

THE ITALIAN NOVEL AND FASCISM

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## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
CONTENTS	ii
SUMMARY	iii
PREFACE	iv
CHAPTER SUMMARIES	xvi
CHAPTER 1. Dux: The Mussolinian myth and its literary prefigurations.	1
CHAPTER 2. The Fascist and Pro-Fascist novel - or actions officially deemed worthy of propagation and consumption within Fascist Italy.	52
CHAPTER 3. Images of Disenchantment and dissent: The non-Fascist novel.	144
CHAPTER 4. Silone and Ferrero: Two writers in exile.	245
CHAPTER 5. Towards a regeneration of collective identity: The Italian novel 1943-60.	298
CONCLUSION	456
INDEX	460
BIBLIOGRAPHY	464

## SUMMARY

This thesis examines the depiction of Fascism together with manifestations of dissent and anti-Fascism in the twentieth century Italian novel. The first chapter considers literary prefigurations of Fascism from 1890 onwards, including the treatment of the Superuomo by D'Annunzio, Papini, Marinetti and Soffici, and also the vulgarization of the Superuomo myth in Sarfatti's 'Dux'; one of Mussolini's official biographies. Also mentioned are several accounts of the First World War which reveals social dissatisfactions that proved fertile soil for Fascist exploitation. The second chapter concentrates on a number of Fascist and pro-Fascist novels, that is novels written in homage to the regime and the bestsellers whose conservative values, and preoccupations with the nuclear family, coincide with the Fascist regime's domestic policies. The third chapter examines the covert expressions of disenchantment and dissent formulated against the regime; from the antipathy of Palazzeschi and Gadda to Moravia's dissection of middle-class vacuousness, and to the concern for the conditions of the peasants, the emergence of Neorealism and the importance of the influence of the American novel for disenchanted novelists. The fourth chapter compares and contrasts the works of Silone and Ferrero, two novelists writing in exile, who denounced the injustices and hypocrisies of the regime's domestic policies in order to undermine its international prestige. The fifth chapter analyses the retrospective portrayal of Fascism from 1943-1960, and the ideology of regeneration that developed as a reaction against the cynicism and inhumanity of the regime. The fictional treatment of the Resistance movement and various war journals are also discussed, together with the hostility of reactionary writers towards post-war Italy. A short conclusion outlines some peripheral but relevant considerations, and suggests the difficulties of attempting an accurate assessment of the degree of influence exerted on the novel by Fascism.

## CHAPTER 1

*Dux : The Mussolinian myth and its literary prefigurations*

In a recent work entitled 'Ideologia e arte del fascismo' the genesis of Fascist ideology is thus defined:

'il fascismo così costruisce la propria ideologia: assume come propri i temi ideologici di scarto presenti nella piccola borghesia e altri, non di scarto, presenti anche in altre classi, ma nella loro accezione peggiore; elabora questo materiale grezzo secondo i propri schemi, in modo che diventi il più possibile interclassista e volgarizzato per una pratica esclusivamente "produttivistica" e pertanto d'infimo livello.' (1)

An analagous procedure occurs in the fabrication of the myth with which Mussolini surrounded himself. Written by Margherita Sarfatti in 1926, and considered one of the 'official' biographies, 'Dux' offers a clear illustration of the heterogeneous elements incorporated into what can only be termed the Mussolinian myth. Many of these elements were, predictably enough, derived from the literature of the previous thirty years (chiefly the literature pertaining to the Superuomo and subject to considerable modifications). while others of lesser importance, like Mussolini's alleged faith in superstition, were drawn from the stock of peasant wisdom - or perhaps what the middle-class Sarfatti imagined to be peasant wisdom. The end result is a rather fatuous narrative whose only seeming merit is that it offers 'something to everyone'; in other words, the reader whatever his age or class should be able to identify with or approve of some aspect or characteristic of the Mussolinian myth that is set before him as a model which is, by definition, incomparable. However, when considering the extent to which Sarfatti plagiarized preceding literary formulations of the 'Superuomo', it is obviously necessary to take into

account the converse: that preceding formulations did much to prepare the way for the creation of the Mussolinian myth. The fact that the notion of the Superuomo with his panoply of virtues had become more or less common currency during the second decade of this century - a situation for which the propaganda requirements of the First World War were, no doubt, largely responsible - this fact was, I would suggest, instrumental in determining the 'acceptable' face of Fascism, and equally the acceptable image of the leader as a type of Superuomo. (The superhuman image was to meet with Mussolini's unqualified approval.)

Salinari (2) states that D'Annunzio first introduced the Nietzschean concept of the Superuomo into Italian literature largely as an idealistic reaction against, or as an alternative to, the existing social and political order (a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this study) and that in this attitude D'Annunzio was representative of a generation. Further Salinari speaks of the tensions apparent in D'Annunzio's exposition of the Superuomo (3), of the contrast between the limitless, unrealistic ambitions and aspirations of the Superuomo and his incapacity to fulfil them; between what might be termed the exaggeratedly self-assertive or self-projecting aspects of his character and the self-doubting or self-rejecting aspects. This constitutes an evident and fundamental contradiction inherent in the Dannunzian Superuomo. However, I hope to show that D'Annunzio's self-rejecting characteristics preceded and indeed necessitated the creation of the Superuomo myth, and that the survival of this myth and its ultimate, if modified, personification in Mussolini indicated a continuing underlying need for self-assertion, if only of a vicarious nature, on the part of a large number of Italians. This is not to say that Italy provided peculiarly fertile ground for the cultivation of Fascism, nor that a similarly favourable predisposition to an all-powerful rallying figure did

not exist contemporaneously in other European countries, but merely that retrospective analysis permits the linear tracing of a single literary trend from its genesis to its culmination.

Reference to Nietzsche's Superuomo first appears in D'Annunzio's novels with the publication of 'Trionfo della Morte' in 1894, although the protagonist Giorgio Aurispa through most of the novel bears little resemblance to a Superuomo. 'Le vergini delle rocce' published in serialized form in 1895 constitutes, as Salinari suggests (4), the political manifesto of the Superuomo, while 'Il fuoco' published in 1900 constitutes the literary manifesto. As 'Trionfo della morte' and 'Il fuoco' both contain numerous autobiographical elements and as 'Il fuoco' is, in a sense, the fulfilment of the promise made in the dedication of 'Trionfo della morte' - and in fact in the last two sections of the novel - I have decided to examine the Dannunzian Superuomo in the context of these two novels.

Much has been written of D'Annunzio's debt to Nietzsche and more specifically of his debt to Wagner via Nietzsche as it appears in 'Il fuoco'. Ultimately, however, Stelio Effrena, no less than Giorgio Aurispa, remains a distinctively Dannunzian creation. Stelio is the Superuomo as poet, or perhaps more correctly the poet as Superuomo. Hence it is possible to say that in 'Il fuoco' the Superuomo undergoes a subtle metamorphosis, and that the criteria by which his supreme merit is measured derive essentially from the realm of the aesthetic. Thus, while Stelio's indisputable dynamism, his almost magnetic domination and powers of persuasion over other, lesser, mortals are typical of the Nietzschean Superuomo, they are manifested most fully in the exercise of his art. D'Annunzio describes the powerful effect of Stelio's discourse on Beauty, which takes place against the highly evocative backdrop of the Doge's palace, thus:



'Il vasto applauso scrosciante fu soverchiato dal clamore giovanile che salí come un turbine verso colui il quale faceva balenare agli occhi inquieti una cosí grande speranza, verso colui il quale mostrava una cosí lucida fede nel genio occulto della stirpe, nella virtú ascendente delle idealità trasmesse dai padri, nella sovrana dignità dello spirito, nel potere indistruttibile della Bellezza, in tutti gli alti valori dalla novissima barbarie tenuti a vile.' (5)

The synthesis of Nietzschean theories, fairly loosely adapted, and Dannunzian convictions is clearly illustrated by Stelio's belief that the future glories of his race and of Italy are dependent on the creation of a new and supremely valid art:

"È vero, è vero" pensava Stelio Effrena. "La fortuna d'Italia è inseparabile dalle sorti della Bellezza, cui ella è madre ...." Dai ruderi inondati di tanto sangue eroico non doveva levarsi robusta di radici e di rami l'arte nuova? Non doveva essa riassumere in sé tutte le forze latenti nella sostanza ereditaria della nazione, divenire una potenza determinante e costruttiva nella terza Roma, indicare agli uomini partecipi del Governo le verità originarie da porre a norma degli statuti nuovi?' (6)

Although Stelio declares his preference for Monteverdi on the crucial grounds of race:

"Io mi glorio d'essere un latino; e... riconosco un barbaro in ogni uomo di sangue diverso." (7)

it is in fact Wagner, the 'vecchio barbaro' who is exalted as the example of an artist who glorifies his race; an example which the quintessentially Italian Stelio will soon surpass through the creation of a pure and intrinsically Italian art.

If the aggrandizement and universal admiration of his nation, which are the goals of the Superuomo, are inextricably linked to his own merits, it follows that D'Annunzio must reinstate the poet as a figure of mythical stature. To this end the word of the poet is

made the equivalent of the deed of the hero; as Stelio realizes both exercise an irresistible power:

'V'era dunque nella moltitudine una bellezza riposta, donde il poeta e l'eroe soltanto potevano trarre baleni.... Era un atto che creava dall'oscurità dell'anima innumerevole un'istantanea bellezza,' (8).

Beauty then becomes the ultimate power, the ultimate means of domination of the Dannunzian Superuomo, and in consequence it is also the supreme expression of the power of the will. To make one's life into a work of art is the proof of man's power to create his own destiny. Stelio declares:

"Io non comprendo perché oggi i poeti si sdegnino contro la volgarità dell'epoca presente e si rammarichino d'esser nati troppo tardi o troppo presto. Io penso che ogni uomo d'intelletto possa, oggi come sempre, nella vita creare la propria favola bella." (9)

The image of the Superuomo projected in 'Il fuoco' is that of a preternaturally self-assertive being who is both Stelio Effrena and Gabriele D'Annunzio. At one point Stelio declares quite simply:

"io non so parlare se non di me." (10)

an affirmation which is hardly surprising in view of his extraordinary qualities. He is forceful, dynamic and so outstandingly gifted that he fears being paralyzed by the sheer exuberance of his genius:

"Ah se non sarò sopraffatto dalla mia stessa abbondanza" (11)

An exuberant vitality characterizes every aspect of Stelio's life, it distinguishes and elevates him above the common herd,

'(gli) uomini oppressi dal tedio e dal travaglio dei lunghi giorni mediocri;' (12)

and logically enough, in view of his exceptional qualities, it determines

his total disregard for the constraints, moral or legal, that govern lesser men. As he says to Foscarina:

"ho un'opera da compiere e una vita da vivere secondo la Natura mi dispone.... Voi sapete che non posso rinunciare a nulla..." (13).

Stelio makes this pronouncement with particular reference to the inviolability of his irresistible sexual drive - a powerful sexual drive (of which more will be said later) being another important distinguishing characteristic of the Superuomo. However the significance of this statement exceeds the purely sexual sphere. It is an essentially solipsistic statement extremely fecund in immoral and anti-egalitarian suggestions; which D'Annunzio and other writers like Marinetti and Soffici will develop deliberately. Further Stelio's vitality leads him to proclaim the supremacy of pleasure over suffering as the true source of knowledge; a theory which negates the entire doctrine of the -unmentioned - Catholic Church.

Perhaps Stelio Effrena merits consideration as the first 'anti-Establishment' figure of twentieth century Italian literature, inasmuch as he apparently stands in opposition to prevalent social norms and conventions; certainly he represents a new departure inasmuch as he affirms the supremacy of the individual deriving from his own force and dynamism. Ironically, although not unpredictably, the Superuomo himself quickly becomes a kind of institution, although often superficially transformed, as we shall see, in terms of different movements and transposed into different social milieux. The next metamorphosis of the Superuomo for discussion appears in Marinetti's Futurist man. Marinetti's manifestos suggest that Futurism is a positive - albeit somewhat overstated - reaction to a culture and society in a state of stagnation. (Moreover the constant glorification of the machine and the relationship between the Futurist and the machine seem to stem from the individual's need to

affirm himself in a mechanized alien world.) However although Marinetti's manifestos are underpinned by a modicum of rationality, the Futurist Superuomo - as personified by Mafarka - is in every way more outrageous and also considerably more successful than his predecessor in his projects for self-affirmation and self-aggrandizement. It should be noted that in the context of the Superuomo these terms are, ultimately, synonymous.

The novel 'Mafarka le futuriste' is both an allegory of the birth of Futurism, and a necessarily Surrealistic exposition of the theory of Futurism through the life, death and achievement of Mafarka. Mafarka epitomizes the African warrior king; African, because, for Marinetti, the Arab personified the virtue of an aggressive virility. The African setting of the novel and the preoccupation - not to say obsession - with 'action' has the further merit of precluding any cerebral or academic considerations; for which the author repeatedly articulates his scorn. Marinetti's vehement rejection of accepted literary conventions and the norms of the apathetic, complacent reader is rendered unmistakable by his subject-matter, and by his brazen treatment of it. 'Mafarka le futuriste' is, perhaps, intended as a radical subversion, from within, of a bourgeois art form and indeed as a provocation to his reader's - conventional - sensibilities. Much of the first part of the novel is acutely and deliberately distasteful, even obscene; a value judgement admittedly, but in all probability the one the author intends to provoke. The dead soldiers stinking on the battlefield, the mass rape and involuntary orgasm of the African women, and the atrocious death of Mafarka's rabid brother, who tears both himself and his fiancée to pieces (a significant image) all these scenes are calculated to offend social and moral taboos, otherwise defined as the canons of good taste. To question to what end Marinetti determines to offend taste, morality, literary conventions or whatever,

is, in a sense, to arrive at the dilemma inherent in the concept of the Superuomo; it is a radical step, a new departure, certainly, but what then? 'Mafarka le futuriste' with a certain sophistry or jubilant nihilism proposes the question as the answer.

Stelio Effrena at one point defines the value of the spoken word thus:

"mi sembra che la parola orale, rivolta in modo diretto a una moltitudine, non debba aver per fine se non l'azione, e sia pure un'azione violenta." (14)

However this definition remains a purely theoretical assertion, a mere fantasy of action, since Stelio is primarily a poet and aesthete. Mafarka, in contrast, epitomizes the quintessential man of action, the African warrior whose instinctual blood-lust or joy in inflicting death has not been etiolated by European methods of warfare; he is the last of the horse and sword campaigners. As such he has, as Marinetti says, the close-set eyes of the beast of prey, and the same physical watchfulness:

'Il avait l'aisance et la carrure d'un jeune athlète invincible, armé pour mordre, étrangler et terrasser.' (15)

His love of war is as spontaneous, fundamental and uncomplicated as his assertion of it; he says:

"J'aime la guerre, moi.... Et mon peuple l'aime autant que moi!" (16)

The adulation of violence per se displaces all conventional systems of values. Mafarka's younger brother and disciple, Magamal, considers war the supreme fulfilment of a truly virile sensuality; he declares:

"je trouve que rien n'égale la joie de fendre le coeur de nos ennemis comme une grenade mûre et d'en savourer les grains un a un! Le baiser des femmes est bien fade..." (17);

As lovers of war, Mafarka and Magamal predictably delight in danger, and consistently execute feats of immense personal heroism; Mafarka confronts and cowers the hordes of his mutinous soldiers almost single-handed, then ventures alone into the enemy camp, provoking a massacre of one wing of the enemy army by the other; a sight which fills his eyes with tears of joy. (It is, perhaps, significant that the enemy remains unspecified.) Mafarka's blood-lust is naturally complemented by an urgent sexual lust, which he apparently prefers to satisfy through recourse to two women simultaneously rather than one - thereby contributing further to the degradation of women to bestiality. His love for his brother is, of course, tender, virile and fundamental to his very existence.

Marinetti's exaltation of war is a theme which is developed and dispatched fairly swiftly in 'Mafarka le futuriste', for it is only one of the essential characteristics of the Futurist, who, ultimately, subjects himself to a rigorous, if unorthodox and improbable, discipline, one of whose most uncompromising laws is age. For the Superuomo is super-human only in youth; his enemy, mediocrity settles on him inevitably as youth passes. Having conquered Africa in five days, Mafarka knows he has completed his 'mission' and therefore a certain sense of rectitude compels him to leave his domain, alone as ever, apart from his brother's corpse. He explains:

"En vérité, j'ai fui parce que j'ai eu peur de vieillir avec ce misérable sceptre entre les mains! J'ai eu peur des accommodements de l'âge et des lâchetés futures.... La victoire obtenue, ma présence n'a plus aucune raison d'être!..... Que les Arabes fussent mes soldats, je me l'accordais avec orgueil..... Mais qu'ils devinssent mon troupeau!....." (18)

The fact of his own finiteness and the inevitability of gradual physical and mental degeneration, as symbolized by Magamal's death, are amongst

the main problems Mafarka has to confront - not to mention the ultimate dilemma, that warfare successfully waged through an ineluctable logic eliminates the need for the Futurist. Nor is there any alternative for the Futurist but to win the battles he undertakes, by reason of his very being. The treatment of these problems in the novel is consistent with Mafarka's refutation of the validity of rhetoric as the conceptual exposition of a theory, and the manifest preference for a surrealist symbol. He says:

"Je n'aime que le sang jaillissant sous les coups redoublés de ma hache et je ne sais guère introduire dans une plaie la couleur de mes idées pilées et delayées avec un petit pinceau!" (19)

The section of the novel entitled 'Le Discours Futuriste' confirms that the Futurist credo, as expressed by Mafarka, is merely an incitement to action; an action whose ultimate goal is the redefinition of human mortality through the conscious intervention of the will. The primary and most obvious result of this attempted redefinition lies in the more or less unanimous response of the sailors to Mafarka's discourse; they throw themselves instantaneously and ecstatically into the sea and onto the rocks. The speech itself represents a suggestive and seemingly persuasive confusion of Eros with Thanatos which proved attractive enough propaganda to be incorporated almost verbatim into Fascist mythology over a decade later. Mafarka says:

"Poussons en splendeur toutes les minutes de notre vie par des actes de volonté impétueuse, de risque en risque, courtisant continuellement la Mort qui immortalisera d'un rude baiser les fragments de notre matière souvenante dans toute leur beauté..... Je glorifie la Mort violente au bout de la jeunesse, la Mort qui nous cueille quand nous sommes dignes de ses voluptés divinissantes!....." (20)

Salinari suggests that D'Annunzio's Superuomo is megal-

maniacal, but judging from the frequency of his various incarnations, it might be deduced that he is a relatively common by-product of the mid to late nineteenth century authoritarian family. Mafarka's form of megalomania is both more pronounced and more significant than that of Stelio Èffrena - whose claims to revitalize an art and thereby a whole nation, are, by comparison, modest. Mafarka's goal is quite simply the act of creation; the procreation of a superhuman being, a son, who is in fact largely a reincarnation of himself, but no longer constrained, by reason of human frailties, to be subject to the forces which govern man's life and environment. He will be immune to such debilitating factors as hunger and fatigue, immensely, invincibly strong by virtue of his gigantic size, and liberated from spatial limitations by his power to fly. This prodigy, Gazourmah, Mafarka's son and aggrandized self, is the embodiment of the supreme power of the will, of the full realization of masculine potential, hitherto invariably everted by the intervention of woman. Gazourmah is to have an immaculate conception. Mafarka expounds this revelation thus:

'J'en ai conclu qu'il est possible de pousser hors de sa chair, sans le concours et la puante complicité de la matrice de la femme, un géant immortel aux ailes infaillibles!.....' (21)

and in the preface Marinetti harangues his Futurist friends overtly:

'Vous résignez-vous donc à demeurer, comme eux, les fils misérables de la vulve?... Au nom de l'orgueil humain que nous adorons, je vous annonce que l'heure est proche où des hommes aux tempes larges et au menton d'acier enfanteront prodigieusement, d'un seul effort de leur volonté exorbitée, des géants aux gestes infaillibles... Je vous annonce que l'esprit de l'homme est un ovaire inexercé..... C'est nous qui le fécondons pour la première fois.' (22)

From these quotations, it is tempting to adduce a castration complex and, more interestingly, a transmogrified envy of the female reproductive organs.



However, the essential distinguishing characteristic of the Futurist is his omnipotent volition: thus the book derives its title from Mafarka rather than from the patently superhuman Gazourmah. The novel ends triumphantly with Mafarka, having fulfilled himself, going courageously to a hideous death - not without expressing his resentment at the parallels between himself and the woman who dies in child-birth - while Gazourmah performs the first of the 'stunts' or acts of wholesale destruction for which Mafarka equipped him.

Now, it is evident from the above that Mafarka has assumed the powers of a god through the act of creation, of endowing his creatures with life. It is not the case that either Mafarka or Stelio (who is, in a sense, his literary precursor) has usurped the role of a god, nor that he has displaced him. The essential prerequisite of the Superuomo appears to be the vacuum constituted by the non-existence of God; and, in consequence, the invalidity of systems of morals and values. Mafarka established himself as a god through the creation of life, Gazourmah, his offspring and superior in every way, affirms the super-human powers invested in him, and his godlike nature by destroying the Earth. Like Mafarka, Gazourmah finds joy in the power of asserting his will through violence and destruction, but in view of his gigantic proportions and corresponding energies, his capacity for destruction is limitless. Having dispensed with the Earth, he moves on to Mars. The conclusion of the novel is evidently paradoxical; the realization of Futurist concepts brings only destruction. Ultimately, this is the dilemma of nihilism as a positive or absolute doctrine. The total destruction resultant on Gazourmah's self-assertion, is an allegory of the sterility of the Superuomo myth. The inexorable consequence of the inconsistencies of the myth is its failure to resolve and even to examine the issues it raises.

These issues constitute the 'positive' or potentially innovatory elements of the Superuomo as depicted by such early exponents as D'Annunzio and Marinetti. I have, so far, tried to isolate them from the consequences and conclusions to be adduced from them, in order to establish any intrinsic merits they may have, before proceeding to examine why they proved infertile, and how, through a subtle metamorphosis, they were incorporated into Fascist mythology. Papini defines the national climate against which he, no less than D'Annunzio and Marinetti, reacted, thus:

'L'Italia mi sembrava un paese senza vita,  
senza unità ideale, senza scopo comune.' (23)

The Superuomo constitutes the personification of an alleged desire for a total break with existing norms. His energy, his incitements to, and exaltation of, violence are reactions expressed by the younger generation against what they considered a moribund culture, and are proportional in their vehemence to the apathy they felt around them. The rejection of artistic and academic tradition represented an awareness of the need for a new and revitalized art, and vehemence, crudity and blasphemy were all means of shocking and overthrowing the established norms. The negation of social and moral conventions or stereotypes, even, in this context, the misogyny of the Superuomo were indications of a desire for a broader, more liberated affirmation of the individual. Even the new nationalism attempted the definition of a new pride in Italy, deriving from achievement, and the formulation of a spiritual unity deriving from novel grounds. Overall, the desire to create an entirely new movement is a manifestation of the challenge that youth presents to the Establishment, its elders; and youth is, in itself, one of the attributes of the Superuomo. However, the legitimacy of the reaction per se is totally negated by the affirmation of the individual as Superuomo, by the

elevation of egomania in one form or another, into an institution. This new departure fails as a result of the confusion of concept with myth, of the incapacity of the author to divest his thinking of stereotypes; the Superuomo represents merely the substitution of an antisocial stereotype for the more conventionally accepted one. Arguably this substitution reveals the author's failure to assert his intellectual and individual autonomy; with far-reaching consequences in subsequent decades.

Papini's autobiographical work, 'Un uomo finito' offers, perhaps, the most linear depiction of the Superuomo, of his aspirations and failures. The strange fusion of feeling, fantasy and myth, which, at the time of writing, Papini considered his authentic autobiography has been described as the testimony of a generation; and this is largely true - in outline at least - although many of Papini's delusions were, presumably, peculiar to him. The fact that transpires very clearly from 'Un uomo finito' - and it can be corroborated by reference to D'Annunzio's novels - is that the myth of the Superuomo was created and survived solely as a reaction against the existing order. It was a negative mythology at its inception and remained such; it posed no real alternatives, nor even questioned its own somewhat vague premises. The point is clearly illustrated by Papini's resolve to become God: despite intensive preliminary research into learning how to work miracles, the attempt is a total failure and Papini comes close to losing his sanity. His denunciation of his failure derives from the premise of the irresistible will-power of the Superuomo, and his inability to measure up to this ideal. He says:

'Non sono riuscito perché non volevo né sapevo seriamente riuscire: ecco la pura, nuda e semplice verità. Non sono riuscito perché non ho saputo creare le forze che mi mancavano e perché non ho avuto sempre in me, ogni momento, come fuoco centrale della mia anima, il sogno che magnificavo a parole.' (24)

The salient feature of this episode, which further characterizes Papini's first premise, his attempt and failure, is a totally irrational approach, a detachment from an objective reality. This loss of reality, a necessary concomitant of egomania, is present also in the case of Mafarka and Stelio whose spheres of influence (the only possible definition of their social environment) are occupied only by colourless phantoms. However, Papini's vilification of himself at this point produces an interesting insight into his own nature, and only a few lines away from the fabrication quoted above. He says:

'Il male è - ormai lo posso dire - che i più deboli sono quelli che si propongono le imprese più difficili, e i più vigliacchi quelle più coraggiose e chi ha il petto stretto e le gambe gracili le corse più lunghe.' (25)

Since 'Un uomo finito' represents the most extreme attempt of the individual at self-deification it must therefore be adduced that the striving for self-aggrandizement is one result of a feeling of personal inadequacy. Papini having abandoned his ambition to become God later became a devout Catholic.

But perhaps the supreme irony intrinsic to the representation of the Superuomo is that he is not self-sufficient, or in other words, invulnerable, and that the invincible façade is fabricated in order to conceal his dependence on others. In 'Trionfo della morte', Giorgio Aurispa's limitless admiration for - his interpretation of - Zarathustra's pronouncements, appears as the embracement of the very antithesis of his own nature, indeed as a means of exorcising his personal inadequacies. The teachings of Zarathustra offer Giorgio a mode of evading the necessity of measuring himself against social and political norms:

'Il verbo di Zarathoustra, del Maestro che insegnava

il *Superuomo* goethiano, gli pareva il piú virile e il piú nobile che fosse mai stato proferito da un poeta e da un filosofo nell'età moderna. Egli, il fiacco, l'oppresso, il titubante, l'infermiccio, aveva teso l'orecchio con un profondo turbamento a quella voce nuova che schermiva con sí aspri sarcasmi la debilità, l'irritabilità, la sensibilità morbosa, il culto della pietà, il vangelo della rinunzia, il bisogno di credere, il bisogno di umiliarsi, il bisogno di redimere e di redimersi, tutti insomma i piú ambigui bisogni spirituali dell'epoca, tutta la ridevole e miserevole effeminazione della vecchia anima europea, tutte le mostruose rifioriture della lue cristiana nelle razze decrepite.' (26)

In this context Stelio Effrena appears as the exorcism of Giorgio Aurispa. Seemingly, although tensions occur throughout D'Annunzio's work, Zarathustra would dispel Giorgio's feelings of moral worthlessness. Stelio is subject to no morality other than that of satisfying the exigencies of his own ego. Papini's self-delusion, his desire to project a self-image of peerless excellence (culminating in his attempt for self-apotheosis) and his general misanthropy apparently spring from a more pathetic cause; a feeling of being unloved and unlovable, which has its roots in his childhood. Early in the book he says:

'Fin da quel tempo incominciò la guerra fra me e gli uomini. Io li sfuggivo e loro mi trascuravano; non li amavo e mi odiavano.' (27)

This feeling of allegedly mutual rejection results in a complete distortion of his personal and social interaction. Papini declares:

'Non so giovare che tormentando; non posso amare che disprezzando.' (28)

It seems irrefutable, in the case of both D'Annunzio and Papini, that feelings of personal inadequacy motivate their striving toward and assertion of superhumanity. The significance of this inadequacy is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that their ambition inevitably surpasses

their achievement, however outstanding the latter. Thus for Stelio it is not enough to be Wagner's successor; at a moment when his defences slip, his tensions or self-doubts appear, and he states:

"In altri tempi avrei forse saputo anche conquistare un Arcipelago.... Vivere tutta la vita vorrei, non essere soltanto un cervello." (29)

Papini, similarly, is not content with being a well-known writer and philosopher; he too is yearning for 'epic' achievement, although he lacks any constant direction and conviction. However, despite the brevity of Papini's intellectual flirtations, as described in 'Un uomo finito' his methods of 'saving' or 'educating' humanity remain constant, and more significantly, they are consistent with the manner in which he manifests his emotions. He says:

'Non si rifanno gli uomini coi cerotti e l'omeopatia. Ci vogliono cure radicali e feroci. Bisogna tagliare dove c'è da tagliare; e bruciare dove c'è il marcio; e portar fuori dal soffice nido delle abitudini chi non conosce la fresca furia del vento e la salutare gelidità della neve se non traverso i vetri di casa sua. E se l'aria vi mozza il respiro e vi soffoca, tanto peggio per voi e tanto meglio per i becchini.' (30)

Obviously this kind of sentiment provided capital from which Fascist propaganda could draw; it is the typical means of 'making a man of' someone (the adult counterpart to 'spare the rod and spoil the child') which flourishes in an authoritarian environment. The Superuomo, as defined so far, seems to be the product of an authoritarian temperament, the invincible myth always camouflaging the peculiarly vulnerable self: the popularity and endurance of the myth, despite its apparent metamorphosis, doubtless contributed to the establishment of Mussolini's authoritarian regime.

Now the myth of invulnerability is demonstrable in the attitude of Papini, D'Annunzio and Marinetti towards women, which is, to a greater

or lesser degree, sadistic. Salinari, with reference to D'Annunzio, suggests that sadism is an essential component of the Superuomo. (31) Presumably, the violent assertion of the Superuomo's sensuality was part of the reaction against Romanticism, and against the reality of marriage as a mundane institution; it is, moreover, a necessary concomitant of aggressive self-aggrandizement. However, it should be noted that the sadistic relationship is also a mutually dependent, or sado-masochistic one. Male and female alternate in the roles of predator and victim. Papini refers to women as parasites, while Giorgio Aurispa becomes the victim of Ippolita's sensuality, no less than she of his. The final image of the novel, their plunge to death, locked in hatred in each other's arms, clearly symbolizes their inseparable sado-masochistic interdependence, but the point is also made earlier; the desire she arouses in him is tantamount to victory over him:

'Ancóra una volta egli era vinto dal semplice tocco di quelle mani magre; ancóra una volta la Nemica sperimentava su lui trionfalmente il suo potere. Pareva ch'ella gli significasse: "Tu non puoi sfuggirmi. Io so che tu mi temi. Ma il desiderio che io suscito in te è piú forte del tuo terrore. E nulla m'inebria piú che il leggere ne' tuoi occhi e il sorprendere nel fremito delle tue fibre questo terrore.'" (32)

Similarly, Stelio's treatment of Foscarina contains an element of sadism, yet he remains dependent upon her as a source of inspiration. Marinetti further reinforces this point, through the image of Magamal's death, and through Mafarka's flight from Colubbi, the Eternal Woman, - and guardian of the jackals - who is killed by Gazourmah. The woman whose function the Superuomo tends to reduce to sexuality, becomes a creature to escape through abstinence, flight or murder.

Curiously, the mother-figure remains totally uncontaminated by this vituperation of women. Indeed the attitude towards the mothers

of Giorgio and Mafarka remains strikingly conventional; the respect, dependence and the need to retain a certain glorified image of her - to confine her to a pedestal - appear in the novel totally undisguised, because unquestioned. Thus, Giorgio Aurispa, in his pre-Nietzschean period admittedly cannot bear to see his mother's rage and suffering, and, ultimately, her need for him, while Mafarka's attempts to appease his dead mother are strangely discordant with his Futurist notions. On returning to his parents' grave with his brother's corpse, he addresses himself chiefly to his mother, before whom he seems to feel compelled to justify himself, so much so that even the projected procreation of a son assumes the significance of an act of appeasement. Mafarka appeals to his mother both to give expression to her grief, and not to consider him unworthy of her. He says:

".... Et maintenant tu ne peux pas, tu ne veux pas tirer du fond de tes entrailles l'horrible douleur, pour la lancer contre moi!....Parle!....Parle!.... Parle! soulage ta poitrine!....Non!...Non!....Tu me fends le coeur!.... Je n'ai pas mérité ce reproche!.... Mais si tu n'en veux pas, mère! mère! j'ai autre chose à t'offrir!... Oui, pour consoler ton coeur et pour distraire ta solitude, je t'apporte un fils, ô ma mère, entends-tu?.... Le fils de ton fils, le fils de mes entrailles!...." (33)

and:

"Quant à moi, j'ai quitté la lutte pour toujours!... Mais, ô ma mère, ne me crois pas indigne de tes entrailles. Tu m'as vu sur les remparts! En cinq jours, je me suis emparé de ma destinée et j'ai élevé mon nom jusqu'aux astres!" (34)

This appeal to his mother and the more or less gift-offering of his son, occur shortly before Mafarka's exposition of the Futurist notion of procreation as self-affirmation through a supreme effort of the will. The perpetuation of an adored mother-figure appears as an unwitting indication of the extent to which D'Annunzio and Marinetti are still



children of the existing order. If they postulate no valid alternative to it, through the projection of the Superuomo, it is, perhaps, in consequence of their ignorance of the extent of their dependence on it. The exaltation of the mother-figure is a theme which persists into the subsequent 'Fascist' literature, coupled with a certain disregard for the wife and mistress.

Papini makes no reference to his mother - which probably relegates her to the realm of the unloved and unloving, in relation to himself. However, towards the end of 'Un uomo finito' after the failure of his grandiose aspirations, Papini retreats into the security of a known territory, which he had previously denied himself. After the failure of his strivings towards the unknown, of the conquest, as it were, of absolutes or macrocosms (in which is comprehended his adhesion to various forms of nationalism) Papini withdraws into the microcosm of Tuscany, in order to finally put down roots in a tangible reality. He says:

'Eppure ho bisogno, per raddrizzarmi, di rimettere le radici in qualche posto. Non ho che me stesso ma questo me stesso è bene che sia legato più strettamente con una parte dell'universo. Non sono un uomo metafisico e assoluto, sospeso nell'atmosfera dei concetti. Son nato in un certo posto, appartengo a una certa razza, ho dietro di me una storia, una tradizione... Sono un toscano - non soltanto italiano. La vera patria di ciascuno non è già il regno o la repubblica a cui appartiene. L'Italia è troppo grande per ciascun italiano: la patria genuina non può essere che piccola.' (35)

Admittedly this retreat into security does not signify an end to Papini's yearnings for self-aggrandizement, rather it represents a temporary equilibrium, even a new springboard. But, as a vision of 'national' identity it is of objective importance: as many of the diaries of the First World War tend to suggest, even under the apparently 'unifying' pressure of an external enemy, regionalism was a more emotive concept, and one which generated more empathy between people, than nationalism,

which remained a somewhat vague and alien concept.

Thus far an attempt has been made to examine the first incarnation and failure of the Superuomo myth. The sterility of this myth was inevitable for the reasons suggested above and, further, in consequence of the fundamental naïvety of its creators, which they themselves did not recognize. The Superuomo as depicted by D'Annunzio, Marinetti and Papini remains an essentially literary creature, since these authors are so obsessed with the establishment of personal supremacy, of surmounting inadequacy, as to appear oblivious to the nature of power and its manipulation. Their Superuomo affirms his superiority through either revelations - and the resultant conviction of the singular powers of his intellect, (Stelio and Papini) - or through the product of his revelations, his exemplary but unsurpassable acts (Mafarka). In neither case does this bear much reference to the manipulation of power, and thus the Superuomo, in his first guise, remains little more than a cerebral projection. Despite this, or perhaps precisely for this reason, as we shall see, it would be a mistake to minimize the exploitative potential of the Superuomo myth as propaganda; in a suitable climate.

Papini's Superuomo, as stated above, clearly illustrates the impasse of the myth; but his affirmation of a regional identity constitutes the start of a metamorphosis in the depiction of the Superuomo, which permits the writer to develop the Superuomo myth in a new direction. In 'Lemmonio Boreo' this entails Soffici limiting his hero to a far more restricted sphere of influence, and a seemingly humbler notion of glory; for which Lemmonio's resounding successes in the second part of the book are ample compensation. The restrictions imposed on Lemmonio's environment, (and the consequently greater awareness of 'reality' which underpins the novel) tend towards an overall simplification of the issues involved, with the result that Lemmonio, unlike his predecessors, is not

destined to defeat himself. Lemmonio reverts quite openly to the traditional criterion of morality - although his is a somewhat equivocal application: and he confines himself, specifically, to the region of Tuscany. Lemmonio's decision to put Tuscany to rights owes a certain debt to the hackneyed notion of setting one's own house in order, and offers a fine illustration of his right-minded intolerance of moral degeneracy. Soffici states:

'Ma dove il fariseismo e la meschineria imperversavano in modo tale da parere i distintivi unici e insurrogabili di qualunque azione, opinione, o come che sia manifestazione di vita, era proprio - dovè convenirne - in casa sua. In Toscana. La Toscana, fra tutte le altre regioni, spiccava sempre e in ogni occasione per questi due caratteri. Ve ne erano delle meno favorite sotto varî rapporti: v'era quella afflitta dal mercantilismo, quella disonorata dall'analfabetismo; nell'una imperava la burocrazia, nell'altra il parassitismo, nella terza il giudaismo, nella quarta il lazzaronismo; qua il brigantaggio, là la mafia; questa era più miserabile, quella più feroce: - nessuna però che fosse tanto pitocca. La tirchieria, la pidocchieria, il camerierismo, trapelavano da tutte le parti, Lemmonio Boreo lo sapeva fin dalla nascita;' (36)

In fact Lemmonio is a more dangerous figure than his predecessors, whose avowed intention was to destroy the existing order; whereas Lemmonio tends to subvert it from within. As the above quotation suggests, Lemmonio deplores the corruption of Italian life and sets himself the task of the restoration of order; a laudable goal ostensibly, perhaps, but one that inevitably erodes the concept of a democratic, unified Italy. As an anti-democratic figure and supreme arbiter of human affairs, (notwithstanding the limitation of the scale of his campaign to part of Tuscany) Lemmonio personifies the pronouncements of Zarathustra - in his own mind at least - and, thus, offers a further example of the gradual transformation of the Superuomo. First comes the dream of the Superuomo as the 'Enemy of Injustice and Corruption' and then Lemmonio's

resolution to realize this dream through his own action:

'Era un uomo dall'aspetto fra di sacerdote e di guerriero, col viso corrucciato, e un randello in mano. Andava a gran passi di città in città, di paese in paese, e ogni volta capitava dove si stesse commettendo qualche indegnità, qualche azione poco pulita, accorreva, e giù legnate a tutto spiano, a destra e a sinistra. E una tale immagine lo seduceva... "Ebbene, io sarò quell'uomo, - esclamò ad un tratto quasi ad alta voce -: "non potrò far che poco, ma bisogna tentare."' (37)

Now, the portrayal of Lemmonio, so far, seems to suggest that he is the annunciation of Mussolini and not merely a prefiguration: even their physical attributes are largely coincidental - Sarfatti describes Mussolini as having the physiognomy of an ascetic warrior. However, in view of the processes of the Fascist propaganda machine, as mentioned by Silva, the possibility must not be excluded that the rationalizations inherent in the character of Lemmonio were quite simply rehashed by Sarfatti, as the simplest and most expedient means of explaining away the many problematic aspects of Mussolini's career prior to his seizure of power. Certainly it was necessary to whitewash a great deal of Mussolini's motivation in order to establish the - retrospective - righteousness of Fascist violence and anti-democratic behaviour in general.

Lemmonio Boreo is depicted as the epitome of personal integrity whose moral rectitude compels him to denounce and castigate the hypocrisy and constant deceptions practised on the people, by the institutions of Church and State; as represented by his emblematic unmasking of the corrupt village mayor (who embezzles public money), and the unchaste priest. Needless to say, Lemmonio's personal qualities - a veritable compendium of excellence - are not sufficient to convert people to virtue; for virtue can only be taught by the authoritarian object lesson of repairing wrong-doing by inflicting corporal punishment. As Lemmonio says to himself:

"A che cosa può servirti,.... come può giovarti, contro costoro e contro tutti i loro simili di ogni rango nei quali t'imbatterai certamente da qui innanzi, il tuo retto giudizio, la tua ragione, la tua energia spirituale e intellettuale, il sentimento, la forza persuasiva, il buon volere e magari l'eroismo, se non hai costantemente al tuo comando, come succedanei di tante belle facoltà, una coltella da salame bene affilata e un pugno fracassante." (38)

Soffici's Superuomo confines his actions to a sphere as mundane as the salami knife itself. Having proffered an adequate rationalization for resorting to violence - that is, that virtue can only be implemented through violence - Lemmonio 'hires' the Herculean youth Zaccagna as his 'muscle man'. But even the combination of Lemmonio's 'brains' and Zaccagna's 'brawn' does not prove a match for the underhanded ruses of the villains of Tuscany. In a moment of profound disillusionment, Lemmonio says:

"Noi, Zaccagna mio, siamo troppo ingenui. Attacchiamo e ci difendiamo lealmente, non sappiamo mentire e crediamo che questo basti, mentre, a quel che pare, agir così è una sciocchezza." (39)

However, destiny, Soffici says, always comes to the aid of the high-minded, and soon Spillo enrolls and completes Lemmonio's little band. His appearance represents the end of the first half of the novel with the various reverses Lemmonio has sustained, and heralds a second heroic period. Thus Lemmonio's vision:

'Si vedeva davanti delle strade soleggiate, tutto un paese smagliante: campagne, villaggi e città pieni di luce, dov'egli e i suoi due compagni, sarebbero passati come esseri provvidenziali, portando pertutto le parole e gli atti della giustizia. L'antica immagine dell'uomo fatale col suo bastone in mano gli si presentava di nuovo alla mente; ma più grande, più completa, più allegra: una e trina, ineffabilmente, come qualche divinità.' (40)

This Trinity or Divinity seems to be of very doubtful symbolic value, but it is perfectly feasible as the allegory of an oligarchy, the form of government praised by Sarfatti in 'Dux' as being the most effective:

'le oligarchie aristocratiche sono tra le forme di governo più perfette e durevoli.' (41)

(It remains a matter for conjecture why she opts for a celebration of oligarchy, unless (in 1926) it represented a less emotionally charged antithesis to democracy than did the term 'dictatorship'.)

The presence of Spillo can be regarded as a concrete representation of the acquisition of native cunning (a quality too proletarian to be found in Lemmonio). Spillo has a fine-divining instinct for injustice; which appears as little more than a talent for prying. Through the addition of Spillo, Lemmonio is able to mete out justice on a somewhat larger scale (previously a sound thrashing of the guilty party by Zaccagna was all that justice entailed) but Spillo's ambivalent characteristics make for a far more questionable form of justice: perhaps this fact is symbolic of the corruption through power syndrome. The later successes of Lemmonio's band merit examination for the reason that they are unmistakably, although unwittingly, prefigurations and indeed almost allegories of the actions of the Fascist squadristi, their rationalizations and their motivations. (42) The Trinity's first exploit is the rout of the corrupt Socialist Ghiozzi from the village where he has come electioneering. Lemmonio's fair-mindedness is proved by the fact that he is not opposed to Socialism in principle, that he is intellectually enlightened enough to recognize its merits (43). Soffici states:

'E non erano tanto le idee del partito.... che lo disgustavano. Le conosceva; e se non erano precisamente le sue, ne riconosceva tuttavia il lato buono, l'efficacia pratica che già avevano dimostrata con molti miglioramenti ottenuti anche fra il nostro popolo.' (44)

Nevertheless the Socialists are depicted as physically unprepossessing men with small piggy eyes. Listening to the Socialist orator, Lemmonio recognizes the fundamental stupidity of the crowd, and the relative unimportance of words as a means of persuasion, in comparison with their emotive charge. Soffici states:

'Le parole - in fondo - contano molto meno che non si creda, in un discorso. Secondo che uomo le pronunzia, esse escono accordate a un ritmo interno che ne segna e ne arricchisce il senso, colorite di una tinta spirituale in cui risiede quasi tutto il loro significato. Una frase da gazzetta può esser piena di fuoco; una papera che tradisce il poco studio di uno può aumentare il valore psicologico del suo discorso. Le parole non contano.' (45)

(Mussolini, manifestly, personified Soffici's realization.) Lemmonio has, for reasons of expediency, conspired with the various political factions in the village against Ghiozzi, exploiting their politically based opposition to succour his moral opposition to Ghiozzi's dishonesty in protracting lawsuits, etc. The orator's attack on the sanctity of Italy, the reduction of the notion of 'patria' to the 'Socialist' definition of the place that offers the worker a chance of filling his belly, finally goads Lemmonio into action. On a sign from him, his accomplices disrupt the meeting, and start to beat up the Socialists. A few bombs are thrown by the Socialists, killing three children - so Spillo informs the crowd - and creating wholesale panic. The rout of the Socialists is completed by Spillo setting savage dogs on them. In fact, there are no casualties, as the bombs were nothing more than bangers; they were merely a device of Spillo's to excite the crowd. (Evidently the thought that the Socialists were, in one way or another, child murderers, could not fail to provoke a powerful reaction.) The affair ends in a seemingly innocuous fashion with the participants toasting their success

in the tavern in much the same way as Pratolini depicts the squadristi celebrating the success of their brutal raids in 'Lo scialo'. The episode concludes with the alleged triumph of justice and morality, and Spillo's methods are celebrated as strokes of genius.

As Lemmonio says of a subsequent kidnapping, which again is an action ostensibly undertaken in the interests of the working-class:

'-La ragione e la forza sono dalla nostra parte e ne useremo senza pietà.' (46)

In the case of Lemmonio's justice the end precludes the necessity of examining the means. Spillo's assertion of the desirability of the use of terrorism is simple and amoral. He says:

'-Non c'è meglio della paura per far capire la ragione a certa gente, creda a me.' (47)

Lemmonio's band present themselves as the true defenders of the working-classes, although their premises and convictions are diametrically opposed to those of the Socialists, and moreover never defined beyond the fact that they uphold a very arbitrary notion of justice and morality - in cruder terms, what the bigot considers fair play and 'public decency'. Once again the parallels with the early days of the Fascist movement are inescapable.

Lemmonio's notion of morality - or what offends 'public decency' - is illustrated by two rather revealing events. Through Spillo, he hears of a young and attractive landowner's daughter, engaged to a suitable party, who conforms to another stereotype, by maintaining a façade of virtue, while clandestinely titillating her sexual appetites with the lusty farm-hands. She is, however, careful to preserve her virginity. This tasteless episode would not seem to belong to Lemmonio's jurisdiction, but having initially been deceived by her virtuous façade,



he decides she must be mercilessly punished. He therefore orders a delighted Zaccagna to rape her, and for good measure, the band pelt her fiancé with excrement - this last act is, in all seriousness, intended to have symbolic value for the fiancé, to acquaint him with the service they have rendered him. In this case where rape has become synonymous with justice, it is obvious that justice is quite simply the sadistic infliction of humiliation, which testifies to the perversion of the perpetrator. (It is, of course, possible to adduce similarities between the rape of the landowner's daughter and that of the peasant women in 'Fontamara': but in 'Fontamara' the dispossessed - or the rural proletariat, if we might term them thus - rape the womenfolk of those almost as underprivileged as themselves, whereas in 'Lemmonio Boreo' Zaccagna, presumably a lumpenproletarian youth himself, rapes a member of the landowning class. Zaccagna's sexual assault could be likened to the anti-capitalist attitude of the Fascist movement in its early days, but more probably this episode which recognizes the punishment of the rich by the poor (albeit in the service of Lemmonio whose formation is essentially that of the bourgeois intellectual) attests to Lemmonio's consummate political naïvety, and indeed to the ignorance of political reality on the part of the writer also, which characterizes the pre-Fascist novel especially.) This deformation of 'justice' is the general direction towards which Lemmonio's deeds inevitably tend. (In 'Dux', a similar notion of justice is portrayed.) Ultimately justice and moral corruption become interchangeable epithets; in other words, to return to one of Soffici's pronouncements, it is not the words that count - nor by extension the concepts they convey - it is the man who pronounces them. Before the triumphant entry into Florence with which the novel ends - and which, as the genre requires, is pregnant with the promise of bigger and better things to come - Lemmonio's final exploit is arson. Lemmonio burns

down the house of a former writer, and explains that this is, in fact, a boon since he will now be compelled to resume his writing, by the loss of security and income. Artists, as a class, are a frequent target for Lemmonio's wrath, since he considers their work mediocre or worse, and realizes that their intellectual inertia, born of easy living, prevents them from conferring on Italy that glory which it is within their power to confer. 'Lemmonio Boreo' represents an unmistakable vulgarization, or degradation, of the Superuomo myth; which was in itself, and at the time of writing, probably of little importance.

The First World War, naturally, effected many changes. In the realm of literature it produced, among other things, a spate of war diaries of varying degrees of actuality, and war novels. This production continued, somewhat abated, throughout the period of the Fascist dictatorship. Later works generally conformed to an officially favoured approach, something on the lines of 'War and Comradeship' or 'War the Anvil of Fascism', while earlier works were either rewritten as extensively as was necessary to obliterate the traces of an unheroic or defeatist attitude or whatever, as was the case of Salsa's 'Trincee', (48) or 'explained' in accordance with an orthodox Fascist outlook, as in the case of Stanghellini's 'Introduzione alla vita mediocre'. Other writers like Borgese in 'Rubè' possessed a happy opportunism which induced them to adapt a cautiously pro-Fascist stance as early as 1921; although they still left themselves room for manoeuvre. This war literature contributes to an understanding of the crystallization process of the Superuomo.

The title of Stanghellini's war diary and Ojetti's preface to the 1935 edition are deceptive. Ojetti says of the author:

'La guerra l'ha conquistato passo a passo.' (49)

and he adds:

'Non conosco altri libri di guerra che nella passione

d'un uomo riflettano tanta passione di patria:  
di quel che per noi è la patria.' (50)

In fact Stanghellini's position is reminiscent of that of Paul in 'All Quiet On The Western Front', but its exploitative potential, in Fascist terms, is quite considerable, and any reader dominated by the climate of obtuseness generated by the regime would doubtless trust the judgement of Ojetti in preference to his own. Stanghellini, like Paul, discovers the nobility manifested in frail humanity by war, and dreads, largely, his own incapacity to accept the inevitable reduction of the quality of life in peacetime. He says:

'la guerra nelle sue tristezze pure non si potrà che leggerla nel cuore di chi ha vissuto tutte le sue ore... Questa era la guerra che noi continueremo ad amare nel silenzio di questa pace ove l'odio, l'egoismo, l'invidia ci sembrano più feroci della necessaria ferocia della guerra. Credo che vedremo in questa pace maggiori orrori di quelli veduti in guerra. E questa pace non ci darà i silenzi ampi e profondi che ci sapeva dare la guerra struggendoci l'anima in un languore di pianto senza singhiozzi e senza lacrime, come accade quando si dovrebbe piangere per un troppo grande dolore. Non ci darà mai il senso augusto di nobiltà che si provava nella consuetudine quotidiana della morte.' (51)

Stanghellini states his opposition to militant ex-servicemen's organizations, and a belief that it is only in isolation that the survivors of war can continue their lives, and pay the necessary kind of religious tribute to the dead.

For Stanghellini a transcendental sense of community was to be found in war, whereas for Rubè, Borgese's eponymous hero, issues were reduced to much cruder terms; to the same kind of crudity which led to the oversimplification and misinterpretation of Stanghellini's work. 'Rubè' was published in 1921, when the outcome of the current political upheavals was still uncertain, and thus Filippo Rubè, who has been trampled to death in a demonstration, is claimed as a martyr by both Communists and Fascists.

However, Rubè is unmistakably Fascist material. (The purpose of the inclusion in this chapter of certain works of the immediate post-war period is to explain, in part, the precipitate way in which Fascism took hold, and simultaneously how, as it were, it brought the Superuomo myth to fruition.)

Rubè is, unremarkably enough, a coward by disposition, but one who, after his first experience at the front is transformed into a reckless hero. The discovery of his cowardice is painful purely because of the degree to which, as an Interventionist, he is imbued with the notions and jargon of Futurist propaganda. He says of his decision to volunteer:

'-Anche s'io sono un uomo della misura comune, la guerra mi solleva. Con un atto volontario ho rinunciato alla mia volontà in favore dello Stato, ed esso in compenso mi moltiplica incarnando anche in me una decisione augusta della storia e facendomi partecipe della maestà dei tempi.' (52)

Futurist notions are evidently employed to good effect by the war-time propagandists. Rubè is, further, depicted as a latter-day Julien Sorel, whose heroism offers the first irrefutable and externalized proof of his exceptional nature, and affords him considerable licence. His new-found courage permits him to make use of Eugenia: his possession of her is a somewhat cruel vindication of himself (and his previously experienced social and personal inferiority) which could not be correctly defined either as rape or as seduction. When wounded, Rubè uses the institutions of the State with a similar arrogance; on the premise that his conduct in battle confers upon him the ineluctable privilege of satisfaction of his needs, and at no cost to himself. Borgese says:

'Bastava aspettare la fine della guerra e poi allungare la mano. Tutto gli veniva di diritto. In lui, non diversamente da ciò che accadeva a tanti altri combattenti feriti, s'era andata insinuando una disposizione d'animo per cui pareva che l'ospedale

fosse un punto fermo con spazio bianco tra il capitolo del dare e soffrire e quello del ricevere e godere. Chi avrebbe pagato il debito? La patria, la società, la natura, Dio? Non importa. Qualcuno.' (53)

Perhaps this is a crucial point: Rubè's military service, initially undertaken as a voluntary and more or less gratuitous action, (a share of Italy's glory being an intangible reward) has been transformed and redefined in terms of the obligation of the State or society towards him. In a sense, Rubè now feels that some external body must and will automatically guarantee his future existence on account of his courage in battle; but more fundamentally, as a direct consequence of his particular kind of self-affirmation, he feels justified in declining all further responsibility for his own life. The implications of this are noteworthy, especially if we adduce that - excluding the lengthy treatment of his conduct during his love affair with Celestina - Rubè is intended to be an emblematic figure. His ultimate aim is to enforce his dependence through any means open to him; amongst others the exploitation of Eugenia's beauty. For dependence is ironically the just reward for his heroic war effort, which, further, exempts him from social and moral norms.

Thus a curious paradox exists between Rubè's aim which is ultimately passivity, and the active nature of the means by which he pursues his aim. Arguably it is another - if inverted - manifestation of the inherently paradoxical nature of the Superuomo. Rubè however is no Superuomo, rather he is the man whose disposition presupposes a desire to be led. Like Stanghellini, Rubè only discovers comradeship in war (human solidarity of one type or another habitually appears as a highly prized fruit of the war) but comradeship is concordant with the dictates of his nature and thus - in contrast with Stanghellini's sentiments - definable in terms of hatred. Borgese's description of violence is, in this context, unusually frank and vivid; he describes

Rubè's reaction on seeing a battle in Milan between Fascists and Bolsheviks thus:

'...Filippo si sentì torcere da un desiderio di violenza, acuto come la sete. Questa sì che era la bella battaglia, mai vista nella lugubre vita di trincea ove i pericoli e le morti si presentavano in serie burocratiche, e il nemico, quasi sempre invisibile, era il Nemico con l'enne maiuscolo, un'astrazione capace di suscitare cieco terrore ma non la letizia dell'odio che vede il suo oggetto e l'abbranca. Qui invece le bandiere, le canzoni, la breve corsa davanti a un pubblico di spettatori partitanti, i gridi e i richiami per nome, il corpo a corpo, e prima del calar della sera la vittoria, coi vinti e i vincitori che tornano a casa pel pranzo e tre o quattro morti sul lastrico intepidito dal sole. I capi delle due parti avverse si conoscevano certo di nome e di salute come gli eroi d'Omero e di Ariosto. Lo stesso nuovo grido *alalà* gli piaceva, così simile all'allalà della caccia.' (54)

Noticeably political considerations fail to touch Rubè; he inclines naturally towards the nascent Fascist movement inasmuch as it offers some continuity with the war and the revindication of ex-servicemen whom he epitomizes. For Rubè, the object of his hatred is inextricably linked to his whole conception of comradeship; hatred does much to determine his notion of solidarity.

In other writers like Malaparte and Soffici, the form of comradeship forged in war, based on a somewhat sentimental regard for the common soldier's courage and resignation, often lacks conviction (this charge is not true of Jahier). Possibly it represents a superficial alternative to the equality which Socialism champions. In fact, it is merely a façade of hierarchical comradeship, in which the hierarchical element is glossed over by the ostensibly sympathetic and 'understanding' attitude of the intellectual officer towards his men - which, obviously enhances his own image in these essentially autobiographical accounts. There is evidence enough included, both wittingly and unwittingly, in Soffici's 'Kobilek' and Comisso's 'Giorni di battaglia' to suggest that such professions of

solidarity effected no change in the system of official privilege, nor even caused it to be questioned. A further significant aspect indicative of change, is the shift of position which occurs between 'Lemmonio Boreo' and 'Kobilek'. Lemmonio is a Superuomo who dominates his small band absolutely; Soffici in battle is indisputably a hero, but he is no longer the apex of his hierarchy: he occupies a rank of relative importance within an established hierarchy with his captain above him, and his soldiers below. Perhaps, the improbable magnification of his exploits derives from this; the Superuomo on the battlefield becomes the hero. (Under the Fascist regime the term 'heroic' is subject to transmogrification culminating in more or less indiscriminate application as in Saporì's novel 'Sotto il sole'.)

Margherita Sarfatti's biography 'Dux' begins with the statement that every great war produces at least one hero, and that the First World War actually produced two; Lenin, defined as the prototype of the Asian demigod, and Mussolini who is:

'Romano nell'anima e nel volto, Benito Mussolini  
è una risurrezione del puro tipo italico, che torna  
ad affiorare oltre i secoli.' (55)

This quotation conveys the very different climate of Fascist Italy in its early years; the regime having established itself, is at pains to emphasize its legitimacy retrospectively, by claiming its continuity both with the Roman Empire and with the - ununified - Italy of the Rinascimento. The title of Sarfatti's biography obviously constitutes an emphatic articulation of this continuity. Seemingly the objectives of 'Dux' are to legitimize, preserve and even render more acceptable the existing political reality. To this end 'Dux' rehashes a somewhat metamorphosed version of the Superuomo myth, complete with an account of Mussolini's Heroic and war oriented activities during the period 1914-1918. According

to Sarfatti, Mussolini alone saved Italy after the defeat of Caporetto (56). However, it is impossible to accept 'Dux' as anything other than a fiction, put out by Fascist propaganda to fulfil certain specific exigencies, amongst which factual accuracy does not figure. Sarfatti declares:

'La statura di un uomo si misura anche dal mito che proietta di se, anche dalle devozioni che è capace di suscitare.' (57)

and adds that even after the Matteotti affair, Mussolini is becoming a myth. The point she so evidently declines to make is that the official biographers, like herself are largely instrumental in the making of the myth. While the observation that a man's stature can be measured by the myth he projects deserves no other comment than Mussolini's own:

' Questo libro mi piace perchè mi proporziona nel tempo, nello spazio e negli eventi, senza ipertrofie malgrado l'amicizia e la comunità del lavoro e delle idee.' (58)

In fact, Mussolini's comment defines the function of the work; which is to whitewash a past which might seem equivocal, especially to the middle-classes, in view of his many inconsistencies, (which might be termed opportunism unless otherwise explained) and unfortunate youthful sympathies for radical Socialism. Further 'Dux' provides a fecund source of propaganda for schools, the younger generation, and later literary works, not to mention for general diffusion by the media. Evidently in 1926 Mussolini needed to project a certain image; the question which 'Dux' inevitably raises is whether the majority of Italians wanted to accept this myth and 'swallow' it in its entirety. Italians above a certain age could not fail to remember certain facts like Mussolini's Socialist agitation, his political volte-face, and the Matteotti affair, to speak of only the most significant. Sarfatti's explanation of these facts is



totally unconvincing; that is, unless her readers wished to be convinced, in which case the usual Fascist prerequisite, the suspension of disbelief, would be necessary; together with the abdication of personal memory.

'Dux' poses the problem, but offers no answers.

Possibly, as many Fascist novels tend to suggest, the middle classes were not deeply affected by the Fascist regime, and possibly as Sarfatti suggests the aggrandizement of the sense of a national identity (and deriving from it an altered and superficially enhanced sense of personal identity, of belonging to some kind of powerful collective, that is to say national, body) offered sufficient compensation to make the question redundant. As Sarfatti says:

'Il Governo fascista tende a dare all'Italia, e agli italiani sparsi per i due mondi,.... questa forte consapevolezza di essere italiani, controllati, ma anche spalleggiati da un governo forte.' (59)

Certainly the Fascist regime bolstered the feelings of dependence of its citizens and polarized them into an illusion of national community. 'Dux' presented most social classes and age groups with what could almost be defined as 'guide-lines' for understanding (or coming to terms with) Mussolini, and consequently with Fascism also. For the working-classes there is superstition, the peasant wisdom Mussolini learned from an aged servant (and in which he has such faith that he resorts to it when making decisions on affairs of State) the portrait of the 'poor but proud' Mussolini family, and the devoted, self-effacing, hard-working mother-figure, an account of Mussolini's life as a manual labourer, his experiences as an unemployed and penniless immigrant in Switzerland, and of course his fundamental commitment to the amelioration of the conditions of the working-classes. Conversely, Sarfatti frequently suggests that Mussolini championed a strange brand of Socialism at best, and that some of his political theory was rather dubious, (or in other words, that he

always inclined towards a nationalism which closely prefigured Fascism).

At one point she declares:

'È molto più originale e convincente quando adombra la concezione che maturerà nel fascismo: molto pane al popolo, lavoro equamente compensato e un livello medio di benessere dignitoso e di umana cultura.' (60)

Noticeably, Sarfatti is appealing to the traditional aspirations and beliefs of the working-classes, rather than to any reformist tendencies. With the middle classes, for whom 'Dux' seems primarily intended, the issues involved in explaining Mussolini in a favourable light become more complex and contradictory, to include stressing somewhat covertly that Mussolini is the protector of bourgeois interests, while at times overtly decrying the bourgeois preoccupation with security. Given that Margherita Sarfatti is herself a member of the haute bourgeoisie, the whole becomes a fascinating and perhaps paradigmatic mixture of a kind of reverence and condescension.

Now, Fascist propaganda, possibly as a result of Mussolini's political and journalistic background, manifests a talent for incorporating Socialist notions and its inevitably exploitable language, which it distorts and vulgarizes to suit its own ends. Thus, although the Fascist movement develops a clearly hierarchical structure, it retains vestiges of comradeship and equality through such obvious devices as the Black Shirt, amongst others; these however are nothing more than sops. More important is the development of the theme of Fascism as the middle-class counterpart of, and equally antithesis to, Socialism. This idea derives from a premise expressed by Papini, who declares:

'E fui socialista - socialista a rovescio: accettai la lotta di classe.... Ma che fosse vera lotta, guerra in veri termini, non già aggressione dell'affamato imbaldanzito (il popolo) contro il

padrone tremolante e accomodevole. Lotta di classe: cioè difesa della classe che ha fatto e che ha vinto contro la classe che vuol farla abdicare prima del tempo. Difesa borghese: poca pietà; politica di ferro; - e tutte le idee associate: espansionismo (cioè nazionalismo - esercito e marina!).' (61)

While Sarfatti cannot conceivably state the open and total opposition of Fascism to Socialism and its conflicting class roots, she nevertheless affirms the rights of self-protection and self-assertion to be sacred principles of Fascism. Obviously, in practice, this statement applies almost uniquely to the middle classes and it further offers them a sense of moral rectitude in negating the rights of others. Sarfatti illustrates the point by a reference to the politically safe and banal period of Mussolini's childhood. (With a spuriously feminine logic she constantly asserts that all the characteristics of the man, even his future political theory, are apparent in the behaviour of the child.) The young Benito has been hit in the face by another child and comes home crying, his father is unsympathetic and tells him he must defend himself; which Benito does by nearly beating the other child's head in with a specially sharpened stone. The conclusion to be drawn from this episode is Sarfatti's ludicrous declaration:

'Il fascismo non fu se non l'applicazione del principio, fatto dal buon scolaro su larga scala. Non è il santo Vangelo del Cristo, e ancor meno l'utopia tolstoiana, è la base pratica delle società che furono e probabilmente saranno: lo Stato è la collettività dei singoli; non aspettate tutto da babbo-governo, siate forte se lo volete forte.' (62)

In other words, Fascism represents the perpetuation of a system of social injustice. Further, the excesses of the squadristi are generally glossed over, or explained thus; it is the beastly Socialists who are primarily responsible for violence and, excluding a few regrettable incidents, Fascist violence consists solely of retaliation or protection extended.

Mussolini is protective towards the weak; animals, children and women (in that order) in the way that the strong usually are:

'per un istinto profondo che rinnovella  
le milizie degli ordini cavallereschi attraverso  
i secoli; quelle milizie, di cui il fascismo è  
l'ultima in data.' (63)

Two pretty working-class girls who were blown up by the Socialists and now only have one leg between them have become ardent Fascists, Sarfatti says, because it is precisely such unfortunates that the squadristi were established to avenge. These incidents typify the rationalization of illegal and often sadistic Fascist violence, frequently termed 'surgical'; which again implies the justifying necessity of the intervention.

In effect, in one way or another, the Fascist regime allegedly epitomizes the strong government whose function is to protect the weak and the dependent. 'Dux' indicates the degree to which the Fascist regime fosters the dependence of its subjects: the most obvious manifestation being the well-known projection of Mussolini as the benevolent, paternalistic figure who works until late every night at Palazzo Chigi. The Italians know that he does this for their good, Sarfatti says, and, in fact, this criterion of judging and acting for their good, (generally without consulting them) is the sole acceptable means of evaluating Mussolini's motivation - as becomes very apparent in later novels.

Mussolini, thus depicted, constitutes an externalized realization of the Superuomo myth, inasmuch as the myth which is constructed around him is that of the strong omniscient and omnipotent leader; which satisfies personal yearnings for dominance, vicariously. The measure of Mussolini's projected power is therefore directly proportional to the personal feelings of security experienced by his subjects. In fact this observation is exact, but it is nonetheless

paradoxical. The sense of security of Mussolini's subjects is proportional to and consequent on their belief in his omnipotence. If this is so, it is because of their underlying insecurity, deriving from their personal apathy and feelings of impotence which Mussolini successfully fostered - and not least by the superhuman qualities he arrogated to himself. As Superuomo Mussolini is endowed with immense Heroism, so much so that he instructs the doctors to use no anaesthetic when operating on his forty-two war wounds, (64) and he recovers by the sole effort of his will. His integrity is such that money and material goods cannot corrupt him - although the reader is led to speculate whether this kind of comment is not also a means of playing on middle-class guilt, fears or feelings of inferiority. Certainly Sarfatti seems to be constantly stressing the fact that Mussolini lives by a much nobler criterion than the self-interest which motivates the bourgeoisie; at one point she says that for him;

'I beni materiali, la comodità della vita, e lo stesso istinto di conservazione non contano di fronte ai supremi valori morali, quale è l'onore.' (65)

Further Mussolini's intellectual achievements are outstanding - as is to be expected of a Superuomo. In Switzerland he studied:

'Tedesco, spagnolo, un poco d'inglese e molto francese, le scienze economiche e le discipline sociali - studiava di tutto, con il violino per maggiore svago - ma sopra tutto approfondiva con disperato ardore la nobile filosofia greca; e dopo di essa, la filosofia tedesca.' (66)

His culture is acquired at the breakneck speed that exemplifies the man, (for the Superuomo is not subject to the constraints of lesser mortals) but it is very solid. Mussolini wrote a history of philosophy, (unfortunately destroyed by a jealous mistress) which, Sarfatti says, would rank next to Carlyle's 'History of the French Revolution', in the limbo for still-born

books.

'Dux' mirrors a strange tension; the qualities mentioned above which furnish proof of Mussolini's superhuman qualities, also serve to reassure the middle classes that he is not a common upstart, that he is in every way superior to the middle classes. Hence the strange assertion:

'Mussolini è un aristocratico plebeo, senza mezzi termini.' (67)

and she comments in a way which reflects as much on her culture - and the value she attributes to it - as on the physiognomy of Mussolini:

'Non ho mai passeggiato per un museo o una città d'Italia, senza meravigliarmi di ritrovare così fedele lo stampo della stirpe in ogni impronta, dalle argille di Veio ai marmi romani, dai fieri bronzi del Gattamelata in Padova, dal Colleoni in Venezia - il condottiero che assomiglia al Duce come un fratello che gli assomigli - sino alla gioventù d'oggi.' (68)

Mussolini is then, one of nature's aristocrats, the embodiment of the pure Italian type, the last of the condottieri, and, as a final appeasement, the resuscitation of the crusading knight:

'Austero e rude, malgrado i suoi sporadici tentativi di rivolta, è in fondo un cattolico asceta-guerriero, per il quale la conquista è un appagamento in se stessa; e che riconosce, nella rinuncia dopo la conquista, il privilegio delle supreme aristocrazie, quali furono, sono e saranno - *gens* e baroni, *ras* e *samurai* - sino a che durano incorrotte nei loro principii vitali.' (69)

Perhaps this last portrayal of Mussolini as a Catholic warrior is the most outrageous of all, since it seeks to establish his respectability and even orthodoxy in the eyes of the traditionally devout sections of the middle class. Nevertheless, despite these emphatic assertions of Mussolini's continuity with an ancient race - which amount to an assertion of his worthiness to rule - a constant note of condescension

pervades the narrative; Sarfatti has recourse to the patronizing tone adopted by a member of the established middle class when speaking of a rather gifted working-class man who is still a trifle uncouth. Sarfatti professes an enlightened comprehension and admiration for Mussolini's working-class origins to which she attributes a strength of character which has been bred out of other classes:

'Vivono fra il popolo tipi di intera originalità, difficili da trovarsi nelle classi alte, dove l'originalità è limata dall'educazione e dal costume; impossibili a rintracciarsi nella media borghesia, la quale ha il "che se ne dice" per dio, e per dogma l'abitudine.' (70)

But this recriminatory attitude towards the bourgeoisie is fundamentally defensive: the constant references to 'il figlio del fabbro', 'il contadinello di Romagna' and 'il *magutt* di Losanna' tend to suggest that Mussolini's class origins were neither forgotten nor wholly accepted; possibly they were feared and deprecated. If this is the case, then 'Dux' is ultimately a paradoxical work: Mussolini is depicted as the champion of the continuity of a noble Italy, and the protector of an order to which he does not belong. The mussolinian myth is obviously created by such official biographers as Sarfatti to obfuscate his past reality; it also serves to restore the confidence of the bourgeoisie in their own security to a certain extent (and this notwithstanding Mussolini's origins, given that the art of dissociation was much practised in Fascist times) and further to satisfy the need for the projection of a strong image with which they can identify collectively while remaining free from feelings of personal social responsibility.

Clearly, the Mussolinian myth, as represented by 'Dux' makes for the serenity of the bourgeoisie (which Saporì emblemizes in 'Sotto il sole') and, by extension, for the smooth running of the country. The omnipotent leader is naturally the paragon of honour, integrity and

by extension, justice, (although this last is not overtly stated in 'Dux'); and thus, all is right with Italy. The Mussolinian myth develops in response to some very real needs. It is a matter for conjecture whether there is any significance in the fact that its chief apologist is a woman; since women are habitually portrayed, in twentieth century Italian literature, as having the greatest interest in assuring the continuity of the existing social order.

In contrast, Malaparte, described by Piero Gobetti in 1925, as:

'la più forte penna del fascismo' (71)

vehemently denounces the hypocrisy of the benevolently paternalistic façade of Fascism in 'Tecnica del colpo di stato'. (72) In what appears as a more or less deliberate refutation of Sarfatti's attempt to render Fascism palatable to Mussolini's more conservative, conventional and non-violent subjects, Malaparte declares of Fascist violence:

'Ma l'esercito rivoluzionario di Mussolini non era la Salvation Army, e le camicie nere non erano armate di pugnale e di bombe a mano per fare della filantropia ma per fare la guerra civile. Coloro che pretendono di negare la violenza fascista e di fare passare le camicie nere per discepoli di Rousseau e di Tolstoj, sono gli stessi che, malati di retorica, d'eloquenza e di letteratura, vorrebbero far credere che Mussolini sia un antico romano, un condottiero del Quattrocento, o un signore della Rinascenza, dalle mani bianche e dolci di avvelenatore e di platonico.' (73)

Of Mussolini he says:

'È un uomo moderno, freddo e audace, violento e calcolatore.' (74)

Fascist violence is deliberate and ruthless, Mussolini is a disciple of Marxism, and his revolutionary tactics are identical to those of Trotsky. Malaparte's interpretation of the seizure of power is in total antithesis



to the notions Sarfatti expounds, and as such he overstates his case, no less than she does. Ultimately Malaparte totally negates the cosily reassuring fiction that the regime was at pains to propagate; in Malaparte's eyes it is indicative of the degree to which Fascism has been corrupted.

However, the myth of Mussolini as some kind of Superuomo was to survive through most of the life of the regime. Why Mussolini rather than D'Annunzio? Sarfatti says with her usual flourish:

'Nell'aristocratico voluttuoso e crudele, posto da Gabriele D'Annunzio a tipo del superuomo, rivive mirabilmente il principe del Rinascimento - non dico il Valentino, perché lo stile cupo e oltranzista di Cesare Borgia è nettamente spagnolo - dico Sigismondo Malatesta o Lodovico il Moro, italiani genuini, duttili ed edonisti - reincarnati, con Andrea Sperelli o Claudio Cantelmo nella nostra società plutocratica e ugualitaria.

'Proprio questo edonismo li distingue dal rude superuomo nitciano, interpretato alla Mussolini.' (75)

Certainly Mussolini was not a hedonist but nor would middle-class morality permit the prevalence of hedonism. Especially in 'Il piacere', D'Annunzio portrayed himself primarily as an aesthete, a sensualist, and by definition an élitist; a figure with whom few could identify. Mussolini, the Nietzschean Superuomo, altered his image, in the post-war years especially, in such a way as to offer the maximum identification to the largest number of people. To this end, he exploited every facet of his public image from which he could possibly hope to make capital. Evidently, the war and the consequent dislocation of large numbers of the population, together with the inability or reluctance to accept a return to the existing social order, contributed immeasurably to his success. The war, its inglorious conduct at high levels, and its disappointing outcome, (the fact that Italy was not sufficiently recompensed in terms of territory gained for her sacrifices) augmented and diffused the sense of disenchantment with democracy expressed by writers who had propagated the Superuomo myth

before the war. (76) The language of violence and the familiarity with the fact of it, had, with the war, considerably diminished the significance ascribed to it, or so it must be assumed since 'Dux' implicitly suggests that violence is a qualitative thing: Socialist violence is, by definition, bad, while perpetration of violence by the Fascists is good, and retaliation just. This constitutes the beginning of institutionalized arbitrariness; democratic justice perishes with the democratic system, and all things are good which conform to Fascist orthodoxy - itself an arbitrary and often inconsistent criterion. Mussolini made capital out of the somewhat xenophobic nationalism manifest amongst intellectuals like D'Annunzio, Papini, and Soffici. Large numbers of Italian intellectuals fought during the war, chiefly in the capacity of officers, and a certain honesty, together with their admiration for the common soldier, led them to observe that the soldier, usually the peasant, felt no hatred for his enemy, rather that he tended to regard him as an equal. (The soldier was in this respect often far more humane than his officer.) Significantly nationalism was apparently neither inherent nor widespread at this point; at least not in the way in which it was soon to be exploited. Nationalism was attributable only to intellectuals and officers. Mussolini's constant rhetorizing about the Glory of Death for the Mother Country possibly presented the most satisfactory way of translating the irrefutable fact of the vast numbers of the dead. Under the Fascist regime, in a somewhat transmuted form, as national aggrandizement, nationalism became - as Sarfatti intimates - (possibly adequate) compensation for the loss of personal freedom. More than that, it was the indisputable proof of a strong government; and this, of course, leads full circle back to the question of who or which qualities are defined by the term strength. The appellation 'Superuomo' provides the answer; he is the man endowed with exceptional powers, both physical

and intellectual, through which he will, by rights, dominate and lead lesser mortals. Surely, this is an exorcism of human weakness, an admission of impotence by those who create him, and those who believe in him. Mussolini is his ultimate and perhaps most feasible incarnation: he embodies both authoritarianism and paternalism, alternating between scorn for the people and a tender sense of duty towards them, so Sarfatti says. The one thing that is not asked of him is that he respect them, for that would be tantamount to treating them as equals. As for Mussolini himself, as the top of a hierarchy of sublimated weakness, it is only logical that he should also be masking his personal inadequacies under an impassive mask of strength, otherwise he could not have played so skilfully upon the sensibilities of vast numbers of the population, cultivating, especially, the feeling of having been cheated out of their just deserts by society, in the ex-servicemen. Indeed the declaration with which he prefaces 'Dux' is readily interpretable as an involuntary admission of his own need to be constantly in the public eye, and worse, to be loved by all. He states:

'Io sono perfettamente rassegnato alla mia sorte di uomo pubblico. Accade talora che io ne sia entusiasta.... Il pensiero e la constatazione reale di non appartenermi più, di essere di tutti - amato da tutti, odiato da tutti - elemento necessario alla vita altrui, mi dà una specie di ebbrezza "nirvanica".' (77).

Notes

- (1) Umberto Silva *Ideologia e arte del fascismo*, p.38
- (2) Carlo Salinari *Miti e coscienza del decadentismo italiano*, p.41-65
- (3) Op. cit. p.94-104
- (4) Op. cit. p.82
- (5) Gabriele D'Annunzio *Il fuoco*, p.99
- (6) Op. cit. p.137
- (7) Op. cit. p.126
- (8) Op. cit. p.135-6
- (9) Op. cit. p.56
- (10) Op. cit. p.59
- (11) Op. cit. p.186
- (12) Op. cit. p.46
- (13) Op. cit. p.286
- (14) Op. cit. p.67
- (15) Filippo Tommaso Marinetti *Mafarka le futuriste*, p.7
- (16) Op. cit. p.13-14
- (17) Op. cit. p.88
- (18) Op. cit. p.209
- (19) Op. cit. p.210
- (20) Op. cit. p.217
- (21) Op. cit. p.215
- (22) Op. cit. p.X-XI
- (23) Giovanni Papini *Un uomo finito*, p.117
- (24) Op. cit. p.159
- (25) Op. cit. p.159
- (26) Gabriele D'Annunzio *Trionfo della morte*, p.322
- (27) Papini *Un uomo finito*, p.6
- (28) Op. cit. p.104
- (29) D'Annunzio *Il fuoco*, p.203
- (30) Papini *Un uomo finito*, p.104
- (31) Salinari *Miti e coscienza del decadentismo italiano*, p.68  
'Le caratteristiche della sensualità che si trova alla base del superuomo son tutte qui: hanno alla loro radice una sorta di furore sadico, di volontà di distruzione, di eccitazione violenta e sanguinaria.'
- (32) D'Annunzio *Trionfo della morte*, p.339
- (33) Marinetti *Mafarka le futuriste*, p.200

- (34) Op. cit. p.202
- (35) Papini *Un uomo finito*, p.210-11
- (36) Ardengo Soffici *Lemmonio Boreo*, p.51-52
- (37) Op. cit. p.53-54
- (38) Op. cit. p.83
- (39) Op. cit. p.151
- (40) Op. cit. p.181
- (41) Margherita Sarfatti *Dux*, p.246
- (42) Indeed Piero Gobetti declares in an article entitled *Difendere la rivoluzione* (in 'La Rivoluzione liberale') 'è inutile ricordar(vi) che *Lemmonio Boreo* è diventato con perfetta coerenza l'*Iliade del fascismo*' quoted by Manacorda in *Letteratura e cultura del periodo fascista*, p.84
- (43) His creator, in the edition of *Kobilek* revised after the Fascist seizure of power, admits to a more overtly biased attitude towards Socialism; Soffici declares:
- 'per me, ognuno il quale, a un momento qualunque della sua vita, ha potuto servire, anche per poco, l'idea socialista, è squalificato senza remissione, tanto quell'idea mi appare bassa triviale: un raccoglitticcio di spurghi e cascami di tutte le più idiote e grossolane filosofie.' Soffici *Kobilek*, p.57
- (44) Soffici *Kobilek*, p.231-2
- (45) Op. cit. p.232-33
- (46) Op. cit. p.297
- (47) Op. cit. p.295
- (48) In *La prima guerra mondiale*, p.205 Mario Isnenghi refers to this book, (in the 1924 edition), as one of the most important of the entire genre. Later editions were altered in homage to the Fascist regime.
- (49) Arturo Stanghellini *Introduzione alla vita mediocre*, Ugo Ojetti Preface p.XII
- (50) Op. cit. p.XIV
- (51) Op. cit. p.70-72
- (52) Giuseppe Antonio Borgese *Rubè*, p.26
- (53) Op. cit. p.134-5
- (54) Op. cit. p.240-41
- (55) Margherita Sarfatti *Dux*, p.10
- (56) Op. cit. p.229
- (57) Op. cit. p.298
- (58) Op. cit. Mussolini's preface, p.7
- (59) Op. cit. p.257
- (60) Op. cit. p.127
- (61) Papini *Un uomo finito*, p.117

- (62) Margherita Sarfatti *Dux*, p.22
- (63) Op. cit. p.41-42
- (64) In *Le origini del fascismo in Italia* p.138 Salvemini comments:  
 'La verità è che, secondo il racconto che Mussolini fa nel suo *Diario*, la lunghezza lineare di tutte le quarantadue ferite raggiungeva complessivamente gli 80 centimetri, il che significa che ciascuna era in media inferiore a due centimetri; se due di esse erano tanto ampie che potevano accogliere il pugno di un uomo, è ovvio che queste due da sole prendevano quasi tutta la lunghezza, e le altre quaranta ferite devono essere state superficiali e quasi invisibili. Non c'è proprio ragione quindi per il chiasso della Sarfatti per delle ferite che non erano niente di grave in una guerra dove mezzo milione di soldati italiani hanno perduto la vita.'
- (65) Sarfatti, *Dux* p.22
- (66) Op. cit. p.73
- (67) Op. cit. p.63
- (68) Op. cit. p.118
- (69) Op. cit. p.105
- (70) Op. cit. p.27
- (71) Curzio Malaparte Suckert *Italia Barbara*, Editor's note
- (72) Although published in 1931 in France, *Tecnica del colpo di stato* was only published in Italy in its entirety in 1948. One chapter entitled 'Trotzki e il colpo di Stato' appeared in *Italia letteraria* in 1931. Martelli states that this book occasioned Malaparte's imprisonment while Massimo Dini declares in the preface to the Vallecchi edition of 1973 that the possibility should not be ruled out that this was not the case, and that Malaparte was incarcerated for other reasons, including the provocation of his friend Italo Balbo. At any rate, by alluding to the hypocrisy of the regime and its mythology Malaparte is, in fact, challenging the ideological monopoly of the regime, and committing what is perhaps the ultimate heresy by equating Communists with Fascists. In so doing he fulfils Gobetti's ironic pronouncement:  
 'Coi nemici si vuole essere generosi: qui poi Curzio Suckert ci aiuta a combatterlo.' *Italia barbara* Editor's note.  
 The 'più forte penna del fascismo' damaged his credit with *Don Cammaleo* - which Martelli argues was considerably modified in the second and extant version of 1946 - and then with *Tecnica del colpo di Stato*. Obviously, however, the damage Malaparte did to his own image within Italy through the latter work would be of lesser importance to the regime, than the damage done to its international credibility by one of its alleged chief exponents.
- (73) Malaparte *Tecnica del colpo di stato*, p.133
- (74) Op. cit. p.161
- (75) Sarfatti *Dux*, p.104-5

(76) Indeed there is a good case for arguing that Italian intellectuals, generally, did not set great store by Italy's democratic government either before, or in the years following the First World War, and that the preoccupation with the Superuomo not only served as a refutation of the Socialist notion of egalitarianism by that section of the population who considered - doubtless rightly - that Socialism would be detrimental to their interests and status, but that the Superuomo also constituted an exorcism of mediocrity: both personal mediocrity subjectively evaluated, or intuited (as in the novels already discussed) and the relatively objective mediocrity deemed to derive from subordinating individual considerations to those of the collectivity. (Certainly there were grounds for disenchantment with the Italian system; democracy à la Giolitti was evidently imperfect and less than admirable, but it would have been the democratic principle rather than the practice with which liberal and conservative intellectuals, including Croce, were at odds.) Accordingly prior to the advent of Fascism, the primacy of the exceptional individual over the collectivity was asserted by Italy's two most prominent and influential philosophers, Croce and Gentile, in a way which if not consonant with the extreme manifestations of the Superuomo, was nonetheless inevitably injurious to the existing political order. (Although in the case of Gentile, the tract *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* was presumably open to interpretation even as a celebration of the Superuomo as deity. Both were, in fact, thereby advocating the continued primacy of their own caste; it is unthinkable that the 'Io' referred to in Gentile's *Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro* could be a peasant or proletarian 'Io'. In the same way, Croce's asseveration (in *La Critica* XX (1924) quoted in Abbate's *La filosofia di Benedetto Croce e la crisi della società italiana* p.97):

'in ogni regime politico, anche in quello che si considera il più dispotico c'è libertà'

is essentially true only of the minority whose privilege (deriving from high social class) puts them more or less over and above the regime, because their interests do not threaten those of the regime. For them there may well be freedom under even the most despotic regime, but for the vast majority of the regime's citizens, clearly there will not be. If Croce can permit himself to make such a judgement as late as 1924 it is because, as Abbate says:

'Ponendosi dal punto di vista sintetico e totale della classe dominante e dello Stato che è di classe ma viene postulato come lo Stato di tutti, Croce e Gentile negarono bensì le classi e la lotta di classe come "empirici" e "pseudocconcettuali", ma non negarono la loro classe; che però non intendevano come classe, parte tra le parti, in un sistema dialettico di forze, ma come tutta la società..... Il terreno su cui prende coscienza di sé, nella sua fase espansiva, nel fiore della sua egemonia, la borghesia, è proprio questa ideologia superclassista che le consente di valutare il proletariato non come classe contrastante, cioè come bozzolo e matrice di una nuova struttura economica, di una nuova civiltà etico-culturale, ma come parte della stessa società borghese, subordinata e che ha il suo ruolo in quanto tale.' Abbate *La filosofia di Benedetto Croce e la crisi della società italiana* p.74.

(76).....

Evidently, Croce and Gentile exerted a considerable influence over their liberal and conservative middle-class contemporaries, because their positions and indeed even their names served to sanction the views and conduct of the middle classes. (Gentile, of course, was to involve and compromise himself with the Fascist regime and its ideology.) Lacking the necessary philosophical foundation to evaluate the works of Croce and Gentile, I do not propose to join the ranks of those, including their middle-class contemporaries, who more or less crudely, and often at second hand, misinterpreted their works. I merely wish to point out the obvious: that the two philosophers, like many other intellectuals, grew up in and imbibed a particular cultural tradition which had a certain, identifiable if unrecognized influence on their thoughts and on their works, causing them, like a large proportion of their class - from Southern Italy especially - to be disenchanted and to sanction disenchantment with Italy's democratic government. In so doing they acted quite simply - albeit unwittingly - as the mouthpieces of their caste and of the middle classes.

(77) Sarfatti *Dux* Mussolini's preface.



## CHAPTER 2

*The Fascist and pro-Fascist novel - or fictions officially deemed worthy of propagation and consumption within Fascist Italy.*

In a collection of critical essays on twentieth century literature entitled 'Cinquant'anni di narrativa in Italia', Silvio Guarnieri defines the manifestations of Fascism in the novel in the following way:

'i vent'anni della dittatura non pesarono sulla letteratura italiana tanto come una costrizione pratica, immediata, quanto con una tenace e quotidiana opera di scoraggiamento. Infine sarebbe stato ed è stato facile opporsi, non accettare il fascismo; ma il piú doloroso si era che tutti gli italiani lo scoprivano in se stessi, se ne sentivano soverchiati intimamente; fascismo era la società e l'esistenza, un costume che circonvoleva e penetrava negli individui; fascismo era soprattutto l'impossibilità di una fede e di una speranza.' (1)

Guarnieri's observation points to what is perhaps the most problematic paradox of Fascism; the fact that it would have been possible to oppose Fascism (by which Guarnieri presumably means the beliefs propounded by Mussolini and the regime) but that the spiritual, religious and social, or more correctly inter-familial, values of the majority of Italians were underpinned, even moulded by - a kind of Fascism. What then are we to understand by Guarnieri's statement? that there are two different types of Fascism, which are obviously interrelated but, at the same time, at least theoretically separable, and which, for want of a better appellation (yet with a proper caution of the error of undermining to the point of mere abuse the significance of the epithet 'Fascist') we might define political and personal Fascism; thereby respectively designating the sphere of public and private beliefs. If, as

Guarnieri states, large numbers of Italians failed to make a stand against the Fascist regime, because they could not, might this not have been because the personal Fascism with which they were imbued had deeper, stronger roots than those of their political Fascism? And, of course, what do we mean by personal Fascism? Essentially the kind of self-interest and the total absence of a sense of social responsibility which married peculiarly well with arch-conservatism and proved particularly deleterious because unquestioned and unrecognized. These traits characterize the novel - and cinema - of the period both in Italy and abroad (thereby refuting a possible charge of being peculiarly national characteristics) insofar as both diffusers of fiction catered predominantly to either a conservative middle class, or an audience whose aspirations and identification were petty bourgeois. (These aspirations the media, naturally, sought to encourage by stressing the sanity and right-mindedness of conventional middle-class values and, not infrequently, even the niceness of bourgeois sentiment.) Accordingly, it is necessary to preface any remarks concerning the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel by acknowledging that it was written to satisfy fundamentally different criteria to those of the other novels discussed in this study. The Fascist or pro-Fascist novel was deliberately non-intellectual and determinedly dealt in conformist fantasies; rather than making its goal the achievement of artistic excellence it was essentially a commodity, aimed at the bestseller lists, and at making both figurative and financial capital out of the prejudices of a particular section of society.

The pro-Fascist and Fascist novel is, then, the literature of the middle classes, wherein their outlook attains its fullest and most sympathetic expression. Seemingly, the bourgeois is fundamentally hostile to change and reluctant to admit the reduction of stability it represents in his own life, instead holding fast to those notions which have the

familiarity of long acquaintance, and more, the reassuring quality of affirming the permanence of his social ascendancy. The Fascist and pro-Fascist bestseller, or 'pot-boiler' is, thus, almost exclusively the depiction of a static society, a society which consistently opposes change and is at pains to justify its position. (To this end, several novelists, like Vergani and Bacchelli habitually situated their work in pre-Fascist times.) In the main, therefore, the novel offers the argument of negativity, of closed-minded mediocrity; any and every alternative to the moral and social stance favoured by the middle classes will inevitably end in disaster. Moreover, the mediocrity of outlook is reflected perfectly in the mediocrity of style. The bourgeoisie favoured a literature that was readily accessible to them from the point of view of both form and content, and apologists of the regime, like Paolo Arcari confirmed the merits of this 'low-brow' literature through the public expression of their enthusiasm and support for it. (2) The influence of Fascism on the novel is evident in this determined opposition to intellectualism, to 'high-brow' or minority reading (which emblemizes the hostility of the regime towards manifestations of independence or nonconformity in most spheres) and ultimately in the elevation of mediocrity into an art form. In consequence, the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel becomes stereotyped to the point where the adulterous triangle seems to be ubiquitous and inevitable, and sentimental examinations of the parent-child relationship abound. Novelists, according to Guarnieri, aim to reach the five hundred page mark - since this is considered one of the principal features of epic achievement. Whether or not this is actually the case, after protracting a relatively simple situation well beyond the limits within which it retains a certain amount of interest for the reader or exploitative potential for the author, pro-Fascist and Fascist novelists often appear to be abruptly deserted

by their imagination, or perhaps their own interest, and so conclude the novel in a few pages, without a satisfactory dénouement. (The hasty conclusion is common to Bontampelli, Vergani, d'Ambra and Gotta.) Further, language, particularly in the case of Vergani, is often drawn from the sphere of popular journalism, with poor or incomplete sentence structure and ambitious but unfinished similes. At worst, the sterility of the author's premises, tends, as it needs must, towards the break-down of language. Thus, Milanese incorporates into his narrative the very antithesis of art, the failure of his powers of expression:

'Quando l'arte annaspa impotente, e pennello,  
scalpello e penna, agitati da sterile febbre non  
sanno più tradurre le vibrazioni del cervello,  
la tela riceve un colpo di spugna d'Apelle: il  
marmo la martellata di Michelangelo; e la carta  
una parola di rinuncia: inesprimibile.' (3)

In fact the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel ultimately constitutes a celebration of impotence, an impotence which derives as much from internal constraints as from external restriction. Generally, rather than imposing on the pro-Fascist or Fascist novelist restrictions which would be repressive or alien to his nature, the Fascist regime seeks to reinforce particular notions of class and personal conduct, more or less in ratification of the mores of the bourgeoisie.

Nonetheless, certain external constraints were imposed upon the author. Mussolini saw fit to give the 'Società degli Autori ed Editori' quite clear directives regarding the regime's expectations of them. Mussolini admonished:

'Non si può mettere tutto allo stesso livello.  
L'ineguaglianza è nella natura, nella vita, nella  
storia.' (4)

If inequality is a predetermined and insuperable fact of the human condition, it follows that society will be static and hierarchic and

thus, by logical extension, that the Fascist regime is the form of government that corresponds most perfectly to this predetermined order. However, we should not assume that this limitation Mussolini imposed weighed too heavily upon most Fascist and pro-Fascist novelists. Rather, since it affirmed the rightfulness of the social dominance of the bourgeoisie, it could only have been favourably received. Mussolini, further, outlines the positive contribution that the writer should make to the Fascist regime:

'Bisogna che tutti gli scrittori italiani siano all'interno e soprattutto all'estero i portatori del nuovo tipo di civiltà italiana. Spetta agli scrittori di fare quello che si può chiamare "imperialismo spirituale" nel teatro, nel libro con la conferenza. Far conoscere l'Italia non soltanto in quello che essa ha di grande nel passato (...) Portare che cosa? La conoscenza del nuovo Stato italiano come lo ha fatto la guerra e come lo sta facendo la rivoluzione fascista. Vivere in questa atmosfera, non estraniarsene perché è inutile e può essere alla fine sterile ed infecondo (...)' (5)

In fact it is the attempt at 'spiritual colonialism' the confusion of art and propaganda, and ultimately, as in Saporì's prize-winning novel 'Sotto il sole' the substitution of propaganda for literature, which proves an infertile approach. (As we shall see, the 'spiritual imperialism' of the regime only attains covert success, inasmuch as it manages to subvert the values it allegedly champions, thereby reducing its subjects to almost total inertia.)

Seemingly a variety of responses to this pronouncement proved acceptable to the Fascist censor; the sine qua non of acceptability being, even more than the celebration of Fascism the assertion (whether implicit or explicit) of the stability of the bourgeois - and Fascist - social order. In an extreme case, the more or less autobiographical novel 'Il fiore della notte', Salvaneschi articulates an acceptance of blindness and makes no reference to Fascism. His protagonist, Vanni la Bruyère,

only attains spiritual fulfilment after his rejection of the decadent 'high society' in which he previously moved. His spiritual rebirth is largely a consequence of the sudden onset of blindness which leads him to a kind of mystical, Catholic religiosity. The inference of the novel is that Vanni attains spiritual vision only when physical blindness obfuscates the illusory attractions of a morally corrupt social milieu. Salvaneschi's rejection - or perhaps more correctly, transcendence - of society and his advocacy of spiritual purification could not, in all honesty, be classified as obviously Fascist or pro-Fascist themes. All that it is possible to say is that they are in no way uncongenial to or irreconcilable with Fascism since they offer no condemnation of social injustice or of the hierarchical order of society. It would be perfectly possible for the reader to undergo the same spiritual rebirth as Vanni (if unlikely, given that the implication of most Fascist and pro-Fascist novels is that man cannot reasonably be expected to prefer purification to the 'softer option' of immoral sexual gratification when the latter is available; while woman is often so spontaneously devout, or priggish, as to have arrived at her definitive state: Beatrice in 'Villa Beatrice' is a rare exception) - and yet remain a loyal citizen of Fascist Italy. Certainly, the case for numbering 'Il fiore della notte' among pro-Fascist novels would seem a little tenuous, were it not for the fact that readers who had - or believed they had - the same values as Vanni la Bruyère could reconcile themselves to Fascism under a Fascist regime, in the same way as (or perhaps a little more gladly than) they could accept democracy or indeed any other form of government which would encourage them to, as it were, cultivate their garden; while remaining totally indifferent to social concerns. Although this indifference was ultimately, as we shall see, consistent with a certain adhesion to Fascism. For notwithstanding the good faith in which Salvaneschi's novel is written,

it has certain values in common with those of the more readily identifiable pro-Fascist and Fascist novels, wherein 'spiritual gardening' is habitually inseparable from bourgeois respectability; and the Fascist regime, amongst other things, was accepted by the majority of the middle classes (by some sections, indeed, with positive joy) as the champion of bourgeois respectability. However, overall, the transcendence of society and the advocacy of spiritual purification are both relatively rare central themes of the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel, which can generally be characterized by a more or less fixed preoccupation with a constant social sphere and a certain lack of spirituality.

Conversely, Cicognani's novel 'Villa Beatrice' is permeated by values and traits we would tend to immediately associate with the pro-Fascist and Fascist bourgeoisie. Nonetheless, veracity compels us to admit that the characteristics - or, perhaps more precisely, prejudices - encountered in 'Villa Beatrice' are merely consistent with the assertion and maintenance of their social, economic and, largely, political ascendancy. Hence Cicognani's novel epitomizes the problem of distinguishing the merely bourgeois from the specifically Fascist.

Now, although the novel makes no overt concession or ritual genuflection to Fascism, its chronological situation is readily identifiable as the Fascist period. The cameo of the more or less prototypical parvenue, the ex-cook who has married a magistrate (and who is regarded from the conventional conservative stance of the novel as the beneficiary of the imbecillity of a single individual rather than of the opportunity for upward social mobility) taken in conjunction with the implications of the observation that the salary Beatrice's father earns, as a high-ranking functionary in the employ of the Prefettura, barely covers the standard of living expected of him, by the Prefettura, would

suggest that 'Villa Beatrice' is located in Fascist Italy. Similarly suggestive of Mussolini's regime are the degree to which, in contrast to Salvaneschi's 'Il fiore della notte' Cicognani's novel is consciously immured in and does not seek to transcend the values and 'social morality' of the bourgeoisie and the stereotyped roles - civil servant, manufacturer, Mother, loyal family retainer, etc. - ascribed to the various characters. (It is perhaps worth stressing that Cicognani delineates his characters essentially in terms of role; with the possible exception of Beatrice, and for reasons which will be discussed, personal qualities are predetermined by role.) Nevertheless, the only intimations of the rightfulness of the Fascist regime are the occasional references to the idyllic, rustic life, which is especially idyllic at harvest time (when the peasants make merry and dance half the night away) and to the 'delights' of their simple sustenance, which so enchants Beatrice's mother that:

'Alla signora Isabella sarebbe piaciuto sedere anche lei sull'erba e far colazione col pane e le noci: "Che cosa volete di più appetitoso?". Ella andava matta per il pane dei contadini: "Questo, è pane di grano!". E ne aspirava l'odore e poi lenta assaporava socchiudendo gli occhi: ché odore e sapore eran tutt'una cosa: la voluttà della terra.' (7)

And the only incontrovertible allusions to the transformations effected in Italian life under the aegis of Mussolini are a fleeting reference to the 'tempo dei "rossi"' (8) and the following question which, Cicognani declares, is implicit in Romualdo's finger wagging gesture to the aristocratic signora Bettina:

'"Ma non à ancor fatto pace il vecchio sangue col nuovo? la nobiltà vecchia con la ricchezza nuova?"' (9)

(This question does not figure in the novel as a major preoccupation.)  
Seemingly, however, peace has been made after a fashion, although



Cicognani's frequently condescending treatment of Romualdo implies either that this peace was not perfect or, quite simply, that the author no less than his bourgeois characters indulged in backbiting. In the measure in which the author identifies with the sentiments of his characters he inclines towards their harsh, unduly hostile assessment of the shortcomings of others, which appears to have superseded critical faculties or objectivity. This acerbity would seem to be inadvertent inasmuch as it constitutes a transgression of objectivity sufficiently well established to eliminate the risk of being termed sheer petty-mindedness.

Now the purpose served by the denigration of others in the mind of the habitually priggish denigrator is axiomatic. But, more important, 'Villa Beatrice' constitutes an acknowledgement (which is quite unusual in the context of the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel) of the convention of obloquy practised by the middle classes. Thus, when Cicognani depicts Romualdo's social relations with other bourgeois the hideousness of his defects is stressed (although in his dealings with his social inferiors, that is to say his workers, they evanesce). Beatrice's mother reflects that Romualdo's squint would be sufficient to disqualify him from marrying a sensitive girl, although she regards him as a suitable party for her own daughter; when after their marriage Romualdo informs Beatrice that he does not desire her to account for her expenditure Cicognani comments that he adopts this course because he is an ugly man who realizes that in order to win and keep his wife he must offer her his most endearing attributes, that is to say his material wealth and worldly possessions; further, in the first part of the novel, especially, where attention is drawn to his ghastly table manners and the:

'cattivo odore che butta di solito la carne  
rossiccia accaldata' (10)

whenever Romualdo manifests a certain delicacy (and he does so with a

frequency uncommon in, and quite probably uncharacteristic of, a pro-Fascist or Fascist creature) the narrator observes that:

'Quella delicatezza.... veniva fuori dall'uomo a primo aspetto rozzo,' (11)

and when he reveals a similarly unusual intelligence, the narrator, ostensibly empathizing with Beatrice, defines it:

'un intelletto che non si sarebbe mai creduto in un proprietario di conchiglie;' (12)

Similarly don Andrea, the instrument of Divine Grace, or perhaps of a peculiar kind of Divine Charity, a man whose personal appearance:

'spirava un'aria di distinzione, un'aria di nobiltà semplice e affabile;' (13)

and whose personal distinction is such that even the Reds loved him, is nonetheless physically unprepossessing as Beatrice and Cicognani minutely observe; he is:

'un vecchio prete magro con una faccia leggermente "erpetrosa", specie intorno al naso; gli occhi, un po' scerpellini; una corona di bollicine rosse in fronte; i capelli stenti e lunghi, color cenere, formavano un ciuffo rado.... Accostandosi un po' e odorando, s'avvertiva la traccia delle smacchiature fatte con la benzina: e a guardar bene, in certi momenti, alla luce, si vedeva qualcuna delle macchie sul petto digià rifiorire.' (14)

In the spirit in which this last detail is recounted, it does not enhance don Andrea's saintliness, rather it subtly deflates his excellence and radicates him; as all Cicognani's characters are radicated, in the mundane. Indeed, more remarkable than the convention of obloquy revealed in 'Villa Beatrice' is the banality it subserves; for all that moral excellence is, indisputably, a very admirable thing, the novel seems to imply that (Beatrice's) bourgeois criteria regarding presentability hold sway in interpersonal relations, that is to say that at some point the

moral criteria of Good and Evil have been jettisoned and their loss is unperceived. The detractive particulars cited above indicate a failure to discriminate positively between - what are at worst - exiguous defects and the considerable merits they offset. Such indiscrimination patently reveals more about the observer than about the squint or the petrol fumes or whatever. Nor is it entirely inadvertent.

The bourgeoisie more or less automatically denigrate their inferiors (so that instead of remarking, or perhaps not remarking, on the cleanliness of the peasant wet nurse they deem it the cleanliness of a town-dweller) and they denigrate their fellows, but only within the peer group; in his dealings with his employees Romualdo is endowed with a rather different status to that which he is accorded in his social environment. In fact, in his class dealings, particularly in the second part of the novel, Romualdo, as Beatrice realizes, undergoes a total metamorphosis. The novel was written between 1927 and 1931, consequently Romualdo's public transformation suggests a certain conformation to various currently popular, that is to say Fascist, stereotypes. Romualdo, the well loved employer, assumes a topically paternalistic pose, when he thanks his workers thus for the bouquet presented to his wife:

'- ringraziamo tutti. E sia così sempre: che le gioie nostre sian anche gioie vostre come sapete che in me, e da oggi non soltanto in me, avete delle persone a cui poter ricorrere sempre in ogni bisogno.' (15)

While with his housekeeper's nephew, the sixteen year old Pierino who becomes wildly infatuated with Beatrice, momentarily nurtures seemingly dishonourable (but unspecified) intentions towards her and then tries to kill himself, Romualdo incarnates the Man of Action. Pierino recovers and Romualdo fulminates:

'- Uomini! e non molluschi. Il mollicume è la cosa che fa più schifo di tutte. E quando uno à

la disgrazia d'una natura troppo mollicona, bisogna che trovi il verso di rassodarla. E se non è buono a trovarlo da sé, bisogna che glielo trovino quelli che gli vogliono bene. A te ci ò pensato io: te l'ò trovato io: è un sistema antico, il sistema che usavano i vecchi per gli scavezzacolli. Il male in fondo è lo stesso. E i metodi antichi son quelli che dànno i risultati migliori.' (16)

The remedy he excogitates would, hopefully, meet with Milanese's approval: Romualdo sends Pierino to sea. (In so doing he acts in the most Providential tradition, for the sea 'makes a man' of Pierino.) But even towards Beatrice, Romualdo's attitude changes when he learns that she is pregnant; as Cicognani states, he starts to regard her as a mother rather than as a wife and retracts the autonomy he had conferred upon her. To her exasperated question:

'- Neanche di me son padrona, non son dunque padrona neanche di me?' (17)

Cicognani recounts that the expectant father reacts thus:

' Romualdo posò il gingillo con cui si baloccava, s'avvicinò di nuovo a lei: le prese una mano, gliela baciò e col tono sommesso e dolce, tutto suo proprio in certi momenti, pieno d'amorosità ma fermo, virile:

- No cara, non più.' (18)

The virile tone in which Romualdo utters these words, suggests that he has, as it were, come of age, that in accordance with the natural course of events he has developed into the typically Fascist paterfamilias.

Now Romualdo's expectations of marriage are, he considers, modest enough; the narrator says:

'quello che a lui bastava di trovare era un po' di quiete, un po' d'affetto alla fine della giornata, tornando di viaggio, un po' di pace, in casa, accanto a una donna che t'abbia aspettato e che all'arrivo ti accolga contenta e ti faccia festa..... ".... un po' di poesia".' (19)

Perhaps these expectations are modest -- notwithstanding the fact that they are rarely fulfilled in the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel -- but when Beatrice is chosen to be their focus they become almost unattainable, for Beatrice, to use the term which most closely corresponds to her state, is autistic; although Cicognani prefers to define her 'una donna frigida'. Nor is it surprising that she is autistic, since the constant refrain throughout her childhood was:

"Chi vuoi che ti voglia bene?... Nessuno ti vorrà bene: il babbo e la mamma te lo vogliono lo stesso, ma gli altri!...." (20)

(Beatrice's parents are depicted, from the novel's conventional bourgeois stance, as a likeable enough couple.) Understandably, given her psychological disturbance, she does not wish to marry Romualdo (although she dreams about an ideal lover) and she does not want children. Thus, as well as being the story of a woman who, in consequence of her gross psychological inadequacy is in revolt, hers is ultimately the story of a woman made to conform to the conventional bourgeois notions of Daughter, Wife and Mother. Prior to the advent of don Andrea, despite marriage and motherhood, Beatrice remained autistic. But don Andrea converts her to the conviction that Divine Grace must be actively sought; he declares:

'-Con che diritto invocavi ed invochi la Grazia?  
Sii tu, la prima, ad andarle incontro; non chiede altro,  
la Grazia, che è amore, non chiede altro che darsi.' (21)

and he exhorts her:

'-Nessuno può modificare il suo fisico, è vero;  
ma dominarlo con l'anima, sì. Fare dell'imperfezione  
fisica uno strumento di perfezione spirituale è  
il privilegio dell'anima; quello che fa la dignità  
umana, la libertà, la grandezza umana: volere!' (22)

It should be noted that this presumably Catholic precept of the exercise of the will harmonizes with Fascist notions and perhaps also offers a remote,

distorted echo of Gentile's philosophical arguments in 'Teoria generale dello spirito come atto puro'. The physical imperfection to which the priest alludes is a genital deformity which it is stated at the end of the novel should have precluded Beatrice from sexual intercourse. It also appears that Beatrice's autism served to protect an abnormally weak organism and that the emergence from her chrysalis will destroy her physical health, but as is instanced by her motherhood:

'La legge della natura che vuole il sacrificio dell'individuo alla specie, la legge della creazione, era stata più forte. Ora, ella aveva sentito anche la necessità di spezzare quella custodia, di infranger quel fodero che la proteggevano. La legge dello spirito che vuole il dono di sé fin al sacrificio per gli altri, la legge d'amore, era stata più forte. Non c'era nulla da fare. Ormai, ella non poteva più rinunciare all'amore, non poteva più rinunciare alla felicità: costasse qualunque cosa: fosse pure la vita.' (23)

Beatrice fulfils the expectations Romualdo entertained of a wife, wins him and her daughter back to her (having previously estranged both by her autism) and dies, having genuflected to love, religion and conformism; the kind of implacable conformism identifiable - although not exclusively so - with the Fascist regime and with Catholic dogma.

It remains only to be said that 'Villa Beatrice' is one of the best examples of the pot-boiler genre, a skilful fusion of the maudlin and the titillating. Amongst the maudlin elements Cicognani exploits the most prototypal is, of course, the anguished scene that occurs at Beatrice's daughter's death-bed (Barberina however lives); while titillating elements abound. Within the utmost limits of decency Cicognani exploits to the full the potential deriving from Beatrice's genital deformity with a talent that veers towards - without ever quite descending into - the pornographic. Ultimately he transcends the titillating and elevates the maudlin to sanctimony. The novel ends with

the tableau of Beatrice watching her two loved ones free the birds from the aviary and as she watches her soul flies upwards with the birds and:

'"Eccomi!" fu la parola ultima della sua coscienza terrena: suggello di questa, apertura d'un'altra.'  
(24)

Despite the prefatory words 'Dio è carità' 'Villa Beatrice' like the majority of pro-Fascist and Fascist novels, seems to lack profound religious conviction - and perhaps also an intuition of human charity. Overall the novel exemplifies the rather exterior accedence of the bourgeoisie to prevalent religious and secular behavioural norms. As previously stated, it also indicates the difficulty of determining quite what is peculiarly Fascist behaviour, or indeed whether, unless we are discussing the patently pathological, there is any such thing as bourgeois Fascist behaviour, that is behaviour occasioned exclusively by the prevalence of a Fascist regime.

Unlike Silvaneschi and Cicognani, the pro-Fascist novelist habitually tends to make some reference towards Fascism, of the kind suggested by Mussolini; although such references are not usually central to the plot, nor do they really merit the name of spiritual imperialism. Rather, they appear as more or less conformist concessions on the part of the writer to the criteria of Fascist 'taste', consisting chiefly of the adoption of a 'correct' attitude towards the First World War, and of course towards Fascism - although the latter proves slightly more problematic, since Fascist ideology lacks consistency. However, the writer is on safe ground with the First World War, and this accordingly figures quite frequently in the novels of the period. The war is depicted, almost invariably, as the emotional precursor of Fascism. All the young - and not so young - people of a courageous and generous disposition are shown to be naturally patriotic, and eager to give their

lives for Italy. They are, obviously, heroes, exemplary figures we should admire and yearn to emulate (although the inference of the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel is that the regime deliberately encouraged fruitless yearnings in that direction). Naturally, the outlook on life, politics and society of these heroes becomes different to that of the non-combatants. Thenceforth, a new kind of social morality begins to emerge; those who fight for their country are the strong, the good, who will restore Italy to its former glory, and those who do not, become relics of a past era. As such, they are of less worth, both socially and in their own eyes; especially when, as is the case of Sisto Bibbiena (in d'Ambra's 'La sosta sul ponte') they belong to the generation, now middle-aged, that favoured pacifism and opposed the war in Africa. Thus, a breach is created between the two groups, which Bacchelli portrays in 'Iride', Bontempelli in 'Vita e morte di Adria e dei suoi figli' and Celletti in 'Tre tempi'. Nonetheless, despite the alleged moral superiority of those who go to war, the novelist usually concentrates on the sector of the population not directly involved in the war. Hence, although novels like Saponi's 'Sotto il sole' and Celletti's 'Tre tempi' are completely dedicated to the exaltation of Fascism, written, as they are, at a three year interval from one another (and published in 1935 and 1938 respectively) they praise quite different, more or less conflicting aspects of Fascism. (Both, however, offer a very cursory and imperfect exposition of the official Fascist eulogy of war.) Saponi describes the draining of the Pontine marshes - which presumably emblemizes the regime's endeavours to provide land for the peasants and improve their lot; while Celletti recounts the history of a peasant family who, through colonization and personal resourcefulness, achieve financial, social and political prominence. Saponi exalts a paternalistic dictatorship, and Celletti the 'equality' of opportunity the Fascist regime provides.



(Clearly, in this context, equality signifies no more than the allegation of the possibility of upward social mobility for the exceptional, happy peasant.) Overall, novels like these which are entirely devoted to the praise of Fascism are less common than those which make a relatively brief but politically 'correct' reference to the regime or the First World War.

Occasionally, novelists make a more idiosyncratic contribution to the glorification of Fascist Italy. In the preface to 'Portofino', Gotta, an ardent self-avowed Fascist, declares:

'Uno dei tanti mezzi che lo scrittore d'oggi ha per collaborare direttamente ed efficacemente all'opera di valutazione spirituale dell'Italia, mi sembra sia quello di illustrare i lembi di terra italiana ch'egli meglio conosce per averli più profondamente vissuti. Illustrare un paese, una regione, significa ricercarne tutte le intime caratteristiche, dar rilievo alle sue virtù etniche e alle sue bellezze naturali in tal modo che i lettori possano quasi respirarne l'atmosfera.' (25)

Arguably, this interpretation of Mussolini's injunction is feasible, in theory at least. In practice, however, in the case of 'Portofino' it borders on the absurd. Portofino, already a flourishing tourist resort, is intended as both the inspiration and the protagonist of the novel. Accordingly descriptions of the idyllic scenery in and around Portofino are inserted into the novel, somewhat indiscriminately, at such improbable points as Lisl's agonized realization of her husband's adultery. Ultimately, Lisl's maternity and the restorative powers of Portofino effect the couple's reconciliation, and the novel ends with the tranquil comment that:

'...i drammi, le passioni, le sciagure qui sfumano, i cuori travagliati si pacificano, perchè la natura qui è più forte dell'uomo e lo vince con la sua bellezza e la sua serenità.' (25)

Portofino, rather than being the protagonist of the novel, appears as

the subject of a long and repetitive tourist brochure. (Gotta goes to the lengths of debating whether Portofino is more beautiful in summer or autumn.) In his eagerness to contribute to the spiritual reevaluation of Italy, Gotta merely reinforces one of the stereotypes the regime fostered abroad, and at home; and that is that Italy has the best holiday resorts.

The laudatory reference to the regime - or the war - which most pro-Fascist novelists chose, or felt it incumbent upon (or advantageous to) themselves to make, is only the most obvious manifestation of Fascism in the novel. More subtle, but of more fundamental significance is the crystallization, and possible exaggeration, of conventional conservative values. Values like 'Honour' and 'Family', in consequence of their incorporation into Fascist propaganda and ideology (inasmuch as such a heterogeneous movement as Fascism can be said to have an ideology) become localized to the point where they are, ultimately, divested of meaning. Primarily, they are transposed from the code of personal conduct to that of public or social conduct, where they become the foundations of a social morality, of which more will be said. The concept of Honour becomes closely linked to political conduct; hence it is honourable to fight and die for one's country, as in 'La sosta sul ponte'. Equally it is honourable to do violence to Socialists and Reds generally in the name of Fascism. Thus, when Celletti describes Guido Bianchi, years after the March on Rome, as still being 'lo squadrista senza rimpianti e senza esitazioni' (27) who 'ancora sa un po' di manganello' (28) these epithets are highly complimentary. Under the regime, Honour comes to be judged by the criteria of social and political, rather than personal, morality: it ceases to be a concern that governs the individual's private life.

The concept of Family (which is more closely allied to that of

Honour - through the subversion both suffer - than might at first appear ) undergoes a similar deformation in the novels of Gotta, Celletti, Cinelli and d'Ambra. Man is depicted not as an individual but as a member of the nuclear family, towards whom he has various specific and restrictive obligations. D'Ambra demonstrates the ease with which these obligations can be extended from family to country - while retaining the same irresistibility - simply by extending the emotional bond between mothers and their children (chiefly their sons) to cover the almost equally emotive concept of the Mother-country. In 'La sosta sul ponte' Sisto defines Italy as:

'Patria, più grande e più forte delle madri; patria, calvario eroico della Maternità.' (29)

Heroism figures in the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel as the inevitable concomitant of Honour and Patriotism; but in contrast to them, seems to derive rather more directly from Fascist mythology. Heroism, naturally enough, is the epithet employed to denote the sacrifice of life whilst fighting the enemies of one's country, but expediency caused the regime to encourage the indiscriminate application of this epithet to all those killed or wounded in battle (not least Mussolini himself, as in Sarfatti's 'Dux') and also to all those who participated in the war - and of course the squadristi. Hence the heroic simple soldier is a more worthy being, than the civilian. An extreme instance of this glorification of the soldier to the detriment of the civilian occurs in Govoni's 'Volo d'amore' where the narrator eulogizes his own ghost thus:

'Ti vedo e ti ammiro sempre così: soldato.  
Lo so: siamo tutti soldati militanti della vita;  
e chi non indossa quella tua santa divisa color  
dell'erba che sa il sole e sa l'intemperie è da  
meno della polvere della strada battuta, è da meno  
della cenere del focolare spento. L'operaio è  
l'umile soldato del pane, il poeta è il soldato del  
dolore, il filosofo è il soldato dell'ideale. Ma

tu fosti il più grande dei soldati: il soldato  
 ch'è solo soldato. Perché tu fosti il soldato del  
 proprio coraggio e del proprio sacrificio. Colui che  
 porta il crisma del proprio sangue generoso sulla  
 fronte pura, come una nobile splendente croce di  
 gloria. Colui che può camminare tra gli eletti:  
 il Privilegiato.' (30)

Various pro-Fascist and Fascist novelists maintain that the soldier is the most heroic element in society, whose worth far exceeds that of the artist; whence follows the - evidently Fascist inspired - proclamation of the supremacy of life over art. After years of starving in a garret and devoting himself to art, Mariano Biglia, the painter friend of d'Ambra's Sisto Bibbiena, suddenly enlists as a volunteer, in the First World War. He loses both arms and both legs in the service of his country, but finds a spiritual fulfilment that art could not offer him. He informs Sisto:

'-Bella porcheria, i miei quadri... Tra me a te il povero sei tu. Io sono ricco, straricco... Io ho fatto.... Io ho dato... Io ho avuto.... io sono vivo, vivo ancora con quello che mi basta, cuore ed occhi, per vedere vendicati i ragazzi....' (31)

In his fervour to demonstrate the heroism of idealistic, self-sacrificing patriotism and the relative invalidity of art, d'Ambra lapses into a grotesque overstatement of his thesis. D'Ambra's Biglia is only one of numerous patriotic 'stumps' who continue, unquestioningly, to desire the military aggrandizement of Italy. They are proud to have sacrificed their bodies and personal aspirations on the altar of the only truly worthy cause. Such glib rhetoric is one way of dismissing the doubtless very real problem of the war disabled; who figure in the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel uniquely as fervently patriotic stumps, the supreme vindication, in other words, of Fascist Italy's militarism. This rhetoric also constitutes an example of the way in which Fascist and pro-Fascist propaganda obfuscated issues (potentially harmful to its façade of

unanimity) and encouraged callousness.

Evidently, the refutation of art as either an absolute or a relative value, by artists, is another illustration of the contemporary anti-intellectualism - which no doubt contributed to the almost uniformly poor quality of the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel. Possibly this refutation also represents a ritual rejection of individuality, of the artist's capacity for intellectual independence. Certainly it offers a conspicuous illustration of the 'mauvaise foi' that pervades the pro-Fascist and Fascist novels: the writer unequivocally states the invalidity of his own function, yet writers like d'Ambra continue their prolific literary production. Further, despite the novelist's professions of respect for and humility before the heroic soldier, the soldier rarely attains prominence in the novel; since, for reasons we might surmise, most pro-Fascist and Fascist novelists habitually portray a relatively staid, conventional, bourgeois society. Eventually, however, the bourgeoisie come to desire their portion of heroism and accordingly arrogate the epithet Heroic to define their own conduct. Hence it becomes possible to imbue any action with Heroism simply by mentioning the word. Even vanity and its concomitants if pursued to their most extreme consequences can be Heroic, when the quality occasioning this bourgeois Heroism suffices to arouse the writer's sympathy. Adria, in Bontempelli's 'Vita e morte di Adria e dei suoi figli' spends her youth in contemplation of her perfect beauty, at the age of thirty becomes a recluse in Paris so that no one might witness its decline, and ultimately commits suicide to protect 'l'intero edificio eroico della sua vita di gloria'. (32) D'Ambra shows a nice reluctance to use the word, but an aura of Heroism pervades his account of Sisto's moral frailty nonetheless. Sisto resorts, consistently, to the Heroic tone, not least when he appeals to his mistress to have his illegitimate child,

notwithstanding his refusal to leave his wife; he argues:

'-Solo una gigantesca forza fa sicura di sé  
una coppia come la nostra contro ogni possibile  
congiura di coloro che possono volerla spogliare  
del suo bene... Un figlio. Un figlio nostro,  
Rosalba ' (33)

Under the Fascist regime then, and in contrast to Honour and Family, Heroism becomes a notion imbued with an ever-increasing range of possibilities; the protagonist of Govoni's 'Volo d'amore' even debates the possible murder of his sister as a heroic deed which would atone for some hypothetical crime of his parents. Ultimately only Saponi creates a correct and orthodox portrayal of Fascist values, and he does so to the detriment of his fiction. The first half of 'Sotto il sole' attempts to establish the Stacchini family as its central figures, the second is a meticulous account of the draining of the Pontine marshes and the glorious achievements of the paternalistic Fascist regime. However, before discussing the Fascist novel which, like 'Sotto il sole' is purely a vehicle for the regime's propaganda and which therefore offers a fairly obvious depiction of Fascism, it is necessary to discuss the pro-Fascist novels in which the influence of Fascism appears essentially as the reinforcement of a social and moral stance; in order to adduce the self-image of the politically apathetic bourgeoisie. Apart from the necessary - or perhaps more precisely, desirable - genuflections to Fascism, these pro-Fascist novels make no reference to politics: and this total indifference to political considerations and the welfare of the collectivity is highly significant. Despite all the - Fascist inspired - rhetoric proclaiming Fascism a dynamic movement, a whirlwind, (Gotta) a never ending continuation of the March on Rome (Saponi) or whatever, the picture which emerges from these pro-Fascist novels, parallel to these allegations of dynamism, is that of a static society, a society in a vacuum. The inference of the pro-Fascist novel is that social and

political apathy are no less characteristic of the regime than are such overt manifestations of Fascism as the Black Shirt and manganello.

As previously stated, the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel, in accordance with Mussolini's directives, almost invariably stated the need for acceptance and praise of the existing order. Thus the 'pot-boiler' depicted a society with clearly defined hierarchical divisions. Naturally enough, the black and the poor, usually landless, peasant, constitute the lowest level of the social hierarchy; pro-Fascist novelists apparently consider that the peasants live their lives out below the social organism, whereas the Fascist novelist Saponi recognizes, although from a diametrically opposed viewpoint to that of Silone that the Fascist regime, unlike previous governments, in fact concerns itself with these underprivileged groups to a certain extent. Vergani depicts both the dispossessed and the Blacks as unfortunates, but his lachrymously sentimental portrayal of their hopeless lives is totally devoid of reformatory zeal; rather, he argues the need for the lower strata of society to accept the existing order. 'Io, povero negro' and 'Levar del sole' both stress the fact that the most positive response the unfortunate can make to the hardships of his existence, is to resign himself absolutely to his 'destiny'. Obviously, these novels were not written for an audience of unfortunates, but for the middle classes whose social stability such fictions serve to confirm. Guarnieri argues - quite convincingly - that over such novels readers could cry into their handkerchieves, feel themselves morally restored by the tears expended over these unreal tragedies, and continue their daily lives with their usual unconcern. 'Io, povero negro' constitutes a - possibly representative - fusion of sentimentality with a rigidly hierarchical outlook. The consistently patronizing tone of Vergani's narrative reveals a certain pity on the part of the writer for his protagonist George or Geo Boykin. But Vergani's pity and the tone of tolerant comprehension he affects

epitomize the stereotype of the educated white man discussing an -  
undisputedly - inferior species. Vergani describes Black children in  
the following way:

'I bambini negri non hanno, naturalmente, i denti. La bocca è nuda e nera come la spaccatura di un pneumatico d'automobile. Il primo dentino bianco è una festa singolare nel nero assoluto del viso. Fino allora la più grande occupazione dei bambini negri è stata quella di far girare gli occhi sospettosi e curiosi a destra e a sinistra, in su e in giù. Essi si sentono terribilmente indifesi, nel centro o su uno dei lati del loro sconfinato e polveroso continente.' (34)

In the context of the novel, the absolute inferiority of the Black and the author's - travestied - tone of enlightened tolerance are axiomatic. In 'Io, povero negro', under the guise of enlightenment, Vergani subjects the Black to the whole gamut of the propaganda of prejudice: he looks like a skinned monkey, he has a small brain, his house is like a termites' nest, and so on.

At the end of the novel, Geo, now a boxer, fights the World Champion medium heavy-weight, a white man, and contrary to the instructions of his manager, he wins the match. However Geo's success serves only to reaffirm the inferiority of the Black and the immutability of his debarment - on racial grounds - from the white man's world, irrespective of the qualifications he may have acquired. Vergani says of Geo:

'Ha toccato le cose più grandi di lui.... Aveva compreso giusto una volta sola, quando si era allineato tra gli uomini che rinunciano a vincere. Aveva rinunciato sempre, senza fatica. Perché si è ribellato una volta? Non si perdona la vittoria agli uomini destinati alle sconfitte. Ciascuno ha il suo posto nel mondo, il suo posto per vivere e per morire, il suo posto per vincere o quello per perdere.'

(35)

Vergani considers that Geo would have been best advised to resign himself to the fate - or harsh reality - to which his colour predestined him.



Geo is an unfortunate, almost a 'vinto' by reason of his colour, while Mario, the peasant protagonist of 'Levar del sole' is predestined to the same ineluctable condition of the 'vinto' by his extreme poverty. Poverty enjoins that he should resign himself to cruel treatment at the hands of his social superiors, especially his grandfather, who has literally bought Mario, together with the youth's services. Significantly, the cruel destiny Vergani delineates for his protagonist is only rendered inevitable by the indifference of the society on whose periphery - and in whose service - the unfortunate lives. But, if the unfortunate must accept the lot society has assigned him, so too must the reader. Society is a constant, and therefore irreproachable, since its very constancy implies a certain perfection. Nor does Vergani insinuate that society should be blamed. Like the majority of Fascist and pro-Fascist novels, 'Levar del sole' smacks of bad faith: Mario's misfortunes, which evidently occur in the context of a given society - a bourgeois society - are attributed by Vergani only to an ineluctable destiny.

The destiny - or servitude - of the unfortunate is a condition which reveals itself prematurely to both Geo and Mario; since for the unfortunate even childhood joys are curtailed. Mario realizes that his lowly social status, or more correctly his social insignificance (resulting from poverty and ignorance) will prohibit him marrying his pretty cousin Rosetta, and this realization is depicted as the evanescence of his last illusion. In fact the title 'Levar del sole' is incongruous, ironic (whether advertently or inadvertently) and deserving of confrontation with Saporì's 'Sotto il sole'. The 'sole' of the second title refers quite evidently to the Fascist regime and the miraculous changes it effected in Italian national life, whereas the 'sole' of Vergani's title, improbably, symbolizes Mario's disillusionment and his apprehension of the futility of aspiration. The stories of Geo and Mario

suggest that unfortunates cannot and must not nurture great - or even modest - expectations of society, since 'destiny' will crush them, but nonetheless they can still savour little joys. Thus, Mario may not aspire to marry his cousin, but only to buy himself a toy or some crayons with the few centesimi stolen from his grandfather over a period of months. Vergani's choice and treatment of his subject matter denotes a certain affinity with the 'crepuscolari' but, significantly, the pathos that imbues his novels is underpinned by a strong sense of social order and the odious reactionary moral that the unfortunate must make the most of his exiguous blessings; since he cannot aspire to more or better things than his lot comprises, without effecting his own destruction. This notion that the poor and unfortunate should make do with very little - and be thankful for it - is a common argument employed by the bourgeois pro-Fascist or Fascist novelist to justify and reinforce his own social position. One corollary of this is the platitudinous assertion that the poor have never had it so good (the inference being that they hardly deserve to be considered poor any more). An assertion of this type figures in Milanese's 'Eva Marina', where a self-avowed proletarian and free thinker declares that the poor now enjoy a litre of wine and the cinema every night.

Cinelli's novel 'Cinquemila lire' presents an even more ludicrous declaration of the well-being of the deprived, in this case the landless peasant. Tito, a hard-working and somewhat unscrupulous peasant, steals the eponymous 5,000 lire and dispossesses the landowner for whom he works, the lazy gambler Felice. (Felice is Tito's wife's lover). Tito takes possession of Felice's land and finds that the running costs cast him into ever increasing debt until he is obliged to resell, to Felice. The outcome of this tale is that the farm labourer is better placed than the landowner, since he lacks the

responsibilities of the latter. 'Cinquemila lire' homilizes that the happy man is the man who does not seek to change his state or 'better' himself, that hard work is a virtue and that adultery inevitably brings down disaster on all those involved. Cinelli, like Vergani, celebrates the virtues of a static society, governed by the morality of social expediency; it is best for the unfortunate to accept the established order, the obvious although unstated corollary being that this acceptance is in the best interests of the middle classes. 'Cinquemila lire' is a parable of the inevitability of social injustice, of the need for the poor to submit resignedly to injustice, working hard and remaining monogamous - and also, incidentally, of the thanklessness of virtue, in material terms.

The atmosphere of the static society, which perpetuates itself through injustice, is perhaps best portrayed in 'Levar del sole'. The novel is set in nineteenth century Milan (as Vergani's novels often are) but Vergani's use of the unembellished language of contemporary popular journalism and his somewhat cynical portrayal of the mercenary bourgeois family whose affairs he recounts, render the novel's chronological situation conspicuously anachronistic. (The anachronism of the novel appears, in a sense, almost as a reflection of the underlying paradox of Fascist propaganda, which proclaimed its championship of progress while resisting any progressive social evolution with a genuinely reactionary zeal.) Vergani's society is governed by self-interest, which reveals itself to be an extraordinarily restrictive force; the existence of the old man's two sons and their wives revolves around their efforts to procure his undivided fortune. The sons live outside society in the seclusion born of their mutual rivalry. Perhaps the most noteworthy illustration of this mental blinkering generated by self-interest is the story of Antonio, the younger son. Antonio loses the little money

he had, and knows that in order to gain his father's all-important approval, he must recuperate it. To this end he opens a small shop selling photographic goods, and so as to economize sleeps at the back of the shop, and sends his wife back to her father. Antonio has a loveless marriage, yet in Amelia's absence he does not think to look for any sentimental consolation rather, in accordance with the exigencies of his self-interest, he subjects himself to a more rigid and unfulfilling routine than even his marriage afforded him. Antonio and Amelia genuinely dislike each other; nonetheless their common self-interest is enough to confer upon their marriage a certain stability and durability. The substitution of lucre for love is equally evident in the marriage of Antonio's brother, whose wife once worked for the old man and has been his mistress for years. The novel demonstrates how the nuclear family strive unanimously towards the advancement of their self-interest, and how Simonetta's liaison is merely an acceptable means of furthering this common aim. Admittedly, this petty bourgeois family's somewhat base motivation serves to accentuate Mario's lamentable destiny (whereas the pro-Fascist and Fascist novelists generally disregard the destiny of the unfortunate and therefore portray the middle classes in a kinder light) but it is precisely for this reason that Vergani - possibly inadvertently - conveys the stiflingly repressive nature of bourgeois society so effectively. The mediocrity of Vergani's talent, and of 'Levar del sole' serve to confer a certain authenticity on his depiction of a closed minded society.

Perhaps the most valid assessment of the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel tends to be the one that takes it at its 'face' or ostensible value. Seemingly, the majority of the novelists discussed in this chapter did not consciously indulge themselves in subtleties. Certainly this is the case of Mario Massa's curious novel 'L'ospite pazzo'.

Massa's depiction of the banal existence of the narrator Giovanni and the overriding preoccupation with triviality appear almost to burlesque petty bourgeois values. Giovanni describes his relationship with a girl-friend thus:

'S'andava abbastanza d'accordo, sia per l'affinità nei temperamenti perché era dolce e umile, sia per la comunanza dei sentimenti e per il combaciare dell'orario di libertà.' (36)

However, although the banality of Giovanni's aspirations and his tragedy may seem satirical to the latter-day reader, Massa is not, in fact, deriding Giovanni. Rather Giovanni is to be taken seriously. Giovanni is a white-collar worker with a representative background: his father was a petty civil servant and his mother a devout church-goer. Giovanni insists upon the continuity between his father and himself:

'Voglio dire che tra Anacleto-Camilla e me la continuità spirituale si mantiene intatta. Non esiste differenza alcuna di anima, di sensibilità, di vita.' (37)

He is proud - as the regime would encourage him to be - of his heritage of petty bourgeois aspirations and values. Like the family in 'Levar del sole' he lives in a kind of cloister between his employer, his work, his family, his girl and his shabbily ostentatious rented room; in other words he lives within the microcosmic society of the stereotyped petty bourgeois and civil servant. But, no attempt is made to relate the microcosm of his existence to the macrocosm of society as a whole. Like his father before him, Giovanni lives within the cloister of his limited experience, acquaintance and aspirations, beyond which he does not - or perhaps cannot - look. At any rate, the voluntary renunciation of expectation to the limits described in this novel, is obviously of the utmost expediency for the Fascist regime; a voluntary incarceration,

as it were, in a cloister like Giovanni's, is obviously a more effective way of repressing a class - and a nation - than is the police state.

Massa's novel fulfils the Fascist requirement that there be no overt discussion of a class struggle, but it nevertheless portrays a suggestive little conflict, that occurs within Giovanni's microcosm. The conflict occurs between Giovanni and the Other (L'altro) who frequently avails himself of their common body to give vent to his radically different personality. Giovanni suffers, as he sees it, from having two personalities in the one body. But Giovanni is sane, while the Other is the eponymous 'ospite pazzo'. If Giovanni is the natural conservative, and consequently in Fascist times the natural Fascist, the other is the natural anarchist (although perhaps through the polarization of Fascist jargon he would be termed a Communist or Bolshevik or whatever). The Other, it should be noted, is more intelligent than Giovanni, by the latter's own admission. (Although, in accordance with Fascist values, above average intelligence is not necessarily deemed a virtue and indeed this intelligence induces the Other to deny the existence of a God, to reject as an absurdity Giovanni's need to work in order to earn his - or their - small salary, and to go to Giovanni's employer and make outrageous demands of him.) The Other lives by the belief that the 'Avventura assoluta' an all-consuming passion, is the only truly valid and meaningful human experience. His life is therefore disordered and dominated by irrational, nonconformist convictions. Giovanni's tragedy is precipitated by the Other's passionate conduct of a love affair which culminates in the attempted murder of his mistress. Giovanni concludes:

'il buon senso è dei mediocri. Agli esseri superiori non serve.' (38)

and this is the moral of the story. (Pro-Fascist novels not uncommonly seem to have a moral.) The Other refuses to live his life according to

the precepts of 'good' or 'common' sense which Giovanni's petty bourgeois mentality exemplifies. The Other, in fact, conducts himself not dissimilarly to a Dannunzian Superuomo. But there is only room for one Superuomo in Fascist Italy; and that one Superuomo is, of course, Mussolini. In the changed political climate of the Fascist regime, the Other's rejection of social conformity must be shown to end in disaster; whereas previously the Superuomo achieved some kind of distinction, if only inasmuch as he attained a stature superior to that of the common conformist mortal. But in 'L'ospite pazzo' even this distinction is denied him; the Other's values and intelligence are undermined and ridiculed by Giovanni's assessment of them. Iliù, the Other's mistress is thin, bandy-legged and slightly promiscuous, nor is she initially overcome by passion, as the Other believed; she acquiesces to the Other's passionate advances, solely because she is too confused to know how else to respond. Similarly, when the Other makes a passionate appeal to the court, that he should not be tried for attempted murder, his plea - predictably - meets with derision, because those judging him cannot conceive of the 'Avventura assoluta' or his peculiar Weltanschauung. The Other must be mad indeed to attempt to impose his values on society. But, if the Other's conduct is ridiculous, its effect on Giovanni's life is tragic. Giovanni's ambition is to have an ordered life, marry the daughter of an innkeeper, help her run the inn, and have a full belly and a cigar every night, as well as to produce a son and heir. His tragedy is that his dream is probably unattainable. He cannot realize it unless the Other consents never to reappear, for if the Other were to reveal himself to Giovanni's son, the son too would become mad. (The germ of anarchy, then, is irresistibly contagious, notwithstanding the fact that Giovanni himself remains uncontaminated.) 'L'ospite pazzo' celebrates the banal, and the preferability of the commonplace and of common sense to - the lunacy of - individualism,

nonconformity and the quest for intense experience. Thus, Massa, like Vergani and Cinelli, asseverates that man must conform to his social context and resign himself gladly to his cloister. The political implications of Massa's novel are obvious. (In 'L'ospite pazzo' Massa also succeeds in coining a petty bourgeois notion of tragedy.)

From the preceding remarks it emerges that the middle classes, specifically the wealthy middle classes dominate the social hierarchy of the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel. Now, it would appear from the novel that they have only relatively recently displaced the aristocracy - and perhaps this accounts, in part, for the insistence of the majority of Fascist and pro-Fascist novelists that the lower classes must accept and resign themselves to the immutability of their social inferiority. The aristocracy receive small mention in the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel. Like the other social classes, however, they are depicted, when they are depicted, in a more or less stereotyped fashion. Gotta offers a fairly representative picture of two aged aristocratic spinsters; since aged spinsters best epitomize the sterility of their stock. Gotta describes them thus:

'Uscivano sempre insieme, camminando per strada con molto sussiego, tutt'e due piccoline, magre, munite d'un gran naso aristocratico, vestite d'abiti preistorici, sormontate da capellini irti di piume secolari, le mani protette dai mezzi guanti di lana nera, armate sempre d'un ombrellino e d'un parapigioggia che ad ogni passo puntavano in terra con sussiego autoritario.' (39)

The aristocracy are, then, more or less decrepit, impoverished and outdated. Gotta states that after the First World War, the interest on the estate of these two spinsters was reduced to a pittance, and only the generosity of certain well-disposed families has saved them from starvation. Notwithstanding their haughty mien, Gotta's aristocrats are dependents, relics of the pre-war era, who no longer have any useful



contribution to make to the society that supports them.

If the aristocracy is decadent, the middle classes, or perhaps more precisely the upper middle classes are in the ascendancy - financially, socially and of course politically (although the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel does not stress this last point). Nonetheless they are subject to what appears, especially in d'Ambra's 'La sosta sul ponte', as a hierarchy of affection, which, in turn, is inseparably linked to their social morality. In the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel, the hierarchy of affection reveals itself in the stereotyped depiction of the bond between parent and child, and the passionate, adulterous liaison of the male, whose public role is often that of the reformer. These themes are frequently portrayed, fundamentally interrelated and, as we shall see, of a certain consequence to the Fascist regime.

A character in Loria's 'La scuola di ballo' makes the following somewhat surprising remark:

'- Dei figli dovremmo restar sempre padroni noi e  
non i mariti o le mogli che possono farli soffrire.'  
(40)

This is perhaps an overstatement of the importance of the parent-child bond, but in the context of the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel, it is less of an exaggeration than it might initially seem. The bond between parent and child, and especially between mother and son, is shown to be the most intense emotional bond either will engage in. The son is the pivot of the mother's existence; if she loses him she loses her sanity, and the will to live, like Barberina in 'La sosta sul ponte', Clarice in 'Sotto il sole' and Marianna in 'Il figlio di due madri'. (41) Woman in fact, has no rightful place beyond the confines of the family. (The Fascist and pro-Fascist novel repeatedly exploits the fecund emotive and tragic potential of the dying or dead - habitually middle-class -

child and the anguish suffered by its impotent parents.) But the inference of the quotation from 'La scuola di ballo' is that a parent never ceases to consider his offspring as children, regardless of their age or experience. Thus Sisto Bibbiena (in 'La sosta sul ponte') visits his wounded son Isidoro in the military hospital and makes the following paternal observation:

'Tutti così questi ragazzi soldati che vanno in guerra a vent'anni. Li vedo attorno a me nella camerata. Li portano con le barelle, li adagiano sopra i letti, soli. Poi accorrono le madri, i padri... E riappaiono, da questi soldati eroici, da questi uomini che impavidi hanno sfidato la morte, i bambini che erano, che sono ancora, bisognosi d'assistenza e di difesa, pieni di coraggio nuovo ora che nell'ospedale di tutti la loro propria casa li riprende, li protegge, li rifà sicuri, tranquilli....' (42)

These young men, the heroic soldiers of the First World War, are treated like children by their parents and they respond as children. Despite the fact that when in danger, on the battlefield, these soldiers take sole responsibility for their lives and conduct themselves manfully, when they are confronted by their parents they revert to a state of dependence; as Sisto observes, their conditioning causes these grown-up children to regress. Nor is this so only because they are sick. Given that the child regards himself, as he is regarded, solely in the context of the nuclear family, it follows that men who are themselves fathers and are approaching middle age, (like Sisto Bibbiena and Claudio Vela) will, nonetheless, consider and conduct themselves as children when confronted with their elderly parents. When Sisto's mother learns of his adultery, he feels that he is answerable to her; he is remorseful for the suffering he causes her, but thankful for the comprehension with which she judges his liaison. Sisto says:

'Piange. Mia madre piange. Ed io non posso consolarla.

Non rimprovera. Piange. Non pretende quello che sa impossibile a me e a Rosalba. Piange. Meravigliosamente madre, sa le ragioni del mio male, lo comprende, lo vede....' (43)

Sisto evidently nurtures an image of his mother as something of a Mater Dolorosa, in the way she lives and suffers for her son.

Now, the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel generally portray a bourgeoisie who regard themselves as components of the nuclear family rather than as individuals, and the nuclear family is built on the edifice of mutual dependence. Sisto, in his forties, still acknowledges his mother's right to judge him, because he is her child, and naturally his own son Isidoro is equally emotionally dependent on Sisto. But the parent is no less dependent on his child than is the child on the parent. Gotta illustrates this thesis in 'La bufera infernal' where Claudio and Mima Vela look on helplessly, as their child Pia, struggles with death; Gotta comments:

'Stavano immobili curvi sul lettino, guardavano la loro creatura come si guarda un miracolo di vita, non avendo mai come in quegli attimi compreso la necessità che quel piccolo corpo esistesse per la loro esistenza' (44)

The parent, then, needs the child to confer meaning on his own existence. In 'La sosta sul ponte' the father is dependent on his child in a somewhat different, but no less significant manner. Certainly, Sisto is emotionally dependent on his son, but he also depends on his son to fulfil his need for what is best expressed by the Yiddish expression 'nachas'. A child gives nachas to his parents through his success in a field usually chosen for him by them. The child's success is intended to compensate, in the parents' eyes, for some failure in their own life. Sisto Bibbiena is a famous conductor and according to his friends a talented operatic composer, although he has written very little,

and had nothing published. At the beginning of 'La sosta sul ponte' Sisto learns that he is going blind and will have to cease conducting.

(45) He reacts to this knowledge with the heroic proclamation:

'E, se Dio vorrà che io soccomba, - vivo e morto nel medesimo tempo a quarantatré anni - c'è mio figlio.... Ventiquattro anni. Mirabile musicista. Per me, per sua madre, prenderà lui la bacchetta che mi cade di mano a mezza via....' (46)

In consequence of his affair with Rosalba, Sisto squanders his talents and increasingly hopes in his son, Isidoro, to write *his* unwritten masterpiece. In Sisto's eyes, Isidoro's success would be tantamount to Sisto's own success. Finally, after Isidoro's death, Sisto now somewhat deranged, informs his illegitimate two year old son:

'Vedo te, nell'avvenire amare la musica come i Bibbiena l'amarono, vedo te, piccolo Sisto, rassomigliare a Isidoro, riprenderne e continuarne sino alla gloria il radioso sogno interrotto.' (47)

Nachas is a form of dependence which stresses the continuity of the family to the detriment of a valid assessment of the achievement of the individual. Clearly, the mutual dependence engendered by the nuclear family is not conducive to the development of the bourgeois's sense of individual identity, nor does it encourage him to act in a responsible manner, either towards himself or towards society. Rather he is, as it were, a link in a chain, answerable to his parents and responsible to his children. The nuclear family, then, propagates dependence and manifestly, in this instance also, the pro-Fascist and Fascist novelist's subject, and the regime's interest coincide. We can only conjecture as to how much Mussolini's paternalistic dictatorship - Saporì stresses its paternalistic nature in 'Sotto il sole' - found favour with the bourgeois family man; or, indeed, to what degree the bourgeois was even aware of the distinction conferred upon him by the fact of his being a 'family man';

before the regime revealed to him the distinction of his condition. In the pre-Fascist novel adulterers are not always so moved by the thought of their family.

To return once more to the quotation from 'La scuola di ballo', it appears that the marital bond and the flesh and blood bond of the nuclear family are not of equivalent intensity. The bond between parent and child is the supreme bond of love, whereas the relationship between husband and wife is, largely, based on their familial role and coloured by practical considerations. Sisto says of his wife:

'Barberina, prima d'essere mia moglie, è la madre d'Isidoro.' (48)

Similarly, with the prosaic precision that he occasionally resorts to in order to stress the edifying nature of certain remarks, Gotta defines the newly wed Lorenzo's sentiment for his as yet childless wife, in 'Portofino' by the terms 'faith' and 'tenderness', but he stops short of 'love'. Instead he explains:

'Era la "sua" donna essenzialmente perchè era sua moglie. Per essere stato educato secondo principii tradizionali e borghesi, egli sentiva "la moglie" come un'appartenenza, un diritto, una parte di sè stesso, unita a lui da legami più forti d'ogni altro legame umano e sociale.' (49)

and Lorenzo considers:

'Lisl non è mia soltanto perchè mi dia gioia. Lisl è la mia casa, la somma dei miei interessi, la madre dei bambini che metteremo al mondo...' (50)

(Lisl, in fact, would appear to be Lorenzo's property.) As Gotta states, a bourgeois outlook influences the attitude of the male towards his spouse. An atmosphere of stability and of serenity - improbably - surrounds the partners in a monogamous marriage even when, as is the case of Sisto and

Barberina, husband and wife are not altogether compatible.

In fact the novels of both Gotta and d'Ambra strive - somewhat unconvincingly - towards the portrayal of a social morality which appears to be based on a kind of social expediency rather than on religious and personal convictions. Adultery figures largely in the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel and is the predominant theme of 'Portofino', 'La sosta sul ponte' and 'La bufera infernal'. Yet, while protestations of moral disapproval at an illicit sexuality infiltrate the narrative, they smack of bad faith. The depiction of adultery in these novels is not altogether consonant with the novelist's avowed moral stance. In contrast to marriage, the extra-marital affair is shown to be passionate, intense and sexually fulfilling. Further, Sisto, Claudio and Lorenzo all find some justification for their conduct in human terms, at least. Sisto's justification is twofold; he argues in a mood of self-pity that he has become the lover of Rosalba Casarsa out of the extreme loneliness occasioned by his son's absence and his prematurely interrupted career, and because he and Rosalba are kindred spirits, two frustrated artists. In another mood he blames Barberina for his infidelity. He states:

'da lei respinta, la mia tenerezza va altrove. Quante volte una donna rimprovera a una rivale d'aver occupato nel nostro cuore il suo posto, senza domandarsi se non spetta prima a lei la responsabilità d'aver lasciato vuoto quel posto?' (51)

Occasionally Sisto admits that he too is not completely blameless, but clearly d'Ambra's sympathy lies with Sisto's human - and masculine - frailty and not with the devout, unbending and self-righteous Barberina. Gotta regards adultery somewhat differently, but like d'Ambra, he tends to exculpate masculine frailty. In 'Portofino' he argues that Lorenzo could not have been expected to refuse the opportunity of an 'adventure' when it was offered him. He justifies Lorenzo's conduct thus:

'Il senso morale di Lorenzo non era meno forte di quello della normalità degli uomini. Si sa che l'educazione del secolo (anzi, dei secoli) concede agli uomini molti privilegi, e non è qui il luogo di giudicare se questi siano o no giustificabili in rapporto ai diritti dei due sessi.' (52)

The adultery of the male, apparently, is more or less an accepted convention in middle-class marriages; so too, as Lisl observes, is the resultant suffering of the wife. (This, however, seems to be rather an odd - but possibly not entirely redundant - contribution for Gotta to make to the Fascist idea of spiritual imperialism.) The adultery of Claudio in 'La bufera infernal' has a far more sensational justification, and also literary precedents. (In fact, 'La bufera infernal' and 'Portofino' are variations on the same theme, but the happy conclusion of the latter is effected largely by Portofino itself.) The eponymous 'bufera' is, of course, a reference to Dante's 'Inferno', and Claudio's mistress is usually called Lula, but her name is actually Paola. Like Flavia in 'Portofino' Lula represents the 'scarlet woman', the 'femme fatale' the irresistible siren, etc. Claudio tries to resist her but, understandably enough, he fails, for Lula is a kind of sensual 'Typhoid Mary'; all those who come into contact with her are contaminated by her, fascinated by her, even women, even against her will. Baron Roerio defines creatures like Lula as the race of the damned; he says:

'-Il mondo è diviso in due schiere: loro e noi, i sensuali e gli onesti. Vincono sempre loro finchè la perdizione o la morte non li imputridisce.' (53)

Certainly this is an interestingly deterministic attitude towards sensuality.

Now, as stated above, the bond of the male with his mistress is one of passion, whereas his marital bond is composed of legal, moral, economic and familial considerations. Sisto acknowledges that the latter

bond prevails by refusing to leave his wife, to join Rosalba and their child, but nevertheless he fails to act responsibly, that is to say in a fashion consistent with his conviction of the supremacy of the marital bond. Sisto offers a fine illustration of what we have termed social morality; notwithstanding the love he feels for Isidoro, his conduct is determined not by personal, internal convictions but by certain bourgeois norms of social conduct, imposed ab exteriore. Equally, bourgeois norms dictate that wives, like Ernestina in 'Sotto il sole', should, in practice, resign themselves to their husbands' misdemeanours. In a sense this social morality exempts both husband and wife from their share of responsibility for the adulterous liaison. (This middle-class society is obviously 'male chauvinist' since it ascribes to the mistress the whole weight of guilt: she alone is rendered reprehensible by the passion she arouses.) But, if the husband and wife are more or less exempted from personal responsibility, adultery also divests the husband of social responsibility, since his life is reduced to terms contingent to his adultery. Certainly, the portrayal of the bourgeois in the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel suggests that he has, at best, only a very limited concept of social responsibility, or indeed of society. Rather than concerning himself about the nature of the society in which he lives, the bourgeois occupies himself with his adultery and, simultaneously, with the conflicting yearning for an ordered existence. These conflicting impulses leave him little time for any social commitments, or even professional commitments. Sisto, who is a thoroughly irresponsible creature, knows that he will never finish writing his opera, and he relates the failure of his creativity to the pursuit of his chaotic, all-consuming affair with Rosalba. Claudio Vela, the provincial gentleman and Deputy, neglects his political commitments to consummate his affair with Lula. Gotta, somewhat patronizingly, states that an exuberant and



unrepressed sexuality is harmful for everyone - except the artist; he says:

'.... il vizio è sterile e dannoso per tutti, eccettochè per gli artisti, il cui cervello anormale si giova spesso di veleni che lo eccitano. Guai alle creature normali che imitano gli artisti nell'uso dei veleni;' (54)

Subsequently, Gotta explains, in the same moralizing tone, that sensuality is a destiny, a disease which affects Claudio and most of his contemporaries, but that its repression, or sublimation can lead to virtue; he declares:

'Ognuno cerca di nascondere, gelosamente, oppure cerca di dimenticarsene faticando, trafficando; il pudore e la vergogna di esso creano eroismi di disinteresse e di bontà.' (55)

He concludes that only the family can offer respite from the torments of vice and chaos:

'Esiste per ciascuno un porto di salvezza, un'oasi di pace ove sia possibile mondare l'anima dalla sensualità o ridurre la sensualità stessa a cosa santa? La nostra casa, dove, chiusa la porta, si può restare come isolati da tutto il mondo, difesi, purificati, perdonati, incuorati dall'amore ineguagliabile della mamma, di Mima, della bambina innocente.' (56)

Ultimately Gotta advocates the preservation of the nuclear family as the source of peace and virtue, within which man is isolated from (any concern for) his fellows. In contrast with adultery, the family appears as the natural unit of order. It is, moreover, instrumental in the preservation of social order; in the Fascist sense of the word.

The Church and religiosity play little part in the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel. Devout mothers and traditional church-going families like the Stacchini and the Vela family figure predictably in the novel (religious observance, in other words, is a trait that characterizes the virtuous bourgeois) but in general references to the Church itself are

insignificant, and even, occasionally, uncomplimentary. Throughout the course of their liaisons, Claudio, Lorenzo and Sisto are all more moved by emotional and familial considerations than by any profound religious convictions. Nevertheless, in the case of adultery, the weighty moral condemnation of the Church is sometimes brought to bear - especially on the adulteress. The role to which the Church has been relegated by the Fascist and pro-Fascist novelist is instanced by 'La bufera infernal'. Lula is poisoned by her brother-in-law, Orlando, who thereby seeks to vindicate the innocents whose tranquillity she has destroyed; amongst whom he counts himself, since she cannot requite his passion. Orlando's confessor destines Lula to eternal damnation, while Orlando turns back to religion, repents for his sins and dies a saintly death. Gotta's priest advocates that the adulteress should not be pardoned by the God-fearing, but hated with a righteous indignation. Apparently then, the priest represents the bastion of the innocent and of the jilted wife; in this world rather than the next. Thus rather than guiding man's soul or conscience, the Church confirms him in his middle-class social morality. This social morality of the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel is an externally imposed standardized criterion of conduct which, instead of reinforcing detracts from the values of the individual. Social morality is the inevitable product of the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel which deals in stock situations and stereotypes.. (Nevertheless I would not venture to suggest that social morality is a peculiarly Fascist trait; merely that it is another social control that the regime found it expedient to employ.)

In 'La moglie ingenua e il marito malato', Campanile offers a comic treatment of the same pro-Fascist traits of adultery and social morality. The eponymous illness consists of a pair of horns that appear on the husband's head while his wife is holidaying alone. Horns, the mark of the cuckold, constitute the pivot of Campanile's far-fetched, but witty,

farce which concludes with the president of an imaginary republic officially ruling that adultery can be said to have been committed only where there is visible proof (that is to say where the culprit actually grows horns) while unofficially he acknowledges that no correlation exists between adultery and the apparition of horns. Campanile presents a light-hearted parody of middle-class mores which could perhaps have been scathing but is, in fact, rendered innocuous by its conformity to the criteria of bourgeois taste. Campanile's considerable success during the Fascist period attests to his adroitness in gauging his audience's desire for diversion; the frivolousness of his fiction permits the audience to savour uncritically, the riskiness of his comedy. This type of fiction, also, tends to subvert the values of the individual; frivolousness can prove an effective way of lulling the individual into moral inertia.

Overall, it might be said that the portrayal of the bourgeois in the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel is fairly uncritical. A certain justification is offered for his adultery, and praise is given for such actions as the novelist deems praiseworthy. The novelist's uncritical - or perhaps sympathetic - attitude towards the bourgeois corresponds to the bourgeois's evaluation of self and of his social function or usefulness. Men like Claudio Vela and Stacchini (in 'Sotto il sole') possibly follow in the tradition of the middle-class social reformers of nineteenth century England. They are anxious to improve the living conditions of the poor - that is to render their poverty tolerable by providing them with a bare minimum of creature comforts - but, as emerges from the novel, they wish to do so without fundamentally increasing the autonomy or social privilege of the poor. Neither Claudio nor Stacchini contemplate changing or modifying the existing class structure; instead their philanthropy serves, in the last analysis, to assure the continuance of their own social supremacy. By becoming a Deputy, Claudio adds further

distinction to an already illustrious family, while Stacchini, more interestingly, involves himself, and his family, in the hierarchy of the Fascist regime. Stacchini becomes involved in the draining of the marshes, his daughter Selvaggia marries a Fascist diplomat, who becomes First Secretary of the Italian mission in Jerusalem, and his unmarried daughter Pomina directs the local Fascio femminile, in exemplary fashion, so Saponi tells us. The adhesion of the Stacchini family to Fascism enhances their social status, and further, admits them into the political élite; or more precisely, in the case of Stacchini and Pomina, it admits them into the regional political élite. Naturally the Stacchini family's devotion to Fascism is not motivated by self-interest. (The attributes of paternalistic Fascism and the disinterested response they provoke will be discussed presently with reference to 'Sotto il sole'.) It is, however, quite permissible for the reformer to derive a personal satisfaction from his social commitment or philanthropism. In the case of Stacchini this is, perhaps, justified, since the transformation of the Pontine marshes represents the fulfilment of his lifelong dream. But the satisfaction Claudio Vela derives from his presidency of the administrative council of the Civic Hospital and of the 'Opere Pie' is compounded with moral complacency. At the beginning of the novel, his 'good works' and his contact with various unfortunates suffice to reinforce his illusive self-image and to convince him of his spiritual purity. (Although the depiction of the charitable ladies in Vittorini's dissident novella 'Erica e i suoi fratelli' would suggest that the equation of charity with altruism or virtue can be spurious.) Claudio, like most of his literary compeers is, as Gotta observes, a sensualist, but he is nevertheless that highly commendable prototype; the provincial gentleman. Gotta summarizes Claudio's existence prior to Lula's reappearance thus:

'Egli aveva combattuto in guerra, poi s'era creato una famiglia, un nido di abitudini serene, un sistema morale addolcito da compiacenze religiose informate a quel buon senso mistico che è abbastanza comune in certi gentiluomini di campagna studiosi e ligi alla tradizione.' (57)

Claudio epitomizes certain homely virtues. Gotta, it should be noted, is curiously preoccupied with the virtues of provincial life which, seemingly, is still thoroughly imbued with traditional pre-Fascist values. Claudio states:

"La Provincia è la miglior consigliera per un artista" (58)

and Gotta avows (in 'Portofino') that the provincial gentlewoman between the ages of seventeen and thirty offers the most characteristic picture of the age in which she lives. If this is so, Claudio's daughter Pia, a pious Catholic and devoted daughter and mother, whose serene existence is voluntarily cloistered, is most representative of the Fascist era. However, it seems likely that Pia, like the rest of the Vela family (and like Saporì's Stacchini family) is somewhat idealized. Gotta defines the virtues and provinciality that characterize Claudio and Pia thus:

'Essi erano... dei provinciali nel senso più nobile della parola. Erano cioè pieni di fiducia nei valori della vita e cercavano la vita in tutto, in un brano di musica come in una notizia di giornale, nella corolla d'un fiore come nel volto d'una persona;' (59)

Gotta's insistence on the merits of a more or less traditional provincial life reiterates the value of social order.

But the values Claudio and Pia embody bear no relation to the values which Fascist propaganda so vehemently proclaims. We can only speculate whether the piety, virtue, simplicity and culture of Claudio and Pia are intended, by Gotta, to enhance the Fascist regime, to provide some sort of complement to its much vaunted dynamism and aggression -

attributes, which, it must be said, for one reason or another generally receive limited mention in the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel. The figure of Stacchini, however, undoubtedly serves to endorse the validity of Fascism. Stacchini is an educated, cultured man who loves two things in life above all else; his family and the Littorio region. In a fashion typical of the period (or so the novel would induce us to believe) Stacchini watches carefully over the spiritual development of his children. He teaches them the history of the region and transmits to them his love for it. A gentle, pious man, he imparts to his children the precept of charity, of sacrificing time and energy unstintingly to this end - while preserving intact his own social position. All in all, he is a kind of nineteenth century philanthropist and not a social reformer. The Fascist 'revolution' however, provokes a natural, spontaneous and generous response from this man. Saponi says:

'Ha preso il comando di alcuni giovani, ha marciato con le colonne delle "Camicie Nere" da Monterotondo a Roma, contro un Governo imbecille e corrotto.' (60)

The March on Rome constitutes the most memorable day of Stacchini's life; the dawning of a new era. Saponi comments:

'Sono passati nove anni dalla Marcia su Roma, e l'ingegnere Stacchini ricorda quel ventotto ottobre come la data più memoranda della sua vita. Si stava bene, e sicuri, tra quei ragazzi coi pugnali nudi e le rivoltelle a tamburo.' (61)

Now Stacchini's personal values serve to confer a certain generous, humanistic idealism on Fascism. Seemingly, through the figure of Stacchini, Saponi seeks to confer traditionally conservative respectability on the Fascist regime; although thereby, he inadvertently provides a telling indictment of Fascist ideology. (But Saponi's interpretation of Fascism clearly found favour given that 'Sotto il sole' was awarded a literary prize

and that we can exclude, a priori, the hypothesis that the prize was awarded on account of the novel's artistic merit.) Both the character of Stacchini and the singling out of Fascist achievements in the Littorio region contribute to the portrayal of a benign regime, a regime divested of its potential for physical violence. The heterogeneity of the Fascist myth, however, resulted in different novelists celebrating different and often conflicting aspects of the regime's grandeur. In contrast with Saponi's view of a benign non-violent regime, Milanese's 'exaltation of the nation' - as he defines the subject-matter of his prolific literary output - is characterized by the related attributes of arrogance and aggression. All in all, Milanese's Fascism would seem to be coloured by his own aggressive temperament. In 'La sera di Santa Barbara' Milanese attributes the following observation to a young admirer:

"Lei... ha dedicato tutta la sua opera all'esaltazione nazionale, fin da quando nessuno osava farlo, e poi, nei tempo nuovi, ha dato e dà in tutti i suoi libri ogni possibile luce all'Italia nuova." (62)

Milanese, claims - not altogether unjustifiably - to be some kind of spiritual sansepolcrista. His estimation of his works and of the usefulness of his literary critics exemplifies the stance Paolo Arcari exhorts in 'Letteratura italiana e i disfattisti suoi'. It is therefore a Fascist stance, since it is manifestly antithetical to that of the 'disfattisti'. Milanese is perhaps somewhat arrogant in his refutation of the judgement of his critics; in 'La sera di Santa Barbara' he states that they find fault with his books out of jealousy for his remarkable productivity. He continues with a virulent harangue expressed through the mouthpiece of the young naval officer, who states:

'Negli articoli di critica letteraria..... è chiamata 'faciloneria'. Per fortuna il pubblico

italiano, che nella sua grande maggioranza è immensamente piú intelligente ed istruito di questi accusatori riuniti in camarille d'impotenti, sa molto bene giudicare da sé quanto sia difficile questa 'faciloneria'. Non soltanto non accorda il minimo peso agli inchiostri-veleno, lasciando che si avvelenino di piú, ma per una reazione ormai palese di disgusto, accentua in progressione sempre crescente il suo favore verso gli accusati.' (63)

(what little of Milanese's work is reproduced here is sufficient to endorse his critics' charge.) The unhappy influence of the regime on the Arts reveals itself both in Milanese's - aggressive rather than intimately convinced - asseveration of his literary merits and in his praise for his readers' discernment. Milanese manifestly regards himself as a talented novelist, almost a wronged Hero, and his detractors as scribblers and 'impotenti'. Further, Milanese's universe, like his fiction is apparently divided into the two categories of Heroes and impotents. On the one hand there are the seafaring Italians who constitute the class of Heroes. (Milanese, incidentally, is acutely nationalistic, even chauvinistic, and he focuses a particular contempt on the British, presumably on account of their celebrated naval tradition, given that 'Eva Marina' was published in 1929.) The rest of the world can be grouped together under the label of 'impotenti'. The verbal crudity and aggression that distinguish Milanese's works, together with the sketchy depiction of character and circumstance, emerge as an inevitable consequence of the author's particular preoccupation with Heroism.

Milanese writes mainly about the sea; and again according to the young naval officer, after reading his books, many young men have joined the navy, who would otherwise never have thought to do so. Milanese visualizes the sea as a virgin force, possibly - like Fascism - a last stronghold of the Heroic ideal. He says:

'... il mare è ancora infinita poesia non intaccata da formule, non insudiciata dai fermenti delle spiagge



balneari, e non resa ridicola dai tanti odierni poetastri e scrittorelli forti soltanto di un loro mare cinematografico fatto per navi di cartapesta e popolato da marinai da operetta usi allo *smoking*, allo spumante e alle sdorsature femminili.' (64)

Milanesi is as different from these soft hacks who describe the sea as is the seafarer from the land-lubber; Milanesi's vision seems to translate itself most validly into clichés. For him the sea is the domain of the strong, or to quote the cliché which best epitomizes his stance, the sea 'separates the men from the boys' - although the issues become clearer if we translate the cliché into the contemporary idiom and say that 'it separates the butch from the cissies'. For Milanesi's works constitute a celebration of the butch ideal.

Now, Milanesi's butch prototype is more or less synonymous with the myth of virility the regime propagated which glorifies the actions of the squadristi and the joys of an active dangerous life in harsh conditions and in masculine company. In 'Eva Marina' Milanesi expresses his regret for the technological advances which, in recent years, have made the sailor's life easier and safer. Seemingly, relatively unhazardous conditions are detrimental to the seafarer's butchness. The Fascist fostered ideal of the Heroic sacrifice of youth and life to the Mother-country also finds a counterpart in Milanesi's fiction. The most celebrated attribute of both Milanesi's world and Fascism is youth, for it is youth which best incarnates - and lends itself to - notions of Courage, Heroism, enthusiasm and vitality. But, whereas the Fascist allegedly subordinates all other emotional bonds to his love for his Mother-country, the seafarer dedicates himself to the sea. In 'Eva Marina' several young sailors suffer mutilation or death through disasters on board ship and the atrocious and habitually gratuitous nature of these disasters, serves to ennoble all those who go to sea. In the same way that

Fascism's 'martyrs' sanctify the cause for which they lay down their lives. While the old sea dog who regrets ending his life on land, in comfort and tranquillity and says:

'meglio crepare in mare, per l'Italia,' (65)

recalls the dictum coined during the First World War and appropriated by Fascist propaganda:

'Meglio vivere un giorno da leone che cento anni da pecora.'

Now, since the butchideal is itself the expression of an extremely élitist social and political stance, it is eminently logical that Milanese should entertain reactionary class and racial prejudices also. Milanese, in fact, shows himself to be a more ferocious élitist than most of his literary compeers. Like Vergani he considers the blacks to be racially inferior, and he further attributes a certain sexual promiscuity to them. He depicts common sailors and the working-classes in general as total or partial illiterates in such a way as to suggest that their stupidity is congenital; although even common sailors are, by reason of their vocation, superior to the doltish land-lubbers. Nonetheless the butchness of the common sailor is not enough to exempt him from the contempt to which Milanese subjects the lower orders.

In contrast, Romero in 'Eva Marina' and Roero in 'La sera di Santa Barbara' best epitomize the butch ideal. Both are young naval officers whose virile nature is complemented by an aristocratic delicacy of sentiment and a profound conception of Fascist Honour. In 'La sera di Santa Barbara' Roero refuses a valuable gold cigarette lighter when it is offered to him by a beautiful Spanish lady, but he is proud to offer it, on her behalf, to the Fascist 'raccolta dell'oro'. While Romero who found and voluntarily relinquished the one woman he could love, in a

single evening, reacts to his friends' incomprehension of his conduct thus:

'- Hanno tutti la smania di ridurre le belle cose del mondo al comune denominatore del matrimonio -' (66)

A voluntary renunciation of the things that lesser mortals desire confirms the distinction of Roero, like Romero. (But the cast of Romero's magnanimity, particularly, recalls the disdain for marriage and for the mediocrity of conventional values expressed by various pre-Fascist Superuomini.)

In contrast to the majority of Fascist and pro-Fascist novels, the glorification of a butch Fascist myth in Milanesi's works is enhanced by the contrasting depiction accorded to what he - somewhat loosely - terms Marxism, whereby but for the grace of God - and Mussolini - Italy, like Spain, would even now be ravaged. Roero's story in 'La sera di Santa Barbara' is little more than a vehicle for a 'blood and thunder' defamation of the Republican forces in the Spanish civil war. Significantly, Milanesi fulminates the anti-Fascist forces in the language of the Catholic Church, thus:

'Non per nulla l'Anticristo Lenin, con la sua chiaroveggenza diabolica, aveva nettamente indicata la Spagna, come il secondo paese europeo da trasformare, dopo la Russia, in inferno.' (67)

'Le applicazioni delle sue teorie, prima tra le quali quella di adoperare fin dal principio d'una rivoluzione un massimo di violenza per terrorizzare l'umanità e farne sanguinosa poltiglia incapace di reazione, erano visibili... nelle loro spaventevoli tracce.' (68)

The aim of the Reds, as Milanesi pejoratively calls them, is to reduce Spain to chaos and destroy her centuries of civilisation; for they are not human beings but 'feccia, agli ordini della Russia' (69), wild beasts who burn men alive and massacre even ministers of the Church. For Milanesi, the war in Spain constitutes the archetypal battle between the forces

of Good and Evil, in which Franco's forces and, by extension, all Fascists obviously embody the forces of Good. (The Spanish aristocracy, like the Italian, has been evirated by the centuries and therefore has no part to play in this battle.) Only recently, says Milanese, Franco's forces have freed Fort X from the horrors perpetrated by the cowardly Bolsheviks:

'Ma tanta è la forza naturale che riconduce spontaneamente l'uomo ai suoi principi immutabili di religione e di vita civile, che relativamente in poco tempo il fervore della resurrezione già dava l'aspetto di sogno d'orrore svanito, al recente passato.' (70)

The notion that man naturally and spontaneously craves to regulate his life according to the precepts of civilisation (that is to say according to Milanese's peculiar notion of 'vita civile') is curious, and indeed Milanese's implication that man's natural state is one of order and that chaos is an aberration and an Evil which imposes itself ab exteriori, is obviously inverted and refutes the concept of man's evolution; which suggests a manipulation of consciousness whether in accordance with the precepts of the Church or consonant with the best interests of the regime or both. At any rate this notion affords a significant insight into the 'naturally' Fascist disposition, like Milanese's own. The Fascist and pro-Fascist preoccupation with order connotes an irrational terror of autonomy or self-determination, which is equated with chaos.

After negating the humanity of the Reds, Milanese proceeds to asperse their motivation. They are, he alleges, incapable of disinterested conduct, nothing more than criminals whose envy of the material well-being of the rich leads them to overthrow the existing order. It is therefore only fitting that the Marxist leader in Fort X should have been sentenced to prison seven times for fraud. But more interesting than this traduction of their motivation and the laboured explication of the

criteria on which the Reds would build a new society, is the rabid sexuality which Milanese absurdly declares to be indivisible from Marxism. Thus he describes the walls of their headquarters in X as covered in obscene drawings and comments:

'Ottimo sfondo, d'altronde, per i "Viva Lenin", "Viva i Soviet" e le falci e i martelli cosparsi tra accoppiamenti immondi, sogno massimo e continuo, si sarebbe detto, del Marxismo in azione.' (71)

According to Milanese, the Reds constantly indulge in orgies; they rape, impregnate and reduce to camp whores the aristocratic women who fall into their hands, for this is the horror story which is most likely to provoke the fear, hatred - and fantasy ? - of the Fascist and indeed of any Honourable Italian and family man towards the bestial Reds.

Thus the battle against Milanese's Marxism becomes synonymous with the battle against a rampant, indecent sexuality which perpetrates abuses on women, especially the womenfolk of its defeated enemies. Nonetheless the Fascist Milanese is far from being a self-appointed protector of women. He is actually - as might well be expected of the butch archetype - a confirmed misogynist. It emerges quite clearly from 'La sera di Santa Barbara' and to a lesser degree from 'Eva marina' that women, by reason of their sex, abuse the butch seafarer almost as much as the Marxists abuse women. Milanese's women are usually fickle, hard-hearted, promiscuous creatures who, if permitted, will sap the energies of the butch man. The butch seafarer, unless afflicted by passion, considers women - with the rare exception of the virgin of good family - quite simply as objects from which to derive a merely sensual gratification. (Whether or not he suffers from a castration complex, the butch man would certainly seem to be 'psychosexually' disturbed.) There is little or no place in the life of the butch man for either wife or mother.

In contrast to Milanese and other pro-Fascist writers, Celletti

offers a total vindication of woman in her dual role of wife and mother. In 'Tre tempi' Celletti traces the course of modern Italian history and the prevalence and achievements of Fascism (depicted as the eventual triumphant realization of an enduring and imperturbable faith in a national identity) through the lives of three women. Celletti argues, quite simply, that the unfailing support of the wife considerably facilitates a man's success, inasmuch as woman provides the stable foundation for the development of her man's ambition. Teresa, the peasant woman of the first generation, represents the ideal of wifely duty. Teresa's constant self-effacement is termed resignation by Celletti who lectures the reader thus:

'non è forse dovere d'ogni donna obbedire e rassegnarsi? A ognuno il suo lavoro, a lei quello di non imbarazzare mai il suo uomo, di vivere senza pesare su di lui né per un soldo, né con un parere inopportuno.' (72)

Teresa's resignation means that Simone is free to leave her and their young children in Italy, for a period of years, with barely enough to eat, while he starts to amass a fortune. Simone's newly acquired prosperity enables his daughter, Marta, to receive a good education and - essentially in consequence of this education - she marries a doctor, whose career she helps further, both by providing a stable home environment and by assisting him in his research. Simonetta, Marta's daughter and the middle-class woman of the third generation, loyally follows her husband, the newly appointed Fascist Federal Secretary, to Abyssinia 'verso un destino di dovere, di lavoro e di nostalgia.' (73). The basic premise of 'Tre tempi' is that woman constitutes the foundation of the nuclear family, and indeed the stable foundation of Fascism also. Or, since Celletti shows herself to be conversant with 'racial differences', it would perhaps be more correct to say that the race of women like

Teresa and her family, who subordinate themselves spontaneously and whole-heartedly to their men, in the firm conviction that they must not hinder but second their men in their courageous and often formidable undertakings, are responsible in no small measure for the great achievements of Fascism. The self-effacement of Celletti's women renders them true and full partners of their husbands' lives and confers upon them a certain 'equality', inasmuch as their contemporary male chauvinist society conceives of, or permits of the equality of women.

Celletti's portrayal of women as 'equal partners' in marriage - that is to say who, unlike the pious Barberina in 'La sosta sul ponte', share the burden of their husbands' responsibilities, and whose merits are, as it were requited by their husbands' monogamy (74) - is somewhat unconventional, in terms of the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel. But then Celletti's Fascism is somewhat divergent from the reactionary Fascism depicted in various guises in the works of Gotta, Saponi and Milanese; for Celletti refutes the concept of society being static.

In an article entitled 'Perché Charlot non potrebbe essere cittadino italiano' Domenico Lombrossa analyses the peculiar nature of Fascist society (in 1936, it should be noted) and its elimination of the condition of the vinto thus:

'In Italia lo Stato, che è umano per definizione e per natura, tende a diminuire le distanze fra le possibilità massime e quelle minime della vita; da noi il povero ha una dignità e il mezzo per elevarsi, il paria e le zone incontrollate della vita sociale non esistono.' (75)

(Lombrossa's concept of Fascism is obviously diametrically opposed to Mussolini's own earlier remarks about the inherence and inevitability of inequality and this serves to demonstrate both the heterogeneity of Fascist propaganda and the way in which it reflects the political volte-

face of the regime.) 'Tre tempi' however, appears almost as a fictional representation of Lombrassa's 'humanistic' Fascism. Celletti recounts the story of a poor peasant family, possessed of an innate and ineradicable dignity, who through hard work, thrift and an imperturbable determination, attain social prominence and financial security within a few decades. Celletti thereby presents a potent and necessary alternative to - or misconception of - the fascismo di sinistra that gained a certain popularity in Fascist Italy, especially in the mid to late 1930s, due to the circulation of Mussolini's early Socialist writings. The inference of 'Tre tempi' is that the opportunity Fascism affords for the individual to better himself offers far greater rewards than can mere equality, (by which is meant a kind of downward social levelling in accordance with a common denominator of mediocrity, rather than individual excellence), and thus that overall, the Fascist regime provides greater scope for the self-realization of the proletariat than does Socialism. Celletti proceeds to enumerate, with ostensible detachment, the shortcomings of Socialism: she says that those manual labourers who, in their appalling conditions, hope in Socialism, are actually motivated by hatred or resentment; (although it would be hard to say by what other sentiments they could reasonably be expected to be motivated). Further, Socialists like Teresa's relatively prosperous cousins in Torino, come to a 'bad end' solely as a result of embracing misguided political persuasions. Finally, Celletti seeks to invalidate the argument to which the poor are possibly the most emotionally susceptible and that is that equality would put an end to emigration and the consequent break-up of families. To this charge Simone, himself an emigrant, responds with Fascist rhetoric:

'-Non capisci che bisogna lavorare, che bisogna che la gente esca dal paese viaggi, veda, compri, conquisti, perché una nazione diventi una nazione?' (76)

Celletti differs from various other Fascist and pro-Fascist



writers in both her rejection of a hierarchical, immutable concept of society (inasmuch as she conceives of the possibility of upward social mobility) and in her advocacy of emigration. Her stance is manifestly influenced, not to say dictated, by the actual time when she wrote 'Tre tempi' - which is 1938 - and by the current policy of the regime. In 1925, Gotta adopted an antithetical attitude towards emigration in 'La bufera infernal' where he states:

'Chi non si muove è sempre il più esperto,  
tranquillo e, spesso, anche felice.' (77)

Evidently, the regime's volte-face regarding emigration finds a reflection in the conflicting positions of Gotta and Celletti.

Overall, 'Tre tempi' bears a clearer imprint of the year in which it was written, than do the majority of pro-Fascist and Fascist novels; with the obvious exception of 'Sotto il sole'. Hence, in accordance with the regime's incipient racial campaign, Celletti attempts to interject an occasional suitably Antisemitic note into her fiction; to her credit, however, she lacks virulence and conviction, and for want of better, falls back on a feeble reiteration (articulated by Teresa) of the old 'standard' that the Jews killed Christ and that it is therefore best to be wary in any dealings with them. The recent Nazi-Fascist rapprochement also finds a reflection in the partnership formed between the now successful Simone and a German of like peasant stock; but, perhaps predictably, Simone provides the 'brains' of the partnership while the German provides the 'brawn'. Conversely, Celletti depicts the French as the more or less self-appointed, hereditary enemies of Italy. From as early as the 1880s they despise the maltreated Italian emigrants, while during the Fascist imperialist war in Ethiopia, they supply the Blacks with arms. The acrimony with which Celletti regards the French (presumably occasioned by the colonial rivalry existing between Italy and

France) is not extended to the English. But when Britain starts economic sanctions, Simonetta's sister, a Fascist teacher at the Italian school in London, retaliates with emotional sanctions. Graziella breaks off her relationship with an Englishman because she realizes that under the political circumstances she cannot love him. Initially, Graziella had felt attracted towards George because he is so different from Italian men, but she apprehends that marriage to him would be a betrayal of her national, and racial, identity. Celletti recounts that:

'Ad un tratto vede chiaro,... le immagini dei suoi, che da tanto tempo la ossessionano, i suoi tutti uniti in una solidarietà di sangue conservata gelosamente attraverso le tentazioni e le miserie, ed ogni immagine ha il viso triste del rimprovero... ' (78)

Graziella's renunciation of George constitutes another edifying example of self-effacement, in this case in accordance with the exigencies of national and racial duty; it also possibly constitutes an emblematic rationalization of the advantageous aspects of Fascist Italy's isolation within Europe, and of autarky - that is to say the elimination of the hazard of racially and morally debasing contacts....

Graziella and Simonetta exemplify two different, but equally valid, ways in which women can contribute to and perpetuate the pre-eminence of the Fascist regime. Simonetta, the elder of the two, like her mother and grandmother before her, is essentially a home-maker. Nonetheless she has always been sympathetic towards the Fascist movement from its earliest days and she exemplifies the far from negligible contribution a woman can make to the abidingness of the Fascist regime without, as it were, leaving her home, by indoctrinating her young son and by willingly sacrificing her man to the greater glory of Fascism. Indeed the particular innovation of Fascist ideology, as it appears in 'Tre tempi' is its power to inspire a whole family - and by extension,

a whole nation - to a unanimous attitude of self-sacrifice. Thus, when war is declared on Abyssina, Simonetta overcomes her initial reservations and shares in her husband's mortification that he alone has not been called up. She reflects:

'Tutta l'Italia è uno slancio solo di offerta, di entusiasmo, di fede. Solo lei non dà nulla, proprio lei che aveva qualche cosa di infinitamente caro, bello, puro da donare....' (79)

While Graziella, the younger sister, travels the world in the uniform of a Fascist teacher and does the regime's work of spiritual imperialism, for she possesses:

'... i doni inesauribili della buona razza che non traligna e non decade, l'orgoglio incontenibile di avere simile sangue nelle vene' (81)

The qualities Graziella derives from her race - 'il vero sangue dei Vigliani' (81) - include a strong sense of national and personal pride, an innate dignity, a fearless independence and, of course, an unshakeable loyalty to the Fascist cause. Now Celletti seems anxious to portray the Vigliani as some kind of Fascist counterpart to the Nazi notion of the *Herrenvolk* and she accordingly argues that the vitality of Simone's peasant stock results from its concentration or containment over the centuries within the structure of a more or less feudal Italy and from its above mentioned racial purity. (Her inference is that effete-ness and a certain dishonour follow from racial defilement.)

Graziella's family have been pioneers in the fields of : colonization (Simone), medicine, (Marta's husband Alessandro) and Fascism (Simonetta's husband Guido and Graziella). Graziella, the spiritual imperialist, perhaps constitutes the supreme example of Celletti's vital race of pioneers and it is therefore only fitting that she should articulate the perfect fusion of national and Fascist identity which,

as Carocci corroborates, (82) Mussolini's imperialist war briefly effected. In the East End of London where she works, and where according to Celletti there is strong anti-Fascist feeling, Graziella proudly sports her uniform, and when asked if she is a Fascist, she replies aphoristically:

"Fascista?. Certamente, italiana!" (83)

This simple riposte reveals the quintessence of Celletti's rather topical Fascist stance in 'Tre tempi' which reaffirms Simone's comment; that it is only through colonization, that is through venturing beyond the confines of the mother-country that a nation becomes a nation. This stance can be summarized thus: the proud assertion of national identity has only been rendered possible by the dynamism of Fascism; national identity is, therefore, inextricable from Fascism. Celletti further suggests that the regime's conquest of Abyssinia was motivated not by considerations of economic advantage, but solely by the desire for the prestige conferred by imperial status. She declares:

'L'Italia in questo momento è l'unico paese al mondo dove il sogno di gloria possa farsi realtà e la conquista non sappia d'agguato e di Mercato.' (84)

(Despite its paradoxicality this observation is probably exact.)

Further, in accordance with the regime's tendency to sanction its policies retrospectively by adducing historical precedents, Celletti, through the figure of Simone, establishes the historical justification for the colonization of Abyssinia (which, in any case was not altogether lacking, in the context of European international conduct). Simone, who believes intuitively and imperturbably in colonization is obviously the spiritual precursor of Fascism - and presumably also the paradigm of the indomitability of the racially pure Italian. Thus, the reverses that Simone suffers more or less coincide with the reverses suffered by the

small Italian colony in Africa from the 1880s onwards. And when, towards the end of the century, the Italians are massacred and forced to surrender a sizeable portion of their colony and many Italians despair, Simone remains staunchly convinced that the colony and the ideal of colonization will endure. He holds the following optimistic conversation with his doubtful father:

'-Dalla colonia non ci ritireremo, finché c'è Crispi.

-E se Crispi cade?

-Le sue idee non possono cadere, dopo tanti sacrifici' (85)

Further, the narrator herself doubtless reiterates the regime's optimistic proclamation when she declares:

'Nessun paese resiste a chi lo viola col badile del terrazziere, gli allaccia le vene delle strade, immette in esse il sangue della civiltà' (86)

This myth of conquest by the shovel is, patently, a means of dissembling the brutality - 'civilized' or otherwise - with which the Fascists subdued their adversaries.

Thus the necessity of colonization is manifested through the fortunes of Simone, his family and their fellow nationalistic expatriates. In 'Tre tempi' Celletti rightly argues that previously Italians emigrated wherever cheap labour and hard workers were required, and that wherever they went their foreign overseers pronounced the word 'Italian' with scorn. Even Italy did not accord them their just recognition. Conversely, by bestowing an Empire upon these poor emigrants Mussolini ostensibly accorded them a certain recognition. And, although in terms of material advantage this recognition may have been exiguous, nonetheless some members of the least privileged sectors of society enjoyed - if nothing else - an unprecedented sense of identity and of importance within the

'national community'. Mussolini's adroit propaganda offered the underprivileged who aspired to emigrate to Abyssinia - as well as to Italian emigrants throughout the world - a mirror image of themselves as people with some social utility, rather than as mere slaves or pariahs. Small wonder, then, if - albeit momentarily - they supported the regime which gave them this sense of identity. Thus Mussolini exploited the underprivileged as much spiritually as he did materially. The regime made capital out of the feint of retroactively vindicating and conferring significance on the tribulations of the sector of the population most commonly regarded as 'Carne abituata a soffrire' (87).

In fact, however, the injustices perpetrated on Italian emigrants by the French, etc., and which the regime - somewhat disingenuously - claims to have redressed, are intended to confirm the validity of the regime. Apparently, the powers of endurance of the (racially superior) indomitably nationalistic peasant have ultimately been rewarded by Mussolini and the Empire. Celletti clearly implies that the Fascist regime is the just reward of nationalistic virtue, but also that the - alleged - metamorphosis of the peasant's social and economic conditions (accomplished by the regime and which Simone's success emblemizes) constitutes the materialization of a utopia with which no Socialist utopia could compare. Thus, at the time of the March on Rome, Teresa remembers the ordeals of exile and reflects:

' sa com'erano dure le vie del mondo agli  
espatriati, come amaro il pane altrui, come la  
riconoscenza della patria era sterile.' (88)

(Celletti's inference is axiomatic.) Further (since the novel describes the fate of Italians in France and her colonies in the main) during the many difficult and thankless years of exile, the adoption of French citizenship, or at least a concerted effort to assimilate, would have

afforded Simone and the other emigrants an easier life, and possibly exempted them from considerable prejudice. Nonetheless, on the whole, they tended not to reject the matrix of their Italian identity. Marta, Teresa's daughter, visualizes these emigrants thus:

'Vedeva tutta quella carne italiana spargersi per il mondo come certe erbe che strisciano lontano dalla radice, ma da quella traggono sempre nutrimento, anche se le foglie non lo sanno, anche se la sommità polverosa non lo sa, anche se dallo stelo sono caduti tutti i fiori.' (89)

Many of these emigrant Italians were recalled to their roots by the First World War; from Africa and France where they have been living they offer their services to Italy. But the revaluation of national identity which begins with the First World War is only completed by the Fascist colonization of Abyssinia, which alone can offer Italy an international status equal to that of the other victorious European nations, all of which possess colonies. The acquisition of a colony also means that underprivileged Italians are no longer a prey to the exploitation of other European nations (particularly the French) who hitherto regarded them as a source of cheap, almost slave, labour. (Naturally no mention is made of the fact that the Fascist regime regarded the underprivileged in much the same way as the French allegedly did, and actually reduced their wages, as Vittorini reveals in 'Erica e i suoi fratelli'.) Rather, in 'Tre tempi' the regime's achievement is equated with Simone's conquest of wealth and prominence.

In Saporì's 'Sotto il sole' (published in 1935) the achievements of the Fascist regime are depicted quite differently in accordance with Fascism's contemporary policies and propaganda and with the more traditional outlook of the novelist. However, one feature common to both 'Sotto il sole' and Celletti's 'Tre tempi' is the attempt to dissimilate or 'whitewash' the fact that, from its inception, Fascism

is rooted in violence. Saporì's description of the epoch marked by the March on Rome epitomizes this endeavour. He states:

'Cominciava un'era nuova, l'era della rivoluzione fascista, non di gesta sanguinarie, ma di vaste riforme sociali e nazionali.' (90)

Similarly, Saporì redirects the physically aggressive attitude of the young Fascists who marched on Rome with daggers drawn and revolvers to the ready, towards a lust for social reform. While the violence perpetrated by the Fascist regime is 'sublimated' into Saporì's verbally violent portrayal of the 'dynamic' way in which the swamps of the Littorio region are cleared of their century-old vegetation. Saporì says:

'I tronchi delle roveri colpite e riverse somigliano a pachidermi nel tumulto dell'agonia... La foresta si dirada e si scopre. Tra un balenio d'accette, gli alberi s'inclinano e cadono con tonfi laceranti... Le bombe esplose hanno lasciato un sovvertimento da guerra guerreggiata.' (91)

Saporì states that the reclamation of the Littorio region signifies the continuation of the March on Rome and elsewhere he defines the miraculous transformation effected by the regime in less than a decade as proof of the Permanent Revolution. He says:

'Nove anni. E ogni cosa era trasformata: gli uomini, le città, le campagne. Dal Brennero a Marsala, il concetto della rivoluzione s'era propagata "come un modo perenne di conquista". Perfino le leggi erano mutate, nello spirito e nella forma. Tutte le classi sociali si adeguavano nell'incandescente crogiuolo dello Stato.' (92)

But, despite what must be assumed to be a ritual genuflection to the myth of the social revolution accomplished by the regime, Saporì's novel affords no evidence of the break-down of the class structure: Stacchini, the protagonist of the first half of 'Sotto il sole' (the second half attempts a choral celebration of the regime's achievements)



enacts the enlightened middle-class reformer throughout while the peasants are depicted as being suitably submissive and immensely grateful for their - undeniably improved - material conditions. The paternalistic pose which the regime both adopted and fostered is as manifest in the conduct of Stacchini as it is in that of Mussolini and demonstrable on the level of regional and local administration no less than at the level of national and international policy, as is attested by Celletti's 'Tre tempi'. In 'Sotto il sole' the new immigrants to the Littorio region (for the region is populated largely by means of officially supervised immigration) enthuse over the paternalistic treatment they receive at the hands of the regional and local Fascist administrators:

'Il trattamento era magnifico: tutti i giorni il fattore s'interessava a loro. Così si poteva viver senza pensiero, perché farina gialla e bianca non ne mancava mai. Erano visitati spesso dai dirigenti, che s'interessavano del benessere delle loro famiglie.' (93)

With the most basic necessity of their staple food provided for, these new immigrants can, as Saponi says, live without worrying and without thinking. In fact, the degree of - more or less authoritarian - paternalistic intervention in which the regime indulged would largely eliminate the need for thought. But, there is no reason to suppose that thoughtlessness was the exclusive prerogative of the new immigrants who settled in the drained Pontine marshes. Rather, as is evinced by both a number of Fascist and pro-Fascist novels - and also several dissident novels - the regime, in one way or another, tried to encourage every sector of society not to think for itself, that is to say not to exercise its independent critical faculties; and to a certain extent, the regime succeeded. Doubtless, the thoughtlessness the regime fostered by its paternalistic pose, by its constant propaganda barrage and by various more patently repressive techniques, must have contributed in no small

way to the regime's maintenance of absolute power for a period of nearly twenty years. However, in 'Sotto il sole' and possibly within Fascist Italy it was found preferable to transform the somewhat negative quality of thoughtlessness (that is to say passivity or dependence) into the positive quality of obedience. (Sapori's officially approved celebration of the virtues of either thoughtlessness or unquestioning obedience is, per se, indicative of the regime's awareness of the willingness of different social classes to abdicate their independence, albeit for divergent reasons.) The bourgeois perhaps abdicated his hypothetical independence on account of the protection the regime accorded to his material interests but also in consequence of the process of enervation he was undergoing (of which more will be said) and which was possibly largely, but nonetheless not entirely, attributable to the regime. While underprivileged peasants would, of course, be susceptible to the Fascist propaganda aimed at deluding them about the status within the national community that obedience would afford them. (In any case they had no option except to conform; but whereas previously obedience signified servitude, humiliation and even impotence, the Fascist subversion of language seemingly succeeded in conferring upon obedience the positive qualities of loyalty, virility and glory - although, in this instance, not Heroism.) Thus, with his customary ardour for all things Fascist Sapori rhetorizes:

'Non è la gloria di tutti l'obbedire ad uno solo?  
Comandi e disposizioni muovono da Roma. Ma la volontà,  
la disciplina, l'obbedienza sono nel cuore di tutti.'  
(94)

Further, through another typically Fascist subversion of language, Sapori manages to relate the notion of the exercise of responsibility to unquestioning obedience. He says:

'... sanno che l'obbedienza è la parola d'ordine,

la norma di vita... L'abituarsi ai comandi emanati per radio dà ai ragazzi l'idea della prontezza e della responsabilità.' (95)

(From this premise it would only be a small step to argue that obedience is the most valid form of self-determination and of independence.)

Unquestioning obedience was perhaps the goal of the regime - since it would offer the regime the largest potentiality for self-perpetuation - and possibly the most efficacious way to accomplish this goal was to base the notion of Fascist society on the premise of collectivity. The regime, in other words, sought to eliminate individuality. Starting from the more or less predictable premise that the regime constitutes an entirely new (and by implication glorious) departure in terms of Italian national life, Sapori describes the changes effected by a deliberate policy of collectivity, that is to say ultra-conformation in the Italian school-room. He declares :

'Tutto era diverso. Un altro concetto dello studio; un altro senso dello svago. I ragazzi avevano un solo libro, uguale per tutti.' (96)

Thus far, then, according to Sapori, Fascism can be identified by the obedience and the ultra-conformist response it provokes particularly in the young. But, it emerges from 'Sotto il sole' that Mussolini's visits to the Littorio region provoke a powerful, if involuntary, collective response amongst peasants of all ages, which serves to reaffirm their loyalty towards him and to consolidate his popularity. Quite how Mussolini can inspire such an involuntary, almost instinctive response, and how, in turn, such a subliminal response can inspire such imperturbable loyalty and devotion is left unexplained by Sapori. He simply describes Primo Farneti's experience on seeing Mussolini for the first time thus:

'Fu così che vide il Duce e gli venne voglia di gridare "Viva la Romagna", e lo sentì parlare "come un cannone"; e al cannone rispose la concorde mitraglia degli applausi, delle ovazioni. Ma lui non poté unirsi agli altri in quell'omaggio. Si sentiva come paralizzato dai pensieri, dai ricordi, dalle indefinite aspirazioni che quella testa di condottiero, quelle parole d'apostolo destavano dentro di lui. Allorché ebbe finito, il mare immobile degli ascoltatori si agitò come la superficie del mare all'irrompere del libeccio. Nessuno capiva più niente tra quel gridio, quello sventolio, quell'innalzarsi innumerevole delle mani. Allora s'accorse d'aver levato anche lui la sua, come per un giuramento.' (97)

Sapori's conclusion is simple; for Farreti:

'Fu una memorabile giornata, quella.' (98)

Farreti cannot recall the speech he has heard, nor even articulate the sentiment it has aroused in him, but rather than detracting from the momentousness of the experience he has undergone, this temporary obfuscation of Farreti's reason signifies that he has participated in some kind of mystical transcendental and ipso facto positive experience.

Now Farreti, like many of the other internal immigrants who settle in the Littorio region, is an ex-serviceman, or as Sapori terms him - with a possibly significant use of the present participle - a 'combattente'. Sapori defines the particular place accorded to the ex-servicemen of the First World War in the regime's hierarchy and mythology thus:

'Il governo delle Camicie Nere aveva ricondotto in onore due aristocrazie: i mutilati e i combattenti. Quelli avevano costruito una propria sede in Roma, accanto a Castel Sant'Angelo. Questi, dalla data dell'armistizio in poi, s'erano dedicati ad imprese di trasformazione agricolo-fondaria nel Trentino, nel Veneto, in Toscana, nel Lazio, nella Puglia, in Sicilia e altrove. All'Opera dei Combattenti spettava dunque il privilegio di continuar tali imprese nella regione pontina.' (99)

(The memorable resolution of the Fucino question outlined in Silone's

'Fontamara' suggests that notwithstanding the capital it made out of ex-servicemen, the regime had ceased to accord them preferential treatment, as early as 1930 - although the possibility of another volte-face regarding the treatment of ex-servicemen should not be excluded.) At any rate, the 'aristocracy' of these two groups is of only nominal importance or of exclusively moral value; it is not sufficient to modify the regime's social hierarchy in any fundamental way. Even according to Saponi, the ex-serviceman's real rewards are exiguous; he is merely assured the right to work and a more privileged position in society than that of the peasant. Farneti and his fellow 'combattenti' have putatively 'earned' themselves a tranquil future; Saponi says:

'A quei ricordi sanguinosi si sovrapponeva la  
realtà conseguita, la tranquillità del domani...'  
(100)

(As in 'Tre tempi' also, the implication is that the paternalistic Fascist regime only rewards the most deserving of its subjects; privilege has to be earned by an engagement consonant with the best interests of the regime.) In this way Fascist propaganda establishes a linear continuation between the past bloody battles of the First World War, and the present and projected future tranquillity of Italy, which Saponi suggests is assured by the energetic conquest of reclaimable land. As previously stated, Fascist and pro-Fascist writers almost without exception regard the Fascist regime as the logical emotional - and often inevitable - consequence of the First World War, the necessary vindication of a victorious but unjustly treated nation. Saponi portrays the Fascist seizure of power in precisely this way when he states:

'A un popolo vittorioso in guerra era stato  
inflitto l'avvilimento dei vinti. Ora quel popolo,  
come un gran fiume fecondo, prorompeva spumeggiando  
fra crepitio di moschetti e canti di giovinezza.'  
(101).

But whereas Celletti (like certain other pro-Fascist and Fascist writers) retraces the precedents of the Fascist colonialist policy to Crispi, Saponi likens the magnitude of the Fascist regime's achievements to the magnitude of the First Roman Empire and the grandeur of Mussolini to that of the giants of Italian history. Thus the draining of the Pontine marshes is related to the consummation of the Unification of Italy. Previously, according to Saponi, malaria prevented the effectuation of both these endeavours. Saponi says:

'Dopo la rovina dell'Impero, la malaria aveva perfino allontanato alcuni invasori decisi a conquistare Roma. I tentativi di bonifica fallivano, debellati dalla febbre, tutelatrice d'un diritto implacabile e inviolabile.' (102)

'La malaria pesava come una fatalità sulla sorte di Roma medioevale. Essa stroncava nell'ora decisiva della loro azione i tre uomini che personificando la speranza d'un popolo, avrebbero potuto costituire fin da allora la nostra unità nazionale. Innocenza III, il più potente pontefice della cristianità; Brancaleone degli Andalusi, governatore di Roma, che prometteva la supremazia del Comune sui nobili e sul papato; Arrigo VII di Lussemburgo, che teneva nel cuore le speranze ghibelline d'un nuovo impero romano.' (103)

Only Mussolini in his role of 'L'Uomo della Provvidenza' is endowed with the superhuman qualities crucial to the success of both endeavours; for Saponi implies that any unification of Italy which does not reclaim the Pontine marshes is incomplete. He says that Stacchini:

'subiva di continuo l'impressione che la terra tra l'Astura e il Circeo fosse una contrada d'Africa o d'America, dimenticata alle porte di Roma.' (104)

In effect, Mussolini's regime constitutes a second Roman Empire (whose achievements, the reader might conjecture, surpass those of the First). Since they are derived from such an august precedent and presumably related to the great prestige leap forward accomplished by the regime,

activities which might seem regressive according to modern criteria, are termed progressive. Hence when female immigrants to the region are obliged to bake their own bread when previously they bought it, Sapori triumphantly, and somewhat crassly, asks:

'Non è l'Italia antica madre di leggi e di biade?'  
(105)

One consequence of this notion that the Fascist regime constitutes a Second Roman Empire seems to be that the epic achievements of Fascism deserve an appropriate literary celebration. Certainly Sapori, like various other pro-Fascist and Fascist writers, strives - unsuccessfully it must be said - to endow his novels with an epic dimension. To this end, he attempts to depict the life of the inhabitants of an entire region and to incorporate not only the achievements but also the propaganda of Fascism into 'Sotto il sole'. (Admittedly, for the ardent Fascist the achievements and the propaganda of the regime would be indistinguishable.) But Sapori's literary ambitiousness results in a fragmented, prosy narrative which recounts the laudable conduct of various inanimate (Fascist) stereotypes whose heroic leader (Farneti's momentous experience would almost induce us to call him their puppet-master) is, of course, Mussolini: the 'capo del governo' who can harvest the wheat as well as any peasant, and in addition to possessing the physical fitness and skills of a peasant, is paternalistic, benevolent and omniscient. In 'Sotto il sole' Mussolini declares:

'Voglio dire a voi tutti operai venuti da ogni parte d'Italia, coloni di ogni provincia che qui avete incominciato a vivere la nuova vostra vita, che vi seguo quotidianamente. Io sono informato e desidero di essere informato di tutto quanto vi interessa, di tutto quanto può interessare....' (106)

Now in Littoria, Mussolini harvests twenty-six quintali of wheat in a morning, and the irrelevance of his talents in this respect, and more, the

Ludicrousness of such a display should be sufficiently demonstrated by the fact that he does not spend that afternoon and the next day, etc. harvesting wheat. But these displays in which Mussolini indulged were in fact far from being otiose in the eyes of the peasants whom he thereby manipulated. For through such cheap spectacles as these, Mussolini, the aristocratic proletarian, was able to convince the peasants of a whole region of his esteem for them - and what Head of State had ever previously manifested such esteem for his lowliest subjects? Such 'crumbs' as Mussolini's spurious esteem, then, proved an effective - and cheap - way of winning the support of the underprivileged. Thus, no less than in the newspapers and allegedly non-fictional organs of information, Mussolini is depicted in 'Sotto il sole' as the man of every individual's (and every social class's) destiny. A latter-day Caesar (the word dictator, however, is carefully avoided in the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel, since Fascist society is amongst other things, the only true democracy) it would be no exaggeration to say that he is a Superman, since his was the regime of the superlative; primarily in a verbal sense. Saponi describes the Mostra della Rivoluzione as a monument to Mussolini's dynamism, his remarkable leadership, his Heroism, Courage and Determination, etc. Saponi explains:

'Il motivo dominante è dato da un uomo che si scatena, con la sua costanza, con la sua inflessibilità, col suo ardore, contro una demagogia traviata e imbelle. I suoi detti, i suoi scritti somigliano ai tuoni che annunziano la tempesta imminente, travolgono le masse degli armati e dei disarmati, degli audaci e dei codardi.

Dietro a lui, le Camicie Nere avanzano con la serrata compattezza d'un esercito, sotto la bufera,... Con religiosa ostinazione la marcia cruenta sfida il sacrificio e conquista la vittoria.' (107)

Saponi accords the king, Vittorio Emanuele III a correct but only moderately enthusiastic mention; Vittorio Emanuele III is also a



paternalistic figure and a member of the oldest European dynasty still extant (this observation would appear to be equivocal) but he lacks the dynamism that distinguishes Mussolini.

Throughout Italy, Mussolini's leadership is complemented by the unquestioning obedience, energy and enthusiasm of his subjects. The apparently miraculous transformation of Italy which the Fascist regime has so swiftly effected can be explained to a large extent by the profound sense of duty, loyalty and indeed energy with which it inspires its subjects. Sapori portrays the sentiment of the urgency of the common mission and the self-sacrificing response the Fascist cause arouses in its subjects through the paradigmatic Stacchini who, although more than sixty years old, labours night and day for the greater good of the Littorio region, and by extension, of Italy. Sapori states:

'Più che la forza fisica, poteva in lui la coscienza morale: una dura disciplina s'imponneva a quanti s'erano votati a risolvere i problemi dell'agro pontino.

Egli rifletteva che l'Italia unita non conta neppure un secolo di vita. Occorre sanare, rinnovare, ridestare gli animi dal sonno. La dedizione di tutti, qualsiasi età abbiano, dagli adolescenti agli anziani, dev'essere una sintesi attiva del dovere e della fede. "Abbiamo perduto dei secoli di storia, diceva, li riguadagneremo."  
(108)

(Neither Sapori nor Stacchini explain how it is possible to regain centuries of lost history.)

In conclusion, Sapori's panegyric of Fascism might be summarized thus: Fascism is the irresistible innovatory force which effectuates Stacchini's lifelong dream of reclaiming the Pontine marshes and improving the living conditions of the underprivileged. The Fascist regime provides the underprivileged with improved medical care, and their children with a better education and even holiday camps. It provides the peasant with work and enough to eat, thereby conferring upon him an unprecedented contentment. The regime also accomplishes

technological advances so that Fascism can deservedly be equated with social progress; hospitals are built, and electricity is installed in the new homes of the peasants who come to settle in the reclaimed Pontine marshes. Once the shame of a nation, the Littorio region becomes the pride of Italy and indeed perhaps of the whole world, Saponi declares. (Mussolini, in other words, makes Fascist Italy an advanced industrial Western nation comparable or even superior to the other European states; but this overstatement of the international significance of the Littorio region reveals the regime's tendency to seek the approval of other nations.) The regime, moreover, institutes the travelling theatre which enriches the peasant's life by offering him a certain culture. Overall, Saponi is quite painstaking in his depiction of Fascist triumphs. The Patti Lateranensi are touched upon and Saponi even recounts a Fascist *extravaganza*: when the King is due to appear in San Felice, aeroplanes fly overhead, and write 'REX e DUX' in the sky. Finally, in order to complete the portrayal of Fascism, Saponi incorporates into the novel the notion of Heroic death. Curzio, Stacchini's taciturn son says to his father one day in 1931:

"Mi piacerebbe di combattere e di morire in combattimento.... Perché la vita ci vien data e noi non possiamo conquistare che la morte" (109)

The 'conquest' of death while fighting for one's Mother-country is, of course, the supreme Heroic ideal. Curzio, like Angustina in 'Il deserto dei tartari' dies on a routine manoeuvre and the divergent treatment of death in the two novels is in itself sufficient to indicate the superficiality, irresponsibility and triviality that characterize the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel, the obscenity of Fascist propaganda. In conclusion, the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel portray a society based on curiously negative values. The pro-Fascist and Fascist novel, like

Fascistized bourgeois society is subject to certain controls, but these would appear to be as much internal as external. These controls structure society and reduce every situation to a stereotype so that middle-class man is liberated of the need for self-determination, and of his freedom. Indeed, the constant reference to the criteria of a social morality suggests that the bourgeois would opt for any alternative to the threat of potential self-determination. Naturally, an authoritarian government reinforces its subjects' social - and personal - limitations. It emerges from several pro-Fascist and Fascist novels that the limitation is more necessary and important to the bourgeois than the principle in defence of which it has allegedly been adopted; for example, it is not the need for monogamy in married men, or indeed the sanctity of the marital bond which is stressed, but the injunction not to destroy the unit of the nuclear family, through a passionate adulterous relationship. The importance of the nuclear family as the stable foundation of Fascist society is self-evident. In order that women should not neglect their essential roles as mothers they are given no part to play in society, beyond that of wife, mother or mistress; and of course each of these roles is coloured by certain prejudices which conspire to make the role of 'mother' the most praiseworthy.

Finally, I have used the word 'society' loosely throughout this chapter; there is, in fact, little evidence of social awareness, or social cohesion, rather the bourgeois Fascist exists as an isolated conformist. It is his conformity which makes it possible to equate him with other men of the same class or type; taken together, they form a group whose exigencies of self-interest more or less coincide. Beyond this, the novel does not suggest that they have any intimate personal communication. The interrelationships of the working-class outside their immediate family receive very little mention.

Now the prejudices and mores that find expression in these Fascist and pro-Fascist novels may fail to coincide with those of the latter-day reader and thus appear invalid, not to say reprehensible. Nonetheless it is perhaps worth attempting to empathize with the middle classes' assessment of their circumstances, since we might reasonably assume that these circumstances underlie and, to a degree, explain the fictional depiction of the bourgeoisie. Another curious paradox which emerges from the pro-Fascist novel particularly (that is to say the novel which tends to celebrate the social position, personal virtues or whatever of the middle classes) is that the sincerity with which the novelist delineates his personal and class prejudices and mores, seems directly proportional to the bad faith underlying the novel's first premises; most notably the kind of credulous paraphrase of Pangloss's assertion that everything is for the best; since Fascist Italy is the best of all possible worlds. As this is the case, the characterization of the bourgeois and petty bourgeois in the pro-Fascist novel can - and does - reveal his failings without danger of rendering him despicable. Rather his failings should serve to make him a creature worthy of the reader's compassion.

Then, a literal reading of the Fascist novel would suggest that Mussolini had conferred unprecedented harmony and order on Italy, thereby transforming it into little less than a terrestrial paradise, and a literal reading of the pro-Fascist novel would persuade of the security and stability of a traditional bourgeois way of life. Whereas in point of fact, both images of Fascist Italy are largely myths, illusions whose unreality is revealed in the dissident and anti-Fascist novel. Whether and to what extent the readers of the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel were able to convince themselves and be convinced of the myth of serenity extolled therein, and whether, indeed, after years of Fascist rule, readers

implicitly believed that this serenity found a perfect reflection in their own lives (or conversely, that 'art' mirrored their own reality) are problems which, retrospectively examined, are not liable to any easy solution. It is possible, certainly, to distinguish various levels of adhesion to Fascism characteristic of the different strata within the middle classes (although the researcher acknowledges the inevitable fallibility of any such generalization). Thus, we might assert that the petty bourgeoisie were probably, overall, the most ardent and committed supporters of Fascism, by reason of the enhanced social and national status the regime afforded them (in such institutions as the militia) and that the upper middle classes were the group most likely to be purely fair-weather Fascists (in consequence of their social and financial pre-eminence, which was largely independent of the regime) while the middle middle classes might be more or less sincerely pro-Fascist in conformity with their more or less liberal or conservative education and milieu. But, if we can attempt to assess the degree of pro-Fascist feeling of the upper, middle, and lower middle classes, we can only conjecture to what extent even the most uncritical bourgeois Fascists believed that the regime had successfully and definitively resolved the 'class problem' in such a way as to confer upon them total social security. (Obviously, Mussolini's alleged championship of the peasantry and working-classes was indicative of his politic desire to appear to be all things to all Italians, but his 'carrot and stick' treatment of the lower classes could also have been - like the preoccupation with the Red menace - a clever stratagem to ensure that he would not become dispensable to the bourgeoisie.) Nonetheless, even if for a short time the bourgeoisie did enjoy a sense of blissful security, to this reader at least, it seems more probable that the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel developed out of, and as a reaction against, far from negligible feelings of insecurity, vulnerability and a

subtle dissatisfaction. This last derives from an unvoiced and unrecognised sentiment of personal futility, which the regime insidiously fostered, not least through the novel and through the reduction of man's sphere of autonomy to little more, crudely speaking, than his marital and extra-marital affairs. The previous decade saw the positions of the bourgeoisie threatened, as it were, from all sides; by, amongst other things, artistic trends like the cult of the Superuomo and the Futurist movement, the unprecedented national and international upheaval of the First World War, and above all, the alleged imminence of a 'Bolshevik Revolution'. Evidently, these threatening forces were of various degrees of gravity, and doubtless all were considerably overrated by an anxious, defensive bourgeoisie. We can only speculate whether the bewilderment provoked by the erosion of the seeming stability of a privileged way of life was altogether dissipated at least in the regime's early days by the seizure of power by Sarfatti's 'aristocratic proletarian', and whether the acceptance accorded Mussolini by the silent majority of the middle classes (whose custom-made fiction the pro-Fascist novel is) resulted simply from the need for some kind of certainty, the exorcism of insecurity. Especially when, as in the case of the family, the values of Italians (in this instance not exclusively the middle classes) and Fascism could for different reasons, be made to coincide; superficially at any rate.

There is also another cause for the insecurity of the bourgeoisie which, for obvious reasons, finds no overt expression in the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel; and that is that the 'traditional' status the bourgeoisie arrogates to itself has a somewhat precarious foundation. A brief but scathing attack on the decadence - or redundancy - of the aristocracy in Gotta's 'La bufera infernal' unintentionally alludes to the recency of the bourgeoisie's economic and consequently social, even

political, ascendancy; inasmuch as the political inertia of the majority was thoroughly compatible with the emergence and consolidation of power of a ruler who, in practice, championed their best economic interests. Nonetheless, Gotta's provincial middle classes are longer established than Gadda's abhorred 'pescecane' class, who are fairly rapidly ousting the former. Little mention is made in the pro-Fascist novel of the fact that a new bourgeoisie composed of industrial and speculative profiteers has rapidly come into being; although the vulgar materialism of the occasional peripheral figure of the parvenu (as in Gotta's 'Portofino') or venal motivation (as is the case of the Milanese family in Vergani's 'Levar del sole') is generally condemned by the novelist. Condemned, that is, inasmuch as the bourgeois novelist was able to pass unfavourable judgement on the parvenu who, in certain instances, might even have been his fellow (for the pot-boiler, essentially the literary genre under discussion, can be equated with literary profiteering). Confrontation with the profiteer of the anti-Fascist novel, most notably with the Impresario in 'Fontamara', reveals the impossibility of the pro-Fascist novelist, immured within class prejudice, accurately assessing the implications of the social phenomena he witnesses. For the Fascist novelist such problems did not, on the whole, arise. Prosperity was the mark of success, and success the reward of individual enterprise; individual enterprise being the crowning Fascist argument against Socialism, as Celletti demonstrates in 'Tre tempi'.

Thus, although it would be easy enough to attempt retrospectively to adduce the political convictions of the middle classes from the fiction they consumed and in consequence of the above, to do so would possibly be an erroneous undertaking. The evidence of the pro-Fascist novel suggests that the political position of the bourgeoisie was predominantly one of default: they tended to act, or more commonly failed to act, in

a particular way because they were conditioned (by their economic interests and by forces already discussed) to evade and ignore rather than confront issues regarding the welfare of the collectivity. Hence, as is the case of Gotta or Campanile, under a Fascist regime the political inertia of the middle classes, no less than their personal values, are advantageous to Fascism and inevitably interpretable as pro-Fascist. Even where the middle classes are depicted in the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel as ardent Fascists, a curious passivity tends to underlie their enthusiasm for the regime of 'L'Uomo della Provvidenza'. Stacchini in 'Sotto il sole' epitomizes the inability of the bourgeois to accept the need for, much less indulge in democratic, parliamentary political wrangling. Rather, the March on Rome effects an auspicious - or providential - metamorphosis of the exemplary Stacchini's spirits, and overnight, as it were, renders his hitherto impossible dreams of reform, eminently realizable. Saporì says:

'Tornando da Roma... lo Stacchini aveva mutato volto. L'espressione di scontentezza, frequente in lui, sembrava scomparsa per fare posto alla speranza. Alle imprese da lui vagheggiate s'erano opposte, negli anni scorsi, difficoltà meschine eppure invincibili. Ebbe, a un tratto confidenza nell'avvenire.

Aveva combattuto senza appoggi, in mezzo a contrasti d'ogni sorta; adesso spuntava un'alba nuova, non solo per l'Italia, ma anche per la desolata palude. Non osava far parte adaltri di tali pensieri, ma una certezza di fede metteva in fuga dentro di lui i dubbi che fino allora non aveva potuto vincere e dissipare.'

(110)

(It is perhaps worth noting that Stacchini can be more easily dissuaded from his good intentions than could be the Superuomo proper, or the virile Fascist party member, or *Milanese's* butch seafarers, from their more equivocal ones.) Stacchini's adherence to Fascism, then, springs from his disillusionment with the ministers of democratic government and from a sense (doubtless partly justified) of the futility of his personal efforts



to effect reform. Thus, rather than deriving from a political conviction, these feelings of disenchantment can be transformed, or manipulated, by Fascism into an ostensibly political conviction. Certainly Stacchini's previous feelings of hopelessness would not have been entirely ungrounded in reality; although the frustrated philanthropy underlying and exacerbating his disenchantment were probably fairly unrepresentative in terms of his class.

Now various shortcomings characteristic of the pro-Fascist governance of Italy must have been at least partially apparent to even those sections of the middle classes who were less philanthropically motivated than Stacchini and Claudio Vela in 'La bufera infernal' inasmuch as some of these shortcomings touched on their own interests and were liable to be publicly denounced, given the relative freedom of speech enjoyed prior to Mussolini's seizure of power. Conversely, the bourgeoisie were, naturally enough, in the forefront of those groups subjected to hostile criticism by a different spectrum of political opinion, and there is adequate justification (both in the history of the years following the First World War and in the pro-Fascist novel) to suggest that they reacted hypersensitively to the criticisms levelled against them, as well as overrating the gravity of the threats to their well-being. In the literary sphere, then, Claudio Vela is, in some respects, like Stacchini an exemplary figure to be held up in vindication of the conduct of the bourgeoisie to their erstwhile detractors (whom the Fascist regime effectively silenced) but also, to themselves: for the preoccupation with an attractive 'mirror image' should not be underestimated. In fact, one of the predominant themes of the pro-Fascist, and to a lesser degree the Fascist, novel is the vindication of, not identity, rather its antithesis; the bourgeois image of the bourgeois, the affirmation of the worth of his mores and conduct. Often the triviality

of both the values propounded and the limitations of the novelists' own talents make for somewhat trite reading, although occasionally, as is the case of Cicognani's 'Villa Beatrice' it is necessary to recognize the writer's considerable gifts for his chosen genre. It is not necessary to share the aspirations of Jasper Milvain in 'New Grub Street' to acknowledge the exactitude of his remarks regarding vulgarity; Jasper says:

"If only I had the skill, I would produce novels out-trashing the trashiest that ever sold fifty thousand copies. But it needs skill, mind you; and to deny it is a gross error of the literary pedants. To please the vulgar you must, one way or another, incarnate the genius of vulgarity."(111)

Now in the same way fair-mindedness (this writer does not lay claim to objectivity regarding the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel) requires that we acknowledge the 'genius of vulgarity' that occasionally irradiates the pot-boiler genre, so too does fair-mindedness require that we attempt to portray the logical motivation for the allegiance of the middle classes to Fascism. Especially since this allegiance is generally depicted in the anti-Fascist novel as morally indefensible; whereas it emerges from the Fascist and pro-Fascist novel that the grounds for this allegiance are, for its adherents, so axiomatic as to need no detailed articulation. The post-war anti-Fascist novel, as we shall see, perhaps errs in its general failure (although Pratolini's 'Cronache di poveri amanti' constitutes a notable exception) to recognize the legitimacy - from a bourgeois stance - of this pro-Fascist allegiance of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, the anti-Fascist novel habitually insists upon the perversion of the morality of the bourgeoisie; being, in consequence of a common and understandable reluctance to empathize, unable to discern that what has occurred is, in fact, the subversion, rather than the perversion of bourgeois morality. To some extent the workings of this process of subversion are illustrated in the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel. It

further emerges from the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel that the middle classes reveal a - quite natural - loathness to be seen to behave badly and accordingly have furnished themselves with a number of justifications for their conduct; from the static hierarchical order of society (and the fundamental desirability of this) to the irresistibility of passion. Less common in the novel, although present in Saffatti's 'Dux' and Milanese's 'La sera di Santa Barbara' is the exposition of the argument that the bourgeoisie have a legitimate right to defend themselves against the aggression of the 'Reds'. This type of argument, based on an elementary kind of reciprocity, is noteworthy inasmuch as it constitutes an adroit and successful vindication of self-seeking on the part of the regime and its subjects; although it is doubtless not the exclusive prerogative of the regime. Crudely stated this rhetorical reworking of an immature, not to say childish, interpretation of circumstance runs: 'If everyone else can have an Empire, why can't I?' (Celletti) or 'If the Bolsheviks try to destroy my privileges and the order in which I live, why shouldn't I destroy the Bolsheviks?' (Milanesi). All in all, this rhetoric is a most expedient way of eliminating all ethical considerations through an absolute preoccupation with self-interest that paves the way for any injustice or excess. Conversely, if such a venerable figure as Croce had, at one point, declared his aversion for democracy, the middle classes - who could hardly fail to be more or less familiar with some of his ideas, if only at second hand and in a vulgarized form - could not be blamed for adhering to this aversion, even after Croce himself had reneged. Given their - almost fabled - irresponsibility it would be less than feasible to suppose that they might defend a form of government that had been judged wanting by such an influential critic.

Thus, in a sense, the tragic effects upon Italy of Mussolini's rule can be retraced to the bourgeoisie, whose social - and on the evidence

of the novel, also personal and moral - irresponsibility imposed no restraints on the political irresponsibility of their leader. Nonetheless, they obviously appear to be less reprehensible than the 'captains of industry', etc. and the squadristi or whosoever actively, often violently, undertook to safeguard the much vaunted 'unanimity' of Fascist Italy. Nor should it be excluded that these active supporters of the regime may have read pot-boilers with enjoyment, and even, having perfected their faculty for suspending disbelief, ascribed to their own conduct the allegedly positive motivation therein depicted. However, it seems unlikely that the most ardent converts to Fascism were the prime objects of the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel's somewhat diluted and not always specifically Fascist propaganda, which we might term 'soft' propaganda. Rather, it appears as if Mussolini perceived the tendency towards social inactivity of the conventional - or perhaps ultra-conventional - majority of the bourgeoisie and accordingly, instead of encouraging them to involve themselves in the 'Revolution' he was fashioning in Italian life, he merely caused them to be 'fed' the concept of their own goodness. To judge from the pot-boiler, this proved a most effective way of maintaining and even augmenting their habitual inertia. Indeed, it seems probable that the ostensible Fascist preoccupation with 'collective' Action, etc., actually covertly abetted an increasing inactivity on the part of the individual. Nor should Guarnieri's theory as to the safety-valve afforded the average reader by the subject-matter of the pot-boiler be disregarded; if anything Guarnieri's observation should be elaborated upon. Not only might the reader confirm his sense of his own worth through his morally elevating identification with the sufferings and infrequent joys of the pot-boiler's principal characters, but he might consider his own faculty for moral judgement to be intact (since the pot-boiler provokes an allegedly moral response in him) and

therefore 'choose' not to exercise it in his daily life. (This illusion of moral 'choice', the option that is theoretically open to the individual but consistently rejected, is adroitly satirized by Brancati in 'In cerca di un sî'.)

Moreover, the sentiments of contentment and harmony depicted in the pro-Fascist and Fascist novel tend to be inextricably linked to a notion of good which has been so far undermined and devalued as to be almost unrecognizable - to the uninitiated. The inference of the pro-Fascist novel especially is that virtue is virtue is virtue; and adultery, egocentricity and even murder (as in 'La bufera infernal') cannot detract from virtue. The pro-Fascist and Fascist novels then conceive neither of absolutes, in terms of personal virtue, nor of any means of discerning levels of relative goodness. (Secondary characters, on the other hand, may be despicable in order to offset the virtues of the protagonists.)

Now it emerges from this study, as it needs must from any examination of the Fascist regime, that the regime's official policies and achievements constituted a remarkably effective way of obfuscating its realpolitik. Thus, having once deciphered the 'code' of the regime's propaganda, the antithesis between myth and reality becomes readily demonstrable and it becomes possible to assess the fullest implications of this propaganda. In accordance with the different exigencies of consolidating and maintaining power, perhaps the myths the regime propagated initially compensated for a widespread sense of dissatisfaction and of inferiority vis-à-vis other European countries; but with time these myths tended primarily to obfuscate the humiliations, even the subtle but continual degradations Mussolini conferred upon his subjects, especially through his consistent undermining of their sense of their individual social worth; the most flagrant and consummate illustration of this being his project of building a nation of 8,000,000 bayonets. But the divestment

of a sense of social and individual worth was always disguised and possibly 'compensated for' by a grandiose illusion; an Empire was to be the recompense for becoming cannon-fodder (and undergoing the brutalization consequent on a gratuitous participation in wars like those in Abyssinia and Spain); the draining of the Pontine marshes for the cynical policies which further impoverished the poor and brought the peasants far closer to starvation than was hitherto the case (112), and so on. Similarly, the notion of the virtues of the bourgeoisie and of the active goodness of such bourgeois reformers as Stacchini (which was a currency whose circulation Mussolini evidently countenanced) served to conceal the impotence, or moral inertia to which the regime had reduced them. Thus, we might argue that the threats to which the bourgeoisie had been subjected in the first decades of the twentieth century caused them to embrace a Fascist regime which ostensibly gave them some reassurance regarding their social usefulness and consequently an overall sense of their own worth. And that the bourgeoisie clung, as well they might cling, to these illusions. Whilst the regime, under cover of these illusions, proceeded to imbue their lives with a constantly increasing sense of futility, through ways they lacked the intellectual wherewithal to grasp. But are the bourgeoisie to be blamed for falling prey to a recondite force whose machinations they could not apprehend?

And yet, in arguing thus, we have fallen prey to the 'soft' propaganda of the regime, and of the bourgeoisie.

We have analysed various portrayals of the bourgeoisie, by their own best apologists, which depict them in their own milieu, and in the most favourable possible circumstances. We have done so, not least, in order to be able to present an alternative to, a defence, as it were, against the post-war anti-Fascist stereotypes of the bourgeoisie as monsters, psychopaths and sexual perverts - and we have been duped.

(Nonetheless, the fact of being mistaken is not sufficient to confer unqualified validity on the post-war anti-Fascist notion of the gross abnormality of the bourgeois psyche.)

We have swallowed the notion of bourgeois irresponsibility and discarded without consideration that of active collusion. We have further tended to exculpate, on grounds of irresponsibility, that section of the population whose privileges should have afforded them the largest faculties for examining and comprehending their situation: or, in other words, assessing and confronting their personal, moral and social responsibilities. We have even gone so far in exculpating the bourgeoisie as to argue that it is only natural that they should seek, by the means available, to preserve their socio-economic position. (And so perhaps it would be if material achievement were the sole human criterion, if there existed no 'altri doveri' which Vittorini, exceptionally, intuited, but was unable to clearly define in consequence of the immense subversion and erosion these 'doveri' had undergone under the Fascist regime.)

In all this, we have failed to connect, to consider that if Gotta's Claudio Vela represented one face of the provincial bourgeoisie, Bassani's signora Lavezzoli (in 'Gli occhiali d'oro') undoubtedly represented another. Further, that the distance and differences between these two exemplars are perhaps rather smaller than the blinkered soft propaganda of the pro-Fascist novel might induce us to believe. Bassani makes little reference to signora Lavezzoli's execution of her role as wife and mother; nonetheless his inference is, manifestly, that she fulfils this dual role in what is conventionally considered a laudable manner. Conversely, Gotta (like Saporì vis-à-vis Stacchini) makes no mention of Claudio Vela's reaction towards indiscreet homosexuals (homosexuals did not officially exist in Fascist Italy, of course) or towards Jews at the beginning of a racial campaign, but it does not seem far-fetched to assume

that in such circumstances, Vela - or Stacchini - would align himself with the values of the dominant majority and join in condemning such excrescences on the face of Fascist Italy. (As for the Fascist Celletti, her sporadic declarations of Antisemitism are sufficient to indicate that she, like signora Lavezzoli, would feel duty-bound to ruthlessly persecute the enemies of the Fascist regime and race, notwithstanding her probable divergencies from signora Lavezzoli apropos of Fascism as the agent of authentic social transformation and the authority of the Church.) Certainly, signora Lavezzoli is a monster of callousness; but in all likelihood a somewhat quotidian monster. Indeed, she is a monster precisely because in both her conduct and her ratiocination she pushes the principles of irresponsibility to their extreme consequences. Ultimately, then, perhaps the most reprehensible and unpardonable aspects of the stance of the pro-Fascist or Fascist bourgeois (whose 'positive' attributes are the preoccupation with family and the defence of class privileges and purity) are the logical consequences of its social irresponsibility. The fault of social irresponsibility depicted in the pot-boiler as understandable and excusable (in accordance with the argument that a man, after all, is only human) leads, in fact, towards an indifference which can, at worst, countenance any atrocity perpetrated against the hypothetical enemies of class purity.



## Notes

- (1) Guarnieri *Cinquant'anni di narrativa in Italia* p.79.
- (2) c.f. Paolo Arcari *La letteratura italiana e i disfattisti suoi* p.20 'Un altro disfattismo è prodotto dalla permalosità di salotto, di accademia, di conventicola, dalla mentalità ermetica di iniziati, dall'orrore sacro di quanto abbia la jattura d'essere capito e gustato all'aria aperta, dal prossimo più numeroso.'
- (3) Milanese *Eva Marina* p.35
- (4) Mussolini's speech on the inauguration of the new seat of the Società degli Autori ed Editori in Rome on 1st July 1926. Quoted in Alberti *Il teatro nel fascismo* p.201
- (5) Ibid p.201
- (6) It should be noted that even a novel like Celletti's *Tre tempi* which purports to celebrate the virtues and incipient ascendancy of the peasantry in fact depicts the successful ascent of the Vigliani into the middle classes.
- (7) Cicognani *Villa Beatrice* p.143-44
- (8) Op. cit. p.303
- (9) Op. cit. p.112
- (10) Op. cit. p.23
- (11) Op. cit. p.39
- (12) Op. cit. p.101
- (13) Op. cit. p.302
- (14) Op. cit. p.302
- (15) Op. cit. p.78
- (16) Op. cit. p.173
- (17) Op. cit. p.212
- (18) Op. cit. p.212
- (19) Op. cit. p.15-16
- (20) Op. cit. p.3
- (21) Op. cit. p.316
- (22) Op. cit. p.315
- (23) Op. cit. p.347
- (24) Op. cit. p.353
- (25) Gotta *Portofino* p.5-6
- (26) Op. cit. p.330
- (27) Celletti *Tre tempi* p.288
- (28) Op. cit. p.288
- (29) D'Ambra *La sosta sul ponte* p.14

- (30) Govoni *Il volo d'amore* p.XVIII
- (31) D'Ambra *La sosta sul ponte* p.333-40
- (32) Bontempelli *Vita e morte d'Adria e dei suoi figli* p.276
- (33) D'Ambra *La sosta sul ponte* p.172-73
- (34) Vergani *Io, povero negro* p.2-3
- (35) Op. cit. p.277
- (36) Massa *L'ospite pazzo* p.80
- (37) Op. cit. p.11
- (38) Op. cit. p.174
- (39) Gotta *La bufera infernal* p.92-93
- (40) Loria *La scuola di ballo* p.133
- (41) Bontempelli's story is different in detail although not in its desired effect, the tragedy of *Il figlio di due madri* resides in the fact that Marianna's son recognizes another woman as his mother. The tragedy is consummated when the child is abducted physically by Solwanah. While in *Vita e morte d'Adria e dei suoi figli* Bontempelli offers a different twist to the same theme: the tragedy of the children's lives is that their mother, Adria, is out of reach.
- (42) D'Ambra *La sosta sul ponte* p.235
- (43) Op. cit. p.153
- (44) Gotta *La bufera infernal* p.224
- (45) Sisto's imminent blindness is a flagrant illustration of the lack of attention to detail so typical of the Fascist novel. Throughout the three years the novel spans, Sisto retains his sight which shows no signs of deterioration.
- (46) D'Ambra *La sosta sul ponte* p.11-12
- (47) Op. cit. p.391
- (48) Op. cit. p.39
- (49) Gotta *Portofino* p.212
- (50) Op. cit. p.212
- (51) D'Ambra *La sosta sul ponte* p.145
- (52) Gotta *Portofino* p.210
- (53) Gotta *La bufera infernal* p.215
- (54) Op. cit. p.70
- (55) Op. cit. p.156
- (56) Op. cit. p.156-57
- (57) Op. cit. p.18
- (58) Op. cit. p.33
- (59) Gotta *Portofino* p.109-10
- (60) Saponi *Sotto il sole* p.193

- (61) Op. cit. p.222-23
- (62) Milanese *La sera di Santa Barbara* p.23-24
- (63) Op. cit. p.23
- (64) Op. cit. p.102
- (65) Op. cit. p.258
- (66) Milanese *Eva Marina* p.160-61
- (67) Milanese *La sera di Santa Barbara* p.150-51
- (68) Op. cit. p.151
- (69) Op. cit. p.153
- (70) Op. cit. p.151
- (71) Op. cit. p.160
- (72) Celletti *Tre tempi* p.108
- (73) Op. cit. p.312
- (74) Simone does have a few brief extra-marital sexual encounters, but these are shown to be more or less excusable, since they occur only during the period of his prolonged absence from Teresa.
- (75) Lombrossa 'Lo schermo' Dec. 1936 in Carabba *Il cinema del ventennio nero* p.182
- (76) Celletti *Tre tempi* p.115
- (77) Gotta *La bufera infernal* p.77
- (78) Celletti *Tre tempi* p.307
- (79) Op. cit. p.310
- (80) Op. cit. p.293
- (81) Op. cit. p.286
- (82) Carocci *Italian Fascism* p.105. 'The war was a great success from two points of view: the military and, even more, that of domestic policy. Mussolini presented the enterprise as a war that a poor country was waging in order to obtain a minimum degree of prosperity for its children. The kind of propaganda already used at the time of the war in Libya ('The great proletariat is on the move') worked perfectly for Mussolini. The war in Ethiopia gave him a platform for the kind of propaganda which Fascism, born of nationalism, liked to use: a propaganda which transposed the idea of the struggle between the classes to one of a struggle between poor nations and rich nations. Every class in Italy felt it could see the truth of this, and proudly felt both proletarian and Fascist. For a few months the identification of 'Italian' with 'Fascist', which had been proclaimed for about the past ten years, seemed a true one.'
- (83) Celletti *Tre tempi* p.309
- (84) Op. cit. p.301
- (85) Op. cit. p.108
- (86) Op. cit. p.114
- (87) Silone *Fontamara* p.50

- (88) Celletti *Tre tempi* p.281
- (89) Op. cit. p.226-27
- (90) Saponi *Sotto il sole* p.193
- (91) Op. cit. p.222
- (92) Op. cit. p.224
- (93) Op. cit. p.251
- (94) Op. cit. p.277
- (95) Op. cit. p.290
- (96) Op. cit. p.289
- (97) Op. cit. p.268-69
- (98) Op. cit. p.270
- (99) Op. cit. p.243
- (100) Op. cit. p.274
- (101) Op. cit. p.223
- (102) Op. cit. p.35-36
- (103) Op. cit. p.70
- (104) Op. cit. p.67
- (105) Op. cit. p.277
- (106) Op. cit. p.335
- (107) Op. cit. p.331-32
- (108) Op. cit. p.247-48
- (109) Op. cit. p.225
- (110) Op. cit. p.193-94
- (111) Gissing *New Grub Street* p.43
- (112) Carocci's assessment of the regime's rural policy corroborates this observation. Carocci states in *Italian Fascism* p.60: 'What was called the rural policy was also the means by which Mussolini tried to hide their deteriorating conditions from the peasants. Fascist propaganda gave the peasant's small-holding an exalted, mythical air at exactly the time when, in real life, the policy of *quota 90* and the tax on wheat were dragging it down'.

## CHAPTER 3

*Images of disenchantment and dissent: the non Fascist novel.*

In 'Letteratura e cultura del periodo fascista' Manacorda defines the themes intended to serve as an inspiration for the 'official' art and culture of the regime, thus:

'l'anti-individualismo, cioè l'impegno ad esprimere sentimenti e pensieri non personali ma della comunità cui si appartiene; il nazionalismo: essendo la comunità esclusivamente quella nazionale, gli artisti devono ispirarsi alla tradizione italiana intesa nella continuità Impero-Comuni-Risorgimento-Fascismo, rifiutando ogni forma di esotismo linguistico; l'eticità, da verificare immediatamente nei contenuti (patria, famiglia, religione, valore, virtù fisiche, cameratismo ecc.)' (1)

As previously mentioned, Mussolini appreciated the political utility - both at home and abroad - of the writer as 'spiritual imperialist' and sought through financial and social incentives to create a Fascist literary tradition. The divorce between 'orthodox' inspiration and literary merit remained total and irrefutable, even to the Fascist hierarchy. (2) However, the thematic content of the Fascist novel was, essentially, inseparable from a particular atmosphere (perhaps the anti-thesis of 'disfattismo'); a triumphant and all pervasive joy in the Fascist portrayal of reality, the implicit - and credulous - notion of Fascist Italy as the best of all possible worlds in which the rightful place was assigned to every person and thing. Silva observes:

'Se i motivi dell'ideologia fascista hanno un massimo d'eterogeneità, il processo della loro elaborazione ha un massimo di omogeneità: fabbrica di mostruosi modelli *standard* di comportamento.' (3)

Largely, the model of behaviour which facilitated Fascist rule was one of placid conformity, not to say apathy, often depicted in the novel as

the social aspect of the contented and prosperous family-oriented bourgeois; more or less exemplified by Stacchini in Saporì's 'Sotto il sole'. Equally the suspension of disbelief permitted the perpetuation of the myth of a happy and fairly prosperous working-class and peasantry: prosperous in the sense of both enhanced physical well-being and of the spiritual enrichment accorded them by the regime, and deriving from the aggrandizement of the sense of national identity. The insularity of the officially encouraged vision of the social reality predictably had its counterpart in a deliberately provincial concept of nationality, which was to find a precise reflection in contemporary literature. In his *Strapaese* days, Malaparte denied the innovatory value of the *Stracittà* movement, which consisted largely of the association of modern Italian literature with the mainstream of European cultural and literary trends. In *Il Selvaggio* he declared:

'Ma fammi il piacere, che sugo c'è in questa italianità che non sta di casa né a Firenze né a Roma, né a Trieste né a Napoli; ma così in aria librata sulla penisola come se la penisola fosse un punto e non un mondo, il più grande mondo di questo mondo.' (4)

Now, apart from the obvious and directly dependent consequences of impoverishment of the imagination and stifling of inspiration which resulted in the stagnation of the novel form, apparent in the Fascist writers, the encouraged homogeneity in literature came, by implication, to define dissent. Since the regime cultivated an illusion of unanimity, any attitude or vision which did not coincide with the officially favoured view was ultimately envisaged as an expression of hostility. Hence, little more than a statement of disenchantment, whether personal or regarding the social situation of Italy, could be construed as dissent. Certainly the mode and degree of dissatisfaction it was possible to express were considerably limited by two factors: the vigilance of

—

censorship, and the fact that the younger generation of novelists born around or just before 1910 (including Buzzati, Bilenchi, Pavese and Vittorini) were deprived of the means of drawing comparisons with other social and political systems, and were therefore slow to acquire the criteria which would enable them to objectify and assess the system under which they lived. (Their youth at the time of the March on Rome, and the censorship or distortion of foreign news, account in part for the atmosphere of confusion and obscurity which colours their works during this period.) Nevertheless the integrity of the younger writers' poetic vision demanded the rejection of the now stagnant novel form - a more or less exclusively bourgeois tradition - and the portrayal of reality as they experienced it; and this defined them as detractors of the regime, before they had consciously adopted such a stance. But this assessment, in turn, helped to clarify their position towards themselves and the regime. This situation was fostered by the development of the myth of 'fascismo di sinistra', for which Bottai, a leading Party authority on cultural affairs, was partly responsible. (Bottai's own cultural divergence from official 'Party lines' culminating in the publication of *Primato* - the magazine intended to entice dissident writers back into the Fascist fold - is a curious illustration of ideological heterogeneity within the Party hierarchy, rather than a real indication of unqualified freedom enjoyed by writers under the regime. Although, of course, an illusion of freedom was to be officially encouraged.) This 'fascismo di sinistra', a product of the political vacuum, based its claim to authenticity on the long since superseded and essentially Socialist inspired San Sepolcro programme of 1919. It further maintained that the secure position of the bourgeoisie proved that the Fascist revolution had gone astray. The championship of the creation of a popular state - which obviously threatened both the middle classes and the regime - eventually led many

writers from the Fascist to the Communist Party; Vittorini's spiritual journey is perhaps typical.

Thus the younger writers incapable of the cynicism - again implicitly - required of them, frequently expressed their empathy and compassion for the common people, rather than the lowest common denominators of collective emotion such as chauvinism and unquestioning reverence for Mussolini etc., which the regime desired of them as manifestations of anti-individualism. But equally, while in contrast to Fascist propaganda a greater awareness of the real conditions of peasants and workers developed in the novel, (the beginnings of the Neorealist movement), the redefinition of personal identity became an evident necessity. The myth of collective or national identity or whatever, that Fascism projected, seemingly impoverished and debilitated quite considerably the affective and volitive faculties of the individual, (of which more will be said later), thereby necessitating a radical innovation in the portrayal of man qua individual. This was effected through the revitalization of the capacity for feeling which was reconnected with the powerful primal emotions of childhood, and through a parallel transformation - not to say rejuvenation - of language. Certainly, in the 30's, American literature emerged as the principal influence and source of inspiration of the younger novelists, and their adherence to the myth of a democratic, spontaneous and vital America, (in implicit antithesis to decadent Italy) itself constituted a form, but equally a deepening conviction, of dissent. That America remained a myth rather than an exemplar for several novelists, and particularly Pavese, can be illustrated by its rapid dissipation after the Second World War, but perhaps more significantly by the internalization of such innovations as American literature could most validly contribute to the Italian tradition; notably regionalism, (as a new framework for identity) and a



more immediate use of language and dialogue, resulting in the devaluation of specifically literary or academic language and the corresponding revaluation of dialect.

The slightly older novelists - that is those old enough to have participated in the First World War - such as Alvaro, Bacchelli and Gadda, maintained a somewhat different position, one aspect of which is their expression of individuality and in the case of Gadda even eccentricity. Under the circumstances this individuality constituted a valid form of dissent, both in the affirmation of personal identity and in the consequent negation of merit and importance attributed by Fascism to political life, and to the politicization of life. Nevertheless, it is necessary to qualify the preceding remarks in order to suggest the atmosphere of confusion, obscurity and personal isolation peculiar to the period. Alvaro's treatment of regionalism and Gadda's experimentation with language are preoccupations shared with the younger novelists - although deriving from different positions and underpinned by a somewhat different concept of man's position in society; and perhaps by a more complex vision of politics. Hence no deliberate attempt has been made by this study to systematize or unify the various manifestations of disenchantment and dissent, in order to avoid an over-simplified view of a period perhaps best characterized by nuances.

It would perhaps be possible to define this period of dissent and innovation as commencing with Alvaro's 'Gente in Aspromonte' (1930) and Moravia's 'Gli indifferenti' (1929). The themes they respectively developed, extreme poverty and the social injustice to which the peasant was subjected, and the moral bankruptcy of the middle classes culminating in the virtual paralysis of the will, were subsequently further elaborated as fundamental manifestations of dissent. A confrontation of the two books reveals different but equally closed societies. In 'Gli indifferenti' the

environment is punctuated, even regulated, by the middle-class ceremonial of meal times, whereas 'Gente in Aspromonte', at least in part, is coloured and motivated by hunger. In the 1930's 'Gente in Aspromonte' met with considerable success and critical acclaim. The nature of its critical evaluation is perhaps indicative of the mental blinkering and circumscription of the bourgeoisie. De Robertis declares:

'Torno all'idea del coro. Che cosa è di Alvaro che più ricordiamo? Una figura che campeggi, no. Ci rimangono di essa tutt'al più le voci, o i gesti, o i moti interni, non più distintamente che le voci della terra o delle acque o d'una pianta. Volete la riprova stilistica? Aprite una pagina, una pagina sola, di quelle anche più riuscite. Da ogni parte fa ressa, come d'uno che narri tra l'affanno del non sapere tutto dire. Certo Alvaro adopera i mezzi più squisiti, i più insinuanti. E noi vorremmo che n'adoperasse uno solo, e ci facesse riposare, se la letteratura e l'arte devono essere sopra tutto letizia.'

(5)

while Angioletti in 1930 states in more generally applicable terms:

'mi sia consentito ricordare che gli scrittori nuovi, compiendo una rivoluzione che, per essere stata silenziosa, non sarà meno memorabile, intendono di essere soprattutto artisti, laddove i loro predecessori si compiacevano di essere moralisti, predicatori, estetizzanti, psicologisti, edonisti, ecc.'

(6)

Apparently the tendency of the critics was to disregard any correlation between Alvaro's fiction and the reality it portrayed. Yet the opening sentences of 'Gente in Aspromonte' serve as a marvellous refutation of the Fascist myth of the happy and prosperous peasant, and further, raise the embarrassing issue of Southern Italy with its backwardness (the geometric concept of the wheel, he says, has not yet been discovered) and its unrelieved poverty:

'Non è bella la vita dei pastori in Aspromonte, d'inverno, quando i torbidi torrenti corrono al mare, e la terra sembra navigare sulle acque. I pastori stanno nelle case costruite di frasche e di fango, e dormono cogli animali.'

(7)

Alvaro is at pains to emphasize the factual underpinning of this long short story, and also the fact that even this most underprivileged and harsh existence is capable of evoking love. He intercalates:

'È una civiltà che scompare, e su di essa non c'è da piangere, ma bisogna trarre, che ci è nato, il maggior numero di memorie.' (8)

and:

'È una vita alla quale occorre essere iniziati per capirla, esserci nati per amarla, tanto è piena, come la contrada, di pietre e di spine.'  
(9)

Perhaps the degree to which any profession of solidarity with the less privileged sectors of society threatened the Fascist monolith, and consequently the gulf separating Alvaro's viewpoint from that of the regime, can be best exemplified by a curious comment appearing in *Il Bargello* to the effect that:

'il popolo per suo felice istinto se ne infischia dei propri simili e delle pene quotidiane, della realtà e del verosimile.' (10)

Paradoxically, works of both Fascist and non Fascist writers tend to suggest that it is precisely this questionably 'happy instinct' which was responsible for the predominant climate of spiritual sterility. Hence it is evident that an expression of solidarity or compassion is tantamount to dissent.

Now Alvaro's regionalism appears as a kind of moral obligation; a keeping of faith by the individual with his origins, a maintenance of personal integrity both in 'Gente in Aspromonte' and 'Vent'anni'. In the former he depicts the closed and hopeless world of the peasant, in which the survival of feudalism indicates how little change was effected by the Liberation of the Two Sicilies - an expression which Alvaro doubtless deliberately used. In 'Vent'anni' he defines the involvement of Southern

Italy with the North, but rather than this constituting a contrasting vision of reality, it merely portrays another aspect of the same; the First World War is the single problematic point of contact of two essentially separate worlds. Luca Fabio, the partly autobiographical partly emblematic protagonist of 'Vent'anni', illustrates another aspect of the Southern Italian; that of the intellectual of peasant origins. Luca is portrayed as a more vital and intense character than his Northern upper middle-class friend Bandi, who epitomizes the innate grace born of age-old culture and privilege. Luca's experience of the First World War is similar to that of Stanghellini; Alvaro sees no glory in war, but seeks a comprehensive representation of all its horrors, while Fascism, of course, envisaged glories exclusively, and saw no horror that was not glorious, as is illustrated by d'Ambra's patriotic stumps. Alvaro, however, portrays the war primarily as an instrument of sudden, catastrophic change. Therefore Bandi predictably and swiftly succumbs; his death is elegant and heroic, (doubtless a reflection of the lack of resilience, even the substitution of grace for resilience, of his class), while Luca's peasant practicality and instinctive self-preservation ensure his tormented survival; at the cost of becoming increasingly dislocated. Initially Luca is a little ashamed of his Southern origins, he feels inferior to and alienated from the bourgeoisie of the North. Alvaro seems to imply through the figure of Luca that any unification of Italy is illusory, that what has, in fact, occurred is an uneasy and only partial integration of the poor South into the rich North. With specific reference to the Southern peasants' reaction to Florence, Alvaro states:

'Il campanile di Giotto era troppo per loro, eppure gente come loro lo aveva materialmente eretto,' (11)

This could equally validly be interpreted as a symbol of the rare

contingency of North and South, and significantly, the subordinate role of the Southerner when this occurs. Ultimately, in 'Vent'anni', the predicament of the Southerner represents a bitter, if implicit, indictment of the Fascist myth of war. Loricci, another emblematic Southerner, says to Luca:

'-Che ci resterà da fare domani, se torniamo nel mondo?..... Credo che verremo fuori più chimerici che mai, e il mondo sarà ben felice se potrà togliercisi di dosso..... Se accettasse noi altri, si dovrebbe reggere su un ordine impossibile e inumano..... È necessario che noi siamo esistiti, e siano esistiti tutti quelli duri a soffrire e a morire, perché il mondo inorgoglisca d'essere stato capace di tanto.' (12)

The State, that is the representative of an alien Italy, exploits the one native attribute of the Southerner; his capacity to endure - the same capacity which characterizes the world of Aspromonte. Luca sketches a different result of the war, that is equally applicable as a direct consequence of the Fascist virtue of obedience:

'-Abbiamo finito a rassomigliarci tutti. La guerra sta passando su di noi come il fiume che leviga i ciottoli e li rende uniformi. Non siamo più che numeri..... Il mondo si è scoperta una grande passione per l'aritmetica.' (13)

Clearly this is the obverse of the theme of the later 'L'uomo è forte', which is the problematic retention of individuality under a totalitarian regime.

Perhaps obedience is ultimately more or less the antithesis of endurance: Loricci, having endured, feels the need for an intense personal commitment:

'"Bisognerà assumersi grandi responsabilità altrimenti tutto ci parrà ozioso e miserabile." (14)

Antonello, in 'Gente in Aspromonte' is finally driven to an act of violent

self-assertion by the accumulation of human injustice besetting his family, which exacerbates even their capacity for endurance. The village where Argirò lives is dominated by the Mezzatesta who, having the power to grant or deny the peasants a livelihood, act solely according to their own advantage. (This exploitation of the poor and dispossessed by the wealthy landowning class is a frequently depicted feature of the South which, of course, belies the Fascist encouraged myth of the 'enlightened' and benignly paternalistic landowner.) However, the poor too are quick to profit from the misfortunes of one of their number and it is this fact that reveals his predicament to the young Antonello; in other words that his world is steeped in injustice:

'Per la prima volta capiva di essere in mezzo a qualche cosa di ingiusto; il sentimento della sua condizione gli si affacciò alla mente improvviso e chiaro e si sentiva come un angelo caduto.' (15)

Finally Antonello is provoked to commit arson not by the innate injustice and deprivations of the peasant's condition, (that is a permanent state of semi-starvation and the severe limitations imposed on personal freedom by economic necessity such as the impossibility of marrying before he is thirty-four, and the impossibility of remaining in his village, etc.) but by the deliberate act of aggression of the Mezzatesta boys, who burn down Argirò's barn, killing his mule. Antonello's response is not treated by the author as a criminal act; it is retribution certainly, a rude justice of the 'eye for an eye' type that he metes out, but it is equally a revindication of himself and his family over the Mezzatesta. Argirò was similarly motivated by the need for revindication in his decision to make his son a priest; he said:

"Bella rivincita che sarebbe per me, per noi tutti, che da casa nostra uscisse qualcuno che potesse parlare a voce alta, e li mettesse a posto." (16)

Quite simply, Alvaro implies that centuries of oppression have crushed neither the native pride nor the spiritual uprightness of the peasant. Similarly, it should be noted that it is Antonello's inherent notions of morality and justice which instinctively regulate his evaluation of himself and his family - and therefore his revindication of the injury done to them - and thus cause him to commit arson. Perhaps he cannot actually articulate this fact, although it is contained in his concluding words:

"Finalmente," disse, "potrò parlare con la Giustizia. Chè ci è voluto per poterla incontrare e dirle il fatto mio!" (17)

Now the conclusion of 'Gente in Aspromonte' is rich in significance and implication. Primarily, as in Pavese's 'Paesi tuoi' written almost a decade later, the only seeming point of contact between official institutionalized Italy and the peasant's world, is the brief appearance of the carabinieri to arrest the peasant for some wrong-doing. But the implications of this are obvious; the carabinieri emerge as the executors of a justice that is extraneous to the world in which the deed took place. Moreover, as in Antonello's case (where he responds to the destruction of his family's possessions by destroying those of the perpetrators of the crime) the deed is provoked by the inherent logic of the situation, and it is comprehensible, within the given context. To the carabinieri all this is irrelevant; no less than in 'Paesi tuoi' the carabinieri's institutionalized justice is irrelevant and incomprehensible, even unsatisfactory according to the peasants' notions and expectations of justice. Certainly the situation is clear in 'Gente in Aspromonte'; the peasant can only bring himself to the attention of official Italy by committing a crime (for obvious reasons it is naturally unthinkable that a peasant family should bring a charge of arson against the local landowners)

and this predetermines the fact that the only aspect of justice he will experience is the punitive - whether or not this concurs with the particular features of his case. Hence the tragic irony of Antonello's ingenuous words; there will be no dialogue with 'Justice', the very act by which he drew attention to himself precludes that possibility - although it was exasperation and a desire to break out of the peasant's closed circle of suffered injustice that drove him to arson - he will only encounter punishment. Official Italy's 'Justice' then exists exclusively for the punishment - and not the protection - of the peasant; which implies that 'Justice' too is a form of injustice. How are we then to evaluate Alvaro's peasants? Possibly most accurately if we contrast them with Moravia's more or less spiritually palsied middle classes. Their predicament and their aspirations - often through sheer modesty - render them unself-consciously pathetic and therefore moving. Antonello's innate sense of justice (a feature significantly absent from Moravia's world) is far better adapted to regulating a small-scale society than any code devised by official Italy. As is suggested elsewhere especially through *Coi e Senza Baffi* (the police functionaries in 'Conversazione in Sicilia') Fascist notions of criminality were often arbitrary. However, Antonello's sense of justice is, presumably, just one manifestation of an instinctive and healthy morality. Alvaro's peasant is still susceptible to his primal motivation, which constitutes a considerable vitality that can be favourably contrasted with the apathy of Moravia's bourgeoisie. It should, of course, be said that the preoccupation with the spiritual sanity of the peasant, and even with his superiority, is a direct reflection on the period; such a position naturally found confirmation in certain political convictions, but it was equally and perhaps primarily a personal and emotional response to the discredit and corruptibility justly attributable to other social classes. While not disputing the validity



of this preoccupation, it nevertheless often appears, as in Vittorini and Pavese especially, as an emotive option, almost a last bastion of faith in humanity; despite the odds.

In contrast 'Gli indifferenti' is characterized by the absence of faith or hope. It is a statical novel inasmuch as there are no reasonable grounds for assuming that Carla's projected marriage, determined at the end of the novel, will effect any significant change from the situation at the beginning. Indeed it is only in consequence of Carla's obtuseness that she should have initially assumed that becoming Leo's mistress would initiate her into any kind of 'vita nuova', since Leo, her mother's lover, is something of a fixture in the old. However, the preoccupation with a 'vita nuova' - or at least a new departure of sorts - which is common to Lisa, Michele and Carla, is both central and essential to an understanding of the novel, since it is indicative of the sequestered life of a vacuous bourgeoisie and their over-compensatory concern with sexuality as a life-validating experience. It should be noted that most of the observations made with regard to Carla apply, in varying degrees to Michele, Lisa and even Mariagrazia. Leo is exempt because he symbolizes a different moment of the bourgeoisie. Leo seems to belong to a new middle class which, under Fascism, flourished through speculation of one form or another; whereas the position of Mariagrazia's family is slightly longer established and more traditionally based on the possession of material assets. They are differentiated accordingly; Leo is totally cynical and devoid of illusions regarding his own motivation and that of others, while Mariagrazia particularly, and her children to a lesser degree, delude themselves as to a certain magnanimity that appears - as it in fact is - outmoded, ridiculous and hypocritical under Leo's disenchanting mockery. Leo's brutality abets the furtherance of his own interests, while Mariagrazia's attempts to disguise her self-interest

with professions of regard for the social niceties - such as the debt of respect owed to herself and Leo by her son Michele, for whatever reason - fail to shield her vulnerability, especially from Leo.

As stated above, Carla is attracted by a 'vita nuova', although this in fact proves to be a negative notion, purely a destruction of the old. She resolves to:

"Finirla".... "rovinare tutto"....' (18)

It is, surely, an expression of spiritual sterility that innovation is conceived of almost solely in terms of destruction. However, Carla's reasoning is characterized by self-deception; despite declaring her alleged desire to break out of an intolerable situation, her choice of lover is most remarkable for the fact that apart from that of sexual experimentation it eliminates any element of change and of the unknown. (Similarly Michele dreams of an intense and meaningful love with a young girl, and half-heartedly starts an affair with the middle-aged, hypocritical and morally lax Lisa; who in turn desires a pure and purifying love with Michele, yet sets about seducing him in the most obvious and vulgar fashion.) Apparently Carla dimly senses her self-deception from the start, when reflecting upon her motivation she thinks:

'perché rifiutare Leo ? Questa virtù l'avrebbe rigettata in braccio alla noia e al meschino disgusto delle abitudini; e le pareva inoltre, per un gusto fatalistico di simmetrie morali, che questa avventura quasi familiare fosse il solo epilogo che la sua vita meritasse;' (19)

Her subsequent decision to marry Leo clearly illustrates the illusoriness of her desire for a new life and an acute underlying fear of change. Hence on leaving Leo's flat with Michele after the latter's abortive attempt on Leo's life, she assesses her predicament thus:

'Le parve di essere chiusa fuori dal mondo, sola

col fratello in quella scatola buia e di essere portata a grande velocità verso un luogo sconosciuto; dove? Così finivano la giornata e la sua vecchia vita: con una domanda alla quale era impossibile rispondere; dove si va di giorno o di notte, con l'oscurità e la pioggia o in piena luce? Nessuno lo sa; ebbe paura! volle restringere la sua meta, rimpicciolire il suo mondo, vedere tutta la sua esistenza come una stanza angusta. "Sposerò Leo" pensò." (19)

The atmosphere of inertia that dominates the novel is crucial to the characters' sense of security; it is only when this security is threatened by the possibility of change that their torpor is momentarily disturbed by fear. Obviously the manipulation of language is the primary means employed by Carla, (but equally by Michele, Lisa and Mariagrazia) to the end of self-deception, or the evasion of self-knowledge. Thus Carla in the above quotation approaches the brink of such a major issue as the responsibility of the individual for giving direction and purpose to life, then exorcizes it by her swift determination to marry Leo. Earlier she obscured the issue of her choice of Leo as a lover by explaining it as a 'gusto fatalistico di simmetrie morali' (20); seemingly a pointlessly complex way of defining the inertia which renders her incapable of taking any active initiative in the choice of lover. Sanguinetti comments on the use of language:

*'Gli indifferenti sono, anzitutto, un'enciclopedia delle sciocchezze della conversazione media borghese di ambizioni mondane in stile familiare, e come nei colloqui si raccoglie un terribile repertorio topico, così nei monologhi interiori dei personaggi, una formidabile collezione dei luoghi comuni della coscienza borghese moderna.'* (21)

In fact the language of Moravia's characters has ultimately stultified into clichés, derived and parodied perhaps from the hackneyed romanticism of conventional bourgeois novelists. Clichés, rather than possessing the fluidity of language and therefore being, potentially, a means of faithfully

delineating thought, are fixed within rigid confines which actually limit the possibilities for thought; and this accounts for the marked discrepancy between often quasi-idealistic monologues, especially those of Michele, and the increasingly sordid, humiliating reality to which they correspond.

Now the action of 'Gli indifferenti' proceeds through several of the commonplaces of a scurrilous humour, based on a thwarted or in some way perverted eroticism, (such as the frustration of Leo's first seduction attempt through Carla's untimely vomiting, the 'mature woman seducing innocent young boy' stereotype underpinning Lisa's undignified and initially unsuccessful pursuit of Michele, and the very notion of Carla 'inheriting' her mother's lover). This aspect of low comedy is certainly no less important than Moravia's alleged debt to classical and tragic sources, like Shakespeare's 'Hamlet', for such devices as Lisa's situation behind the hall curtain and involuntary witnessing of Leo and Carla's embrace. Campanile who was himself to depict adultery, although in a witty and rather frivolous fashion, roundly denounced Moravia's lapse from good taste:

'Io, la primavera, vado spesso in campagna, in una deliziosa villa purtroppo non mia.... -Dietro la villa, sulla porta di una capannuccia fatta apposta, c'è un truogolo e col muso dentro una scrofa e un verro vi grufolano se non dormono. Non me ne accorgo. Non sento, non vedo tanto tutto l'altro è bello e mi conquide. Invece, il Moravia, lo vede ed è conquiso solo dal truogolo, sente solo la vita della scrofa e del verro.... Di quale tempo parla il Moravia? Del suo tempo; forse dei suoi giorni, e delle sue ore; non del nostro tempo, che il nostro è così chiaro, luminoso, puro, che dal contrasto risulta palese la sua indegnità.....' (22)

It was, doubtless, inevitable that Moravia's frontal attack on the mores of the bourgeoisie would provoke an outburst of bourgeois self-righteousness, since it adopted the traditional novel form and a readily accessible

language. Furthermore, its characterization is composed of more or less familiar middle-class stereotypes. As Guarnieri comments (23), and the quotation from Campanile attests, the moral degeneracy of Moravia's 'indifferenti', served to affirm their own superiority to his middle-class readers. Their preoccupation with sexuality, seemingly centered on the age-old acceptance of masculine adultery usually justified by passion and an irresistible sensuality, was considered in some subtle way nobler, or at any rate healthier and generally preferable. The sole valid explanation of this appears to be that Moravia deliberately divested sensuality of a certain hitherto carefully maintained aura of enchantment. Yet such was his intention; as in the case of Brancati also, Moravia portrays the nature of a society's sexual conduct, together with the degree of its sexual preoccupation, as the most significant single indication of its health and general usefulness. The world Moravia depicts, with its typically trivial social round of fancy dress balls, tennis and love affairs as the principal modes of consuming time is quintessentially bourgeois, and also totally lacking in social utility. This is, of course, in stark contrast with the notion of upper and middle middle-class society developed by Saponi and Gotta, who suggested that freedom from pressing financial concerns permitted their magnanimous and altruistic heroes to involve themselves extensively, and in a voluntary capacity, with projects that benefitted the underprivileged.

The contrast is sustained in the realm of the sexual; the Fascist conceived protagonists are driven to adultery by the irresistible force of their passion; whereas Lisa and Carla initially opt for sexual involvement as a way of injecting some meaningfulness or feeling into an empty and futile existence. (Only Leo is animated quite simply by lust, and subsequently by his financial interests.) But there is something morbid and singular about the eroticism of Moravia's 'indifferenti';

the intrusion of the vicious or unnatural seems an integral part of its arousal. Leo insists upon the quasi-incestuous element of his relationship with Carla by calling her 'mia quasi figlia' (27) and obliging her to don the pyjamas her mother wore. Mariagrazia, Carla and Lisa attribute a disproportionate value to their sexuality, not as an end in itself, but as a more or less passive means of regulating their own existence and that of others. Equally, there is an element of degradation inherent in their submission to their sexual urge; sexual involvement, undertaken in a mood of passivity seems to require that they abdicate the already exiguous basis for self-respect. (This applies to Michele also). But more significant, if we accept the behaviour of the 'indifferenti' as more veracious than their internal monologue - because more consistent - it emerges that rather than wishing to destroy the closed society in which they live, the severe limitations on their possibilities of self-knowledge and development, are self-imposed; and that through their sexuality they seek the final abdication of responsibility for their own will and for their actions - for their lives in fact. Now this is very suggestive if, as the sexual and financial exploiter of Mariagrazia's family, Leo is indeed an allegory of the Fascist manipulation of a compliant bourgeoisie; the sagacity, loyalty and obedience of the middle classes (or whatever other virtues are attributed to them by the Fascist writers) would then appear not solely as euphemisms for apathy, but as a positive welcoming of the erosion of their independence, which reflects the desire to abdicate all personal commitment.

Gadda, like Moravia, denounces the emptiness of middle-class positions, but whereas Moravia's portrayal remains necessarily static, Gadda's election of himself as arbiter of bourgeois witlessness, effects the introduction of a polemic quality and an innovatory vitality. Moravia's

exploitation of a traditionally bourgeois art-form as a means of parodying and formulating a condemnation of the bourgeoisie, although successful in 'Gli indifferenti' nevertheless represented a kind of impasse; whereas Gadda's hostility to stereotyped middle-class attitudes doubtless contributed to his deliberate dissolution of the conventional novel form, and the evolution of a highly individualistic literary style. The fragmentation of his narrative, the importance attributed to seemingly gratuitous digressions such as the account of Ismaele Digben's philosophy in 'La Madonna dei filosofi' (although all Gadda's apparent digressions are subject to a criterion of coherence of inspiration (25) superior to that of simple narrative unity) the introduction of dialect, scientific, foreign, and occasionally scatological words, and the disruption of syntax are all elements that would have rendered his work somewhat inaccessible, if not totally incomprehensible, to the majority of middle-class readers. Thus, since these readers tended inevitably towards an intolerant dismissal of the inaccessible, it can be assumed that Gadda more or less eliminated the paradoxical possibility of the implacable critic of the bourgeoisie becoming its 'enfant terrible'. (In contrast, we might speculate that Campanile's condemnation of the sordidness of 'Gli indifferenti', and other like condemnations, would have created a certain peculiarly morbid bourgeois fascination with the novel.)

For various reasons, and notwithstanding an aristocratic and almost universally extended contempt, a note of self-denigration permeates Gadda's works. An example of this Gaddian device occurs in 'Il castello di Udine'. Gadda mentions Ernesto, a friend from the prisoner of war camp, and a member of the rich Milanese bourgeoisie. He continues:

'parlo della vecchia classe, non di quella così

variopinta, venuta su all'ultimo, a ministrar case luride e riscuoter fitti arpagonici.' (26)

and the bogus Dottore Feo Avverois comments in a note to the text:

'Il Ns., vivendo in istato di perenne malumore contro a certi padroni di casa onninamente cristiani, si fa rabbiosa premura d'escluderli dalla lode cui vien tributando alla 'vecchia classe'. Altrove poi deride e stramaledice anche quella.' (27)

Here, and in his fictional works - where little attempt is made to disguise the autobiographical attributes of his protagonists - the criticisms levelled against himself by the author are no less valid than those levelled against society; his mordant irony is a safeguard against fatuousness and over-simplification. Obviously Gadda's self-denigration is the reflection of a psychological state, of which more will be said later, but I would suggest that, together with the difficulties of his work, his self-professed eccentricity gave him a certain immunity to criticize society, not unlike that of the 'officially' mad Francesco VIII in Silone's 'Il seme sotto la neve'. Gadda prefaces the account of his war in 'Il castello di Udine':

'Tendo a una brutale deformazione dei temi che il destino s'è creduto di proponermi come formate cose ed obbietti: come paragrafi immoti della sapiente sua legge.' (28)

and Manacorda comments:

'Con la retorica ufficiale la retorica di Gadda non concorderà mai; in realtà, egli ne era fuori da sempre, ma ora tanto più quanto più si viene facendo cosciente delle intime ragioni del suo linguaggio e della funzione sovvertitrice che esso esplica nei confronti della deformazione ufficializzata di quei valori. La sua diversa vocazione deformatrice..... sarà in verità passione restauratrice del loro senso autentico,' (29)



Gadda painstakingly chronicles the banality of bourgeois society; in 'Il teatro', (in 'La Madonna dei filosofi') he apparently ingenuously records the witless hyperbolic praise for an amateurish opera, masquerading as 'Culture'; in 'Crociera mediterranea' (in 'Il castello di Udine') he catalogues the impregnable insularity of the traveller, and in 'La cognizione del dolore' he depicts the importance of maintaining a dignified comportment with waiters, or the possession of a villa, as bases for self-esteem. The portrayal of the bourgeoisie's complacent self-esteem tends to be inseparable from Gadda's condemnation of Fascism; indeed it emerges as the necessary complement of Fascism. Hence the juxtaposition of 'Il castello di Udine' and 'Crociera mediterranea'; Dottore Avverois comments significantly on the title of the section 'Dal castello di Udine verso i monti':

'Il titolo è suscettivo di interpretazione simbolistica. Il castello di Udine, il sischiél a Udin, è la momentanea imagine-sintesi di tutta la patria, quasi un amuleto dello spirito. I monti sono quelli delle Alpi Giulie, dove il Ns. pensava di solo adempiere ai suoi doveri, e si ebbe la immeritata umiliazione della prigionia.'  
(30)

The title can also be interpreted as an allegory of Gadda's disillusionment with post-war Italy. After defining his patriotic motivation, the author comments:

'Questi accenni per spiegare le cose: per isolare il germe, forse, della mia retorica patriottarda e militaresca: dalle quale non mi purgò la guerra, né il dopoguerra, né l'ora che volge:' (31)

Manacorda stresses the significance of this remark thus:

'ed è il massimo delle concessioni che Gadda abbia fatto al fascismo, con il quale pure, in teoria, le sue idee avrebbero potuto collimare. Ed era invece il fascismo, a bene intendere tutto il senso della personalità di Gadda, la sua passione usurpata e

rovesciata, mentita e stravolta; era l'istituzionalizzazione di tutta la asinità italiana, la burocrazia e l'incompetenza, il pasticcio e il disordine, il diletterantismo e il carrierismo; era l'ipocrita sostituzione della nobiltà delle cose e del comportamento con le semplici parole che le esprimono.' (32)

Gadda, like Malaparte, D'Annunzio and Papini amongst others, became an interventionist out of a sense of patriotism. This superficial similarity of outlook is noteworthy, partly because, as stated above, it represents the only possible point of contact between Gadda and Fascism, but more particularly because the integrity of the individual and his refusal to compromise his idealism over such a highly emotive issue as his homeland, serves to illustrate the disingenuousness of Fascism's alleged ideological copyright on Nationalism. The juxtaposition of the essentially humble expression of Gadda's patriotism:

'Il Regno d'Italia, per i miei, era una cosa viva e verace; che valeva la pena di servirlo e tenerlo su:' (33)

with the tone of strident self-aggrandizement that characterizes Soffici's 'Kobilek' and the pronouncements of Fascist propaganda emblemizes the contrast between a genuine capacity for the subordination of self to the general interest of the nation (a virtue much lauded by the Fascist regime) and vainglory (the closest approximation evoked by Fascist rhetoric and conduct). Gadda also rejects the convenient Fascist tendency to mythologize about war, and to regard it as the self-evident spiritual precursor of Fascism; Gadda comments:

'Il parlare della guerra e della pace come di un mito, o come del terremoto, è cosa ripugnante in un uomo e in un cittadino. Vi è qualcosa di bestiale in una rissa, ma la volontà di ferire è più nobile della bassa stanchezza che conduce a tenersi gli sputi nella faccia. La guerra si deve volere a non volere da uomini: il parlare della guerra e del governo come di un mito non è cosa degna di uomini.' (34)

The myth of the war as a kind of heroic crusade, and of Fascism as the sole legitimate Patriotism, the paladin of the Mother-country, constitutes for Gadda a betrayal of the values in whose defence Italy entered the war; but also a personal betrayal resulting in a feeling of futility and despair at his continued survival - the 'spettrale sopravvivenza' (35) attributed to Maria in 'La Madonna dei filosofi'.

Towards the end of 'Il castello di Udine' Gadda states that he resisted his internment in the prisoner of war camp through the only means open to him; which was non-resignation to his circumstances. He says:

'Ma sempre, anche nei piú ciechi momenti, ripugnai alla rassegnata saggezza e alla cosiddetta pace del cuore. Sentivo, come da un istinto ultimo e sacro, disegnarsi nel nulla come l'ombra d'un irraggiungibile onore, sentivo che non dovevo rassegnarmi, che almeno con il delirio inutile della mente dovevo reluttare alla mia pace: e renegare cosí la speranza sudicia di una disonorevole pace delle armi.' (36)

Evidently Gadda (and his autobiographical personae like Gonzalo Pirobutirro and Baronfo) maintained this same resistance throughout the Fascist period. Hence he is driven into the predicament of the non-conformist in a conformist society, and, as he suggests of Gonzalo, insularity is forced upon him rather than elected. (37) This point is further illustrated by the case of Baronfo, who becomes a neurotic, incapable of living an active life, after receiving a - presumably emblematic - blow on the head in 1922. Whether this blow represents the Fascist seizure of power, or the chauvinistic pseudo-cultural bombardment to which Baronfo was subjected, or both, it offers a marvellous example of the outrage to the author's sensitivities. Baronfo's neurosis is induced by the grossness of the post-war world - doubtless aggravated by the Fascist resolution to secure loyalties through a broadly based popular appeal. The aristocratic sensitivity, even hypersensitivity of

Baronfo (and Gadda) is in overt contrast with the coarseness of the overwhelming majority. Baronfo enumerates what he considers the intolerable lapses of taste and conduct - which closely correspond to the Fascist boasts of prosperity, technological advances, the revindication of national pride, and 'Culture' - that characterize the Fascist achievements in civil life. Gadda says:

'Ma poi era anche che il mondo del dopoguerra gli pareva troppo sciatto, troppo volgare, troppo dominato dal caffè-concerto e dai rivenditori di motociclette, troppo popolato d'asini in tocco e di villani indomenicati: con analfabetissime donne, sazie d'ogni cibo, sdraiate nelle fanfaronesche automobili de' spaccamonti falliti.

Ma certo erano le fisime della nevrastenia. Tutto era per lui ombra o tortura. Il grammofo "gli demoliva i nervi"; il mandolino gli strappava concitate apostrofi contro "la civiltà Mediterranea" e, subito dopo, la veemente e circostanziata asserzione della razza eschimese che non lo suona; .....la cattiva sintassi e l'enfasi spropositata di alcuni concittadini gli eran cagione d'oscuramenti, di vertigine e d'agorafobia; e le prodezze de' nuovi architetti gli davano il giallo dell'itterizia. Certi imparaticci poi, recitati a gran voce dai concionanti droghieri, improvvisati economisti della nuova Europa, gli parevano indegni d'un venditore ambulante di fazzoletti. Prese ad odiare Puccini, Leoncavallo e Mascagni, che l'Italia e il mondo universo salutavano coi nomi della gloria. Sognava falò accesi da cataste di mandolini: e di coronare imperatore d'Occidente un samojedo sordo.' (38)

Baronfo's response, like that of Gadda and Gonzalo, is to withdraw completely from society, but withdrawal, together with a predominant feeling of implacable anger (the 'delirio inutile') towards the outside world, only serves to perpetuate the neurotic cycle. Gadda defines the spiritual predicament resulting from the isolation of the dissident thus:

'Ma l'andare nella rancura è sterile passo, negare vane immagini, le più volte, significa negare se medesimo. Rivendicare la facoltà santa del giudizio, a certi momenti, è lacerare la possibilità: come si lacerava un foglio inturpato leggendovi scritte di bugie.

Lo hidalgo, forse, era a negare se stesso: rivendicando a sé le ragioni del dolore, la conoscenza e la verità del dolore, nulla rimaneva alla possibilità. Tutto andava esaurito dalla rapina del dolore.' (39)

At this point it should perhaps be noted that Gadda is at pains to arrogate the epithet neurotic for himself and for his autobiographical personae. The implication from preceding remarks, that his neurosis is directly attributable to Fascism would, of course, be inexact. The portrayal of the relationship between Gonzalo and his mother suggests the author suffered profound emotional deprivation; however the situation of the dissident in an acutely conformist society would aggravate the hypersensitivity of the perceptions of the neurotic, and indeed simulate the social alienation and the self-doubts characteristic of neurosis, even in the so-called 'normal' personality. Now, Gadda's insistence on mental disturbance is a very significant manifestation of dissent from the ideological homogeneity of the regime, on several counts. Primarily, it represented a continued interest in European cultural and intellectual developments in direct antithesis to the cultural chauvinism of the regime. Then, more importantly, the emergent disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis, of necessity, threatened the repressive authoritarian foundations of Fascism: Gonzalo's emotional deprivation is innovatory inasmuch as it refutes the Fascist encouraged myth of the closely-knit loving - and habitually middle-class - family. Gadda depicts the parent-child relationship through the emotional response of the child, and shows it to be problematic, insecure, and painful, since the parent is more or less disinterested. Gonzalo's mother apparently lavishes her affection on everyone (like José) and everything (like the villa) except her now adult offspring. But her conduct towards her son is universally assumed to be exemplary and that of her son towards her, despicable; in consequence of their respective roles. Her kindness to

servants and strangers is interpreted as further proof of a benevolent disposition. (The conduct of Gonzalo's mother and that of the minor female characters in Gadda's books would serve as an at least partial justification of his misogyny; since women epitomize the vacuousness and egoism of bourgeois society.) Gadda however suggests that Gonzalo suffers from what psychiatrists term a 'delirio interpretativo' (40) and, in this sense, his lovelessness assumes a symbolic significance. He represents the neglect of real merit; in society, because out of profound emotion he refuses to play the facile and somewhat dishonest role of the 'Heroic Ex-Combattant'; and by the government which bypasses intelligence and rewards bogus claims of disabling war wounds and the exercise of occupations of dubious legality, in a word which favours the Gaetano Palumbos. The circumstances of the novel are obviously a thinly disguised satire on Fascist Italy, and more specifically on the middle classes in Lombardy, just as Gonzalo is a vehicle for the author's sentiments.

Gadda's testimony is important as a negation of the Fascist myth of normality, the healthy mind in the exuberantly healthy body, etc. His preoccupation with neurosis constitutes an affirmation of human frailty; of the weaknesses, or the inability to function, of the individual in a given society. He invalidates the myth of the collectivity by his statement of the personal. His consistent attitude of non-resignation is the measure of his self-respect, and perhaps in the context of the times it offers cause for optimism - albeit limited - inasmuch as it portrays the individual's continuing capacity for resistance. In 'Il mulino del Po', Bacchelli also portrays the resilience of the individual to adversity; but Bacchelli's subject is the noble Ferrarese peasant, and by adopting the stance of the omniscient narrator he eliminates the possibility of revealing his own human frailty. In a

passage more or less central to the novel, Bacchelli declares (with reference to the events of 1856):

'Insomma, mi si permetta una confessione: s'io fossi nato sotto il papa, come i miei vecchi di famiglia, dubito che avrei indirizzate al Gladstone, come fece quel buon ingegno del nostro Farini, le accuse contro il governo di quello che sarebbe pure stato il mio paese, benchè fondate;..... Avrei sbagliato: ed è anche per questo che mi son fatto, se ardisco dirlo, poeta e storico di quel minuto popolo italiano, che di polemiche, e anche d'ideali politici, sapeva poco, e forse anche meno voleva sapere, e non per fiacchezza della fibra vitale e morale; tant'è vero, che in ogni tempo e traversia serbò un costume suo, e la sua religione, e la civiltà e un animo suo, e la lingua, ch'è della civiltà strumento e difesa e fiore, e che lo fu ed è, della nazione italiana, in grado tanto eccellente, per merito del popolo non meno che degli scrittori.

Considerando l'intrinseco di ciò che il popolo nostro ha saputo serbare e tramandare, e attraverso quali vicende e condizioni e calamità estrinseche, il fatto ha del mirabile.' (41)

This quotation contains, in nuce, Bacchelli's belief in the positive contribution the Northern Italian peasants made to the Unification of Italy. (Of course no such claims are - or indeed could be - made for the Southern peasants by Alvaro, Jovine or Silone.) However, even disregarding a possibly romanticized element in Bacchelli's portrayal of the Ferrarese peasants, the novelist's choice of period still remains problematic and more or less equivocal; for, by the time of writing, this period had retreated into the safety of 'history'.

It should be noted that Gadda dedicated 'Il castello di Udine' to Bacchelli, and that another autobiographical persona appears in the chapter 'Il fontanone a Montorio' namely the 'signore taciturno' characterized in part by his 'preoccupazione di sfuggire al calligrafismo'. (42) When 'Il castello di Udine' was published parallels were drawn between Gadda's style and the 'prosa d'arte' of the 'rondisti' - one of whom was Bacchelli. In

fact, whereas Gadda's prose, no less than his art, is characterized by an intense personal involvement with his subject, Bacchelli's language is the expression of his deliberate eschewance of direct and problematic commitments. Like Almeida in Bacchelli's novel 'Iride', Gadda experienced and enjoyed his life most fully in the First World War, but unlike Bacchelli, who treated the war as an enriching experience in itself, Gadda, in 'Il castello di Udine' refused to dissociate it from its outcome; which was, ultimately, Fascism. Obviously the two writers held differing opinions on the relationship of truth to art. Guarnieri clearly considered Bacchelli's position morally untenable: through his literary criticism of the time (this essay bears the dates 1935 and 1943) Guarnieri sought to undermine Fascist positions and encourage novelists to subversion. He judged 'Il mulino del Po' thus:

'Non è dunque la voluminosa trilogia animata da una volontà di scelta, da un'indicazione, da una speranza; vi domina sempre il senso dell'accomodamento, una tenace volontà di vivere e di resistere, ma neppure la sofferenza è tanto forte da esigere una rivolta, da proporre un mutamento; anzi v'è in questi molinari, dominante, il disprezzo d'ogni illusione, di'ogni novità, e di contrasto ad essi chi coverà nuove aspirazioni, chi attenderà una salvezza non convalidata alla consuetudine quotidiana arriverà alla disperazione, a perdere persino il necessario; è quindi la loro una storia di cauta diffidenza, di continuo ricostruire, incapaci, anzi sprezzanti di fronte ad ogni possibilità di rinnovamento;' (43)

and Bacchelli thus:

'si è negato ogni posizione attiva, costruttiva, ponendosi nella situazione di chi appena può pensare al necessario, né gli resta tempo a desiderare od aspirare al meglio.' (44)

Guarnieri's criticisms of a certain passivity towards the existing order, the reluctance to change, are in a certain sense valid - although they fail to consider Bacchelli's own declared objectives. Moreover Bacchelli could be further censured for the fact that he records - albeit fleetingly -



the traditional antisemitism of Ferrara in 'Il mulino del Po' at a time (1938) which coincides with the beginning of Mussolini's antisemitic campaign, and also for a certain hostility he manifests towards Socialist tactics (particularly the use of boycotts in 'Mondo vecchio sempre nuovo'); although he does concede that the Socialist Party alone seriously championed the cause of the peasants.

However, 'Il mulino del Po' represents Bacchelli's weltanschauung perfect in itself, and therefore subject only to the author's own criteria. The peasants' resignation, their preoccupation with merely trying to contain adversity within certain limits and not actively striving to improve their lot, is thoroughly justified by the author's own pessimism. After the murder of Orbino, while the women are waiting for his corpse to rise from the river, Bacchelli states the 'moral' to be drawn from the novel:

'Il mondo non è più se non disgrazia, contro cui ribellarsi è più inutile che soffrire. Nascere non è altro che un venirci a morire, vano come l'andar del fiume, e a cui fu aggiunta soltanto l'inespiabile certezza: quei che ti amano, quelli che ami, ti lasciano o li lasci: pena su pena, non altro: nella certezza della morte, vuol essere morta anche l'anima. Simile al fiume che rende salme, l'ora dell'uomo s'annulla nel tempo che la reca. Vi cade la speranza, la carità vi muore, è perduta la fede.' (45)

Taken on its own merits, Bacchelli's pessimism is admirable inasmuch as it postulates - and his peasant heroes epitomize - a virile acceptance of, and perhaps a certain resilience to, an inexorable fatality. Bacchelli's peasants are constantly aware of their limitations, in other words their human frailty, but they are devoid of self-pity; and this in itself conflicts with the hollow optimism of Fascism, and the preoccupation with the omnipotence of the will. Mussolini mythologized the omnipotent individual who:

'con la sua libera volontà può e deve crearsi il suo mondo' (46)

while writers who rejected the Fascist mythology in one way or another insisted upon the humanifying weakness and vulnerability of the individual. Bacchelli praises the instinctive wisdom of the peasant and his spontaneous devotion to Christianity, uncomplicated by concern for dogma, which is in fact more or less the continuity of the traditional peasant code of conduct: notably, in the case of the Scacerni family, this code of conduct is subject to a stern morality. It is, moreover, by definition, refractory to change, to external intervention into its closed world, and by implication therefore refractory also to Fascist rule.

The historical period chosen by Bacchelli (the Unification of Italy and the preceding decades) was, as stated above, one of the literary themes the regime encouraged; the rationale doubtless being something to the effect that Fascism was the true heir of that patriotic fervour which first conceived of a great and powerful Italy. Bacchelli, however, portrays a less heroic and more credible aspect of the period: he concentrates on humble peasants who were not involved in the glorious conquest of Italy, only experiencing it through the usually onerous, if not totally catastrophic, reverberations on their lives. He says with specific reference to the year 1861:

'Cominciava insomma la storia del Regno d'Italia, senza brillare per altri fatti gloriosi, ma che s'impone al rispetto per un aspro, diuturno, onesto sacrificio, che fu di quelli modesti: e non sono i più facili, nè in cui meno s'affermi e fruttifici la sostanza d'una utile virtù nazionale e popolare. Che infine, se le plebi parteciparono poco al Risorgimento, ebbero parte assai, e dolente e coraggiosa, nel pagarne i debiti.' (47)

Bacchelli, like Jovine in 'Signora Ava', offers an alternative representation of the period, according to which the upsurge of the feeling of national unity was fostered by a minority and suffered by the confused majority

of the poor who, subjected to such ills as heavy taxation and conscription actually fared worse in a unified Italy. The peasants ironically experienced the nascent democratized Italy as an increasing impingement on their autonomy; previously they had been in a sense beneath the concern of rulers and politicians, now without reaping the rewards of democracy they are obliged to pay Italy's debts, in the form of the above mentioned civic and national duties. Also like Jovine, Bacchelli hints at the discrepancies between political propaganda and reality; he insinuates that political theory is perhaps the most ill-adapted instrument for improving the lot of the peasant, since the theories of even so-called 'enlightened' politicians fail to consider the disastrous repercussions of their policies on the peasants. This is particularly true of 'Mondo vecchio sempre nuovo', which recounts the Socialist agitations and depicts the political, or perhaps more precisely moral irresponsibility of the local agitators whose judgement is impaired by lunacy (la Lupacchioli), self-interest (Raibolini) and bland cynicism tempered by political ignorance (Macchiavelli). Also Bacchelli makes little direct reference to the first campaign of Garibaldi, another of the Fascist idols (except through the adulation of the unwholesome Bracciemezzo and friends) but he recounts the progress of Cecilia Scacerni's innocent young son Lazzarino amongst the cowardly scoundrels who fought and lost the second campaign. The unsavoury delineation of the rascally volunteers, the unheroic portrayal of the leaders of the campaign and the inclusion in the novel of certain insinuations about Garibaldi himself, all serve to desecrate the idol.

Bacchelli's election of a historical setting eliminates the possibility of directly confronting contemporary events and Fascism, thus rendering him immune from compromise. In the context of the times this was more or less equivalent to an expression of non or anti-Fascism. His

adherence to the tenets of the rondisti, and his conviction of collocating Italian literature in the wider European tradition, illustrated by the debt of 'Il mulino del Po' to Balzac, Zola and Tolstoy, as well as Verga, further confirmed his dissentient position. Nor is his aloofness from Fascism either as complete or as simple as it might initially seem: there are, he says, lessons to be learned from history. Having discoursed at some length on Baron Flaminio's naïvely incorrect assessment of the relationship between the Pope and Metternich in the 1840's, he comments:

'E così, coi discorsi e le conventicole e i voti e le arie cospiratorie, la setta Ferdinandea arrivò a rimuginare fantasticherie, come il nome indica, d"unione personale", d'annessione delle legazioni al regno lombardoveneto, e insomma un vero e proprio tradimento al papa, per salvarlo suo mal grado: processo d'un fenomeno politico che si rinnova in ogni tempo della storia, e che è istruttivo conoscere, dato che il baron Flaminio non fu un uomo volgare e che esso processo arrivò alle estreme conseguenze.' (48)

Baron Flaminio's example indicates the dangerous confusions that threaten even the most able men who involve themselves in politics. Other 'historical lessons' are perhaps more suggestive; Pietro Vergoli, the paradigm of the parvenu, takes to smuggling when denied legitimate outlets for his affairs. He thereby benefits not only himself, but also the peasants of the area: however Bacchelli shows his activities to be detrimental to stable government. The conclusions he draws are deliberately generalized:

'La gente dello stampo e dell'istruzione d'un Pietro Vergoli, che non andava tanto in là col pensiero e colla riflessione si figurava di restar buon suddito fedele al governo costituito e legittimo, perchè non nutriva idee sovversive, non vagheggiava mutamenti formali, purchè restasse libero di eludere e frondare le leggi economicamente dannose. Nè s'accorgeva che era un ossequio neanche formale, e in sostanza un reato.

Le cose erano al punto in cui maturano le rivoluzioni;

onde quella italiana si è troppo detto che sia stata tutta opera di intellettuali, di politici e d'una dinastia, perchè essa rivoluzione era ormai necessità di vita. Il caso di Pietro Vergoli ..... dimostra uno dei tanti modi in ragion dei quali gli uomini ambiziosi d'attività e di ricchezza nuova, i borghesi insomma, si trovarono ad essere rivoluzionari anche credendosi papalini sinceri.'

(49)

The bourgeois's pursuit of his financial interest is then an important contributory factor in the creation of a revolutionary situation.

The third volume of 'Il mulino del Po' is entitled 'Mondo vecchio sempre nuovo.' This title seems to reflect a fundamental aspect of Bacchelli's philosophy: history constantly repeats itself although in a somewhat modified form; but as the pessimism inherent in this title implies each successive modification bodes worse than the previous one - particularly for the peasants. Human evolution seems to proceed along a downward spiral. A clear illustration of this is the Raguseo-Vergoli-Clapasson continuity: through different means these men successively dominate the region, causing increasing disturbance in the peasants' once closed world. There is doubtless a continuation between the authoritarian temperament of Baron Flaminio and later political figures of a similarly authoritarian disposition. Indeed Baron Flaminio more or less echoes the hackneyed Mussolinian slogan on the need for violence, when outlining his theories on retributory justice:

"La clemenza è buona e bella, la misericordia è una virtù cristiana, ma che cosa insegna la ragion di stato? A tempo e luogo. Che cosa la sana politica? La vera misericordia è la severità del pugno di ferro e del cauterio: *parcere subiectis et debellare superbos*, ossia: il medico pietoso fa la piaga puzzolente." (50)

Equally it would not be unreasonable to suggest a certain continuity between the Socialist goals and tactics of 'Mondo vecchio sempre nuovo,

and those of the period immediately after the First World War - although always making allowance for modification. If it is the case that history permits of virtually limitless parallels, it is evident that the rabble-rouser and political opportunist from Romagna, Virginio Alpi, who enjoys fanatical support between Forlì and Faenza, is a precursor of Mussolini. Going further down the spiral, the way towards a dictatorship was prepared by democracy; or more precisely by the abuses of democracy which the newly procured freedom of speech and the legally sanctioned divergence of political opinions permitted to flourish. Bacchelli defines the abuses of democracy with reference to Cavallotti's actions and the tax on flour, which further impoverished the peasants.

He says:

'le polemiche sul fare di quelle del Cavallotti contribuirono assai a screditare l'autorità e a distruggere il rispetto, lusingando e adulando a una già troppo reale inclinazione della gente a derider quella e a vergognarsi di questo, a sparlare con pretensione saputa che sotto l'impertinenza e l'ostentazione degli entusiasmi d'un moralismo piazzaiuolo ed elettorale, celava e alimentava, più vera, una stanca e penosa accidia. E questo potè molto a difficoltare da noi nella vita pubblica l'abitudine del rispetto reciproco fra le persone e i partiti, e di tutti verso le leggi e le regole.... Così la demagogia preparava, come suole, le condizioni della dittatura esercitata di fatto poi da Crispi e da Giolitti, instaurendo un discredito delle istituzioni parlamentari e rappresentative,' (51)

In this case the sequence obviously runs Crispi-Giolitti-Mussolini.

Bacchelli, then, has the virtue - rare enough during the Fascist period - of rendering recent history comprehensible, but more important of explaining and assessing the circumstances that ultimately enabled the Fascist Party to seize power. According to Bacchelli's system, Mussolini's dictatorship appears as a more or less inevitable consequence of Giolitti's 'dictatorship'; in the light of the wealth of information

Bacchelli provides it becomes possible to conjecture on the interplay of circumstances which created Fascism. Whereas Fascist propaganda insists on the inevitability of Fascist supremacy as the return to a kind of national right-mindedness, Bacchelli implies that the regime constitutes a further stage in the degeneration of political and national affairs. Moreover since the chronicle of a century is in itself a protagonist of 'Il mulino del Po' it is possible to acquire a sense of perspective; the kind of perspective discouraged by the myth of Fascism as an absolute. And since historical reality is constantly evolving it becomes feasible to assume that the Fascist regime is only an interlude, and therefore, like all other interludes, of only limited duration. Ultimately Bacchelli perhaps attributes the same importance to the Fascist interlude as to the upheavals of 1898, of which he says:

'A quei fatti non si può attribuire altro valore che d'esperienza: ma poichè l'ebbero, significa che esperienza fu fatta, scontata, adoperata; dunque che la nazione era viva e vitale, come dimostrò presto.'(52)

For the younger generation of writers, such as Vittorini, Pratolini and Bilenchi, the question of achieving a historical perspective did not arise under the Fascist regime. Rather, the emergence of 'fascismo di sinistra' in the early thirties suggests the degree to which Fascism was able to create a vacuum around itself; but also that its allegedly Socialistic origins and principles were necessary to render Fascism palatable to the younger intellectuals. Vittorini's novel, 'Il garofano rosso' illustrates the contemporary, necessarily naïve, confusion of Communism and Fascism by artists and intellectuals. The novel depicts the reverberations of the March on Rome and the murder of Matteotti on the schoolboy protagonist Mainardi; but the sentiments and political convictions attributed to Mainardi in the first part of the book, belong

to the 30's, when it was written, rather than to the early 20's. Mainardi's 'fascismo di sinistra' is closely linked to his feelings towards his parents: his empathy (53) for his father's workers is balanced by his antipathy towards his father's hypocrisy, his lack of idealism. The divergent sympathies of father and son appear to be motivated, in part, by the 'generation gap'. Vittorini recounts a conversation between the two thus:

"Ma come!" dissi. "Sei stato socialista e non lo sei piú?"

"Ragazzo mio" disse mio padre.... "il socialismo è un'idea e uno può avere avuto delle idee. Anzi è un'idea generosa e uno della mia condizione può aver voluto essere una volta generoso. Ma poi nella vita s'impone la necessità di salvarsi ognuno per conto suo."

"Oh!" esclamai "allora tu ti salvi .... per via di loro che si perdono?" (54)

Mainardi's father, almost emblematically nicknamed 'La Morale', epitomizes the bourgeois 'good sense' of subordinating idealism to the practicality of self-interest, whereas Mainardi embodies the uncompromising idealism of youth, the desire to prove himself to be better than his parents; he says of himself and his sister:

'eravamo cresciuti credendoci migliori di babbo e mamma, con un acuto senso di generazione nuova, e avevamo l'animo aperto agli altri che ci fossero simili negli anni e in tutto.' (55)

Both Mainardi and Vittorini were duped on two crucial issues by the propaganda of the regime; Tannenbaum remarks - admittedly with the advantage of hindsight:

'Much has been written about Fascist ..... populism and bourgeois-bating as 'covers' for preserving the real interests of the bourgeoisie. (Curiously .... little has been written about the Fascist glorification of youth as a 'cover' for preserving the power of the older generations.)' (56)



Tarquinio's remark to Mainardi regarding the March on Rome:

"Ora è questo che bisogna dire. Che non è stata una marcia di industriali; e che fascismo deve essere qualcosa di più e di meglio di un comunismo e non qualcosa di meno del liberalismo."  
(57)

indicates the good faith and sincerity with which these ideas were received. Mainardi's support for a questionable brand of Fascism is fortified rather than undermined by the Matteotti affair. He acknowledges the need for violence thus:

'mi pareva che fosse necessario avere steso a terra nel sangue qualcuno, se veramente volevo entrare nella vita,' (58)

For Mainardi violence is, essentially, a means of destroying the limitations imposed upon his reality by the dominant bourgeois conventions. The revolt of the adolescent symbolizes that of the novelist. In the light of the deviant political faith of the first part, and the equally deviant and precocious sexual revolt of Mainardi's affair with the prostitute Zobeida in the second, it is anything but surprising that the novel was banned by the censor. The appearance of the 'ragazzino' at the end of the novel suggests Vittorini's dissatisfaction - whether conscious or not - with 'fascismo di sinistra' and the need for a more profound examination of human problems that prefigures certain themes of 'Conversazione in Sicilia'. By the end of the novel immature political faith is already yielding ground to the beginning of the search for a mythical formulation of human solidarity and personal validity.

Bernari's 'Tre operai' published the following year (1934) offers a less romanticized portrayal of working-class life. There is nothing inherently admirable or attractive about the life of Bernari's workers, recounted in brief impassive sentences. 'Tre operai', an early Neorealist novel, sought a generic statement of workers' conditions.

It is situated somewhat loosely in Naples, and hardly less loosely, spans the second decade of the twentieth century. The novel is only partially successful as a generalized representation of the predicament of urban workers: often its attempted universal significance seems to be relegated to the bitter moral of the chapter headings, which range from the allusive like 'Ricomincia a piovere. Quando un operaio va in cerca di lavoro, piove sempre:' to the incisive, like 'Teodoro va via di casa perché in una famiglia di operai non si può essere che operai' and 'Anna è libera: se ne va a Roma, e conosce i ladri dei poveri.' However, in the context of the times 'Tre operai' is nevertheless a remarkable novel; not only does it express an unseasonable concern for the reality of the workers' condition, as the aforementioned quotation from 'Il Bargello' testifies, but it offers a rare description of a tabooed subject - the left-wing occupation of the factories of 1921. (It also depicts the debilitating schism of the political Left-wing and the resultant disorganization that prejudiced the outcome of this occupation; and consequently reduced the credibility and efficacy of the Left.)

The novel examines the predicament of Teodoro, Anna and Marco, whose lives are dominated by hardships and a sense of hopelessness: Anna in particular nurtures petty bourgeois aspirations as the sole means of evading her condition; but these remain fantastic. An atmosphere of despair, of the helplessness of the individual permeates the novel, deriving from and mirroring the Fascist reality of the 30's; but equally, as Manacorda remarks, 'Tre operai' contributed to the creation of a particular climate:

'... Un clima problematico e deseroicizzato che strideva quanto possibile con le direttive ufficiali e con quello che esse volevano far credere sulla situazione italiana. Al posto di uomini dalla volontà granitica e dai luminosi destini, questi scrittori (Bernari, Jovine e Moravia) presentavano quali eroi degli "indifferenti",

dei "provvisori", degli uomini grigi e logori. Usciva dalle loro penne una denuncia, indiretta ma non troppo, che cominciava a mordere sulla società italiana anticipando nel risvolto negativo quello che poi sarebbe stato un più aperto attacco.' (59)

Perhaps the deaths of Anna and her child constitute a denunciation of workers' conditions in Italy. Their deaths are at any rate closely interrelated with their poverty, which more or less 'naturally', precludes the possibility of them receiving adequate medical care. Further Bernari stresses the gulf that separates the bourgeoisie from the working-classes: in the hospital where Anna's weak heart is discovered, the doctor offers the sound but impracticable advice that she should avoid all exertion: in the area in which Marco, Anna and Teodoro live, where the workers' houses, although originally built by industrialists with the humanitarian intention to:

'assicurare agiatezza agli uomini abbruttiti dal duro lavoro e dall vita isolata' (60)

have nevertheless become dirtier and more miserable than the middle-class dwellings: in the contrast between Anna and Teodoro, the working-class couple, and Anna's sister Maria, (who achieves middle-class status by becoming a 'kept woman'), her lover and friends. Maria's friends discuss acquaintances and their forthcoming summer holiday: Anna clearly feels the gross disparity of pay and opportunity on which Bernari implies class differences hinge, and she comments - significantly - on the sheer incredibility, rather than the injustice, of the coexistence of war profiteers and of the unemployed and starving. Further Teodoro suffers the typical injustices to which the worker is subjected, although it would be hard to say whether they are more applicable to conditions under the regime, than to the preceding decade 1911-1921. Teodoro is more or less obliged to resort to internal immigration, that is to say to move to

another city, in order to find work. He becomes a revolutionary because he needs work even if that work is fomenting revolution. He subsequently abandons revolution for the same reason; to enhance his job prospects. He is ultimately a contradictory character, perhaps not so much indecisive, as reduced to vacillation by his lack of the means to impose his will on the course of his life; by a social order that is weighted against him. (Unanimity and unquestioning obedience were perhaps the prerequisites of the much vaunted Fascist iron will.) The novel ends with Teodoro's release from prison - to which he was sentenced for violence - and his portrayal as a broken man.

Thus far, we have seen that the non Fascist writers tended towards an antithetical, relatively realistic depiction of the bourgeois, the urban worker and the peasant. The portrayal of both the bourgeoisie and the working-classes, suggests their vulnerability, but more precisely a certain morbidity, an atrophy of volition, which derive from the loss of a sense of individual identity. (Fascist propaganda, it should be remembered, actively discouraged the pursuit of individual identity.) The portrayal of the peasant by Alvaro, and later by Pavese, was somewhat more positive: as Silone was to say, the spiritual vitality of the peasant had previously been a more or less untapped reserve, in literary and social terms. However, during the thirties, possibly as a reaction against a diminished sense of identity, and enriched by the findings of psychoanalysis, another antithetical depiction emerged; that of the child. Paolo Arcari declaimed the literary merit of d'Ambra's pro-Fascist 'pot-boiler' thus:

'Che cosa sarebbe senza la paternità 'La sosta sul ponte' di Lucio d'Ambra? Sarebbe una delle psicologie dell'"età critica" di cui le letterature d'oltremonte si sono fatte un monopolio. Ma per la presenza continua nella lontananza, per la cocente memoria nello stesso oblio, per la fedeltà sanguignante nello spasimo quasi di un'apostasia, l'affetto paterno di Sisto Bibbiene è dolorosa indimenticabile creazione.' (61)

Yet Sisto Bibbiena's conduct shows him to be immature, irresponsible, and totally egocentric. In the Fascist novel parental affection was all too often deemed conclusive proof of irreproachability. Dissident writers quite simply destroyed the myth of an idyllic family life, of the adored, and adoring, child of doting parents - who were habitually middle-class, although theoretically the myth transcended class differences.

Significantly this genre hardly considered the child as a separate personality, whatever his age. In contrast, Vittorini, Bilenchi, Pavese and Pratolini all examine two essential aspects of the child's life: his insecurity in a necessarily problematic relationship with his parents and the joyful self-contained world of the pre-adolescent.

The insecurity and hostility of the middle-class child towards his parents is apparent in 'Il garofano rosso' and Bilenchi's 'Conservatorio di Santa Teresa', 'La siccità' and 'La miseria'. Mainardi's feeling of estrangement from his parents is succinctly put; of his mother he says:

'Mi intimidiva. La sentivo estranea a tutto quello che avevo dentro. E del resto, da bimbi, quando mi trovavo solo con lei e babbo in una stanza dove essi parlavano tra loro, tante volte m'ero chiesto se proprio erano mamma e babbo, e se non erano invece due barbari che mi avrebbero mangiato un giorno o l'altro, ridendo e parlando tra loro.' (62)

Vittorini suggests that far from reassuring the child, parental intimacy actually threatens it, making it feel insecure. The point is further reinforced in 'Erica e i suoi fratelli'; Erica comes to consider abandonment by her mother preferable to her presence since it is only the presence of adults which introduces a disagreeable note into the child's world. Vittorini traces Erica's thoughts thus:

'La vita doveva, per loro ragazzi, essere quella ch'era lì, in una casa, in una città; e non era brutto. A loro ragazzi piaceva, e il brutto era stato sempre soltanto per la miseria di cui facevano

peso i grandi. La miseria non esisteva che attraverso i grandi per loro ragazzi. Forse neanche il freddo esisteva per loro se i grandi non lo nominavano.' (63)

Nor does fear exist for Erica except through her parents. Her inner world, that of the child, is essentially serene and happy; her vision of her parents and her awareness of their sexuality is however disenchanted and seemingly therein indebted to Freud and Jung, whether directly or indirectly. Her initial identification with Gretel, and Vittorini's tendency to portray her condition through situations reminiscent of myth or fairy-tale, seem to confirm this debt.

Obviously, 'Erica e i suoi fratelli' constitutes an indictment of the social policies of the regime. The short story is situated in the early to mid-thirties - this much we can deduce from the stationmaster whose hobby it is to chart the future Italian empire with pins on a map. It is no coincidence that his wife, (a kind of 'wicked witch' figure) cheats Erica of her hen, no more than the fact that such poverty as that of Erica and her family coexists with the Fascist project of building a 'greater Italy, through the creation of an Empire. Her family's constantly aggravated poverty constitutes a passive denunciation of Fascism. It is poverty that causes her father to seek work elsewhere, thereby breaking up the family. Reduced wages and large-scale unemployment are depicted not as serving some nebulous 'general interest', but as inflicting gross and disheartening hardship in the working-class microcosm of the courtyard. Erica's father pithily discredits the relevant Fascist propaganda:

'Scrivava anche che il salario era troppo poco, che si scusava se mandava appena cinquanta lire per la quindicina, lui restava con sessanta e non aveva da stare allegro. Si lamentava molto e protestava, e continuamente ce l'aveva coi "bastardi", specie con un giornalista che lo aveva interrogato sulla sua vita e chiamato "un esempio!" "E mi ha chiamato

un esempio, il bastardo, perché dice che così sono un vero amico del governo, vivere con due lire al giorno e mandare il resto alla famiglia. Uno patisce di tutto e sta privo anche della moglie, e loro bastardi battono le mani contenti." (64)

He is noticeably refractory to the 'spirit' of the regime. Finally, it is poverty that causes Erica to resort to prostitution. From a very early age Erica dreamed of emotional and physical self-sufficiency as the optimum situation. The recurrent image of her dreams is a bunch of grapes, epitomizing the state of self-sufficiency which alone permits 'compagnia', in implicit contrast with the menace inherent in Erica's initial dependence on her parents which is extended to her relationship with all adults. Vittorini defines her fundamental instinctive convictions thus:

'Non si aspettava che la gente le desse. Non voleva genitori nella gente.' (65) 'Essere al mondo non aveva mai significato altro che essere in mezzo al folto delle cose e della gente per lei, tanto che la casa stessa, e la sorella, il fratello, il carbone, il petrolio facevano gente per lei.... Ma non poteva tollerare l'attenzione ferma per cui due occhi, o molti occhi, calcolano, giudicano, condannano, e che non è più compagnia e anzi è il contrario della compagnia, un ostacolo ad ogni compagnia.' (66)

Such condemnation is levelled against Erica by the working-class women of the courtyard once her innocence has been abused and her provisions stolen: they manifestly shy from responsibility for her, for they are as loath as she is to contemplate her dependence on them. Like the story of Hansel and Gretel, the narrative illustrates how extreme poverty and deprivation blunt their feelings of compassion or solidarity or whatever, for Erica's predicament. Significantly, however, it is the wives of the more affluent, the relatively middle-class civil servants, free from the coercion of necessity, who wilfully abuse Erica's innocence. The theft of her provisions by the fat lazy wife of a civil servant is perhaps an allegorical abuse - or 'offesa'. Further the charity of the middle classes

is shown to be highly suspect: initially middle-class women visited Erica's courtyard dispensing charity in return for a show of subservient gratitude, later the state employee's wife offers Erica a little of the polenta stolen from her. Prostitution then is a cruel option for Erica, but one that preserves the self-sufficiency in which resides her integrity; the prostitution of her body nevertheless leaves her essence unthreatened and intact. Hence she leads the men away from her bed:

'E così disponeva fin per le piccole cose di lasciare che gli uomini implicassero nel loro fare quello di cui non le importava nulla, come se disponesse anche per se stessa di dare in balia al fare degli uomini una parte di sé di cui non le importava nulla.' (67)

Obviously it is a sad and ironic reflection on Fascist society that an innocent child is reduced to this in order to feed her brother and sister, and to save herself from worse; that is the loss of her independence and dignity, which are no less keenly felt for being instinctive. Prostitution emerges as the consummation of Erica's poverty, even, in view of her outlook, as a sort of fatality. The doubly scabrous nature of her prostitution, moreover, constitutes a twofold indictment of Fascism; not only does it indicate the regime's failure to resolve social problems, (and even its total detachment from and disinterest for social problems) but it suggests the - presumably - shocking notion of the child's sexual initiation, (which is, in fact, necessitated and even perpetrated by the coercive force - the army - of an *un*paternalistic regime). It seems probable that in antithesis to Freud's theory, Fascist propaganda would have shunned this notion of the sexuality of the child, especially the young child, and even his awareness of his parents' sexuality, since Vittorini, Bilenchi and Pratolini introduce this theme to disrupt the myth of the idyllic, secure and unproblematic family.) Further Erica is used, and cruelly used, by soldiers who are perhaps the exponents of a sadistic aggression masquerading



as virility, or of the machismo of the regime, or both. Erica evaluates masculinity thus:

'Potevano disprezzare e perseguitare, loro uomini; far del male ed essere fieri, e non parlare di bontà. Fieri, orgogliosi, essi potevano, alle volte, in qualche cosa, in qualche modo, anche dichiararsi cattivi, e militare sotto una bandiera di cattiveria dichiarata. Credevano che ciò fosse virile. Così Erica pensò che forse si poteva ottenere da loro uomini quel qualunque lavoro di cattiveria che lei voleva. Da loro uomini, pensò.' (68)

The novel, although unfinished, attains a certain perfection through the tone of its conclusion, which is one of pathetically moving victory. Erica although quintessentially vulnerable, manages to preserve her independence of a harsh, uncaring world, through a sacrifice she considers relatively unimportant; the sale of her body.

The preoccupation with the child in non Fascist novels, appears almost as an involuntary reflection of the writers' predicament; of their own insecurity and loss of identity. In Bianchi's 'Conservatorio di Santa Teresa' the young middle-class protagonist Sergio lives in a state of constant insecurity either actually neglected by his mother, Marta and his aunt, Vera, or envying their exclusive intimacy. Raised in the country, Sergio is sent to school in the town, more or less at adolescence, and these circumstances contrive to force an awareness of sexual relations upon him. For Sergio this constitutes something like a fall from grace that threatens to destroy the Golden Age of his childhood, until he finds that he can prolong the idyll in the country; and thus the novel ends on a note of optimism. In 'La siccità' and 'La miseria' the interrelated long short stories of the following year (1941) the themes are often similar to those of the novel, but they are now susceptible to a profoundly different interpretation. Like Sergio, the protagonist of these stories is a boy whose development is traced until adolescence; who feels the

dichotomy between town and country and experiences a certain insecurity in his familial relationships. (Although his insecurity is equally attributable to his urban environment in 'La siccità' and his broader social environment in 'La miseria'.) However, possibly in response to Italy's aggravated international situation, the treatment of these stories substitutes the preoccupation with the particular for a generic insinuation, (perhaps enhanced by the fact that the narrator is unnamed) and creates an atmosphere evocative of that of Fascist Italy.(69)

Bilenchi emphasizes the evocative rather than the symbolic quality of these stories:

'parlerei di una atmosfera che implicitamente risente di una situazione umana e storica (il fascismo, la guerra), piuttosto che di una metafora che volontariamente rappresenta il fascismo e la guerra.' (70)

In accordance with this statement, I would suggest that 'La siccità' and 'La miseria' evince the infiltration of Fascist inspired attitudes into the home and interpersonal relations. It is, however, impossible to altogether exclude the symbolic interpretation, which seems to present itself spontaneously.

Perhaps Bilenchi's narrative is indicative of the climate of the regime and the cultural reaction against it, inasmuch as it is based on a number of antithetical attitudes, of town and country, parent and child, etc., some of which are shared with Pavese. In 'La siccità' the grandfather and the narrator can form an alliance because both are outside the age limits of social constraint; since the grandfather is retired and the child too young to be of social importance. Thus they both have a freedom of action denied to the other members of the narrator's family. The grandmother, despite her age, is typical of Bilenchi's women, in that like Bruno's womenfolk in 'Conservatorio

di Santa Teresa' she elects herself the agent of society to constrain her husband. The conflict between the two is recorded by the narrator for whom the grandfather comes to epitomize freedom, integrity, enterprise and infinite wisdom; whereas the grandmother's camp, from the start, embodies self-interest and disloyalty. The narrator discovers the grandmother's plan to depose her husband as financial head of the family during his first period of inertia and comments on the discovery:

'Appunto a quel tempo, mentre più palese si faceva la penosa condizione del nonno, avevo avvertito un'altra cosa che nei giorni di tristezza mi dava preoccupazioni e dolori, perchè rivelava l'umanità, anche nella ristretta cerchia che ognuno è portato ad accusare sempre per ultima, molto più cattiva di quanto immaginavo.' (71)

Clearly, this criticism is applicable to Fascistized society as a whole. The conflict is extended from personalities to country and town. The country is the ideal realm of the grandfather (turned farmer) and the narrator, where everything is subject to natural laws, and a certain sanity reigns. The narrator says he loves the countryside:

'in cui ogni elemento era indispensabile all'altro, gli uomini, al contrario di quelli della città, eguali fra loro e necessari.' (72)

In the town the natural order is disregarded; and a heedless and disastrous malevolence - the contemporaneous emotional climate perhaps - reigns supreme:

'Confrontavo i contadini cogli abitanti della città che non possedevano alcun senso di tolleranza, che manifestavano impudicamente i propri giudizi, le proprie preferenze.' (73)

The disaster begins with the drought (which certainly has its counterpart in the emotional sterility of the townsfolk) and culminates in the fire

that temporarily threatens a whole area, finally rallying the townsfolk. At this point 'La siccità' is reminiscent of Camus's, 'La peste'; and like 'La peste' seems an unmistakable allegory of the country's situation in war. The conclusions of 'La siccità' and the narrator are optimistic:

'E di fronte all'incendio sentii di perdonare agli uomini per lo spaventoso flagello della siccità che avevano attirato sulla campagna.... Ero tranquillo. La sciagura a cui avevo assistito m'aveva acquietato con tutti. Non poteva accadere nulla di grave quando si aveva l'aiuto di tanta gente e tant'altra stava in attesa di sacrificarsi a sua volta... Mi parve quella l'ora in cui il nonno avrebbe dovuto tornare.' (74)

This optimism soon rings bitterly hollow. The narrator's rapprochement to family and townsfolk in fact occurred after the abandonment of his grandfather, of which he says with unconscious wisdom:

'Anche me aveva abbandonato, e questo pure era giusto: ero figlio di mio padre e di mia madre, appartenevo a loro, a quella casa.' (75)

'La miseria' depicts his reconciliation to his natural mentors, his parents, and his gradual and painful accommodation to their attitudes. Clearly, the title is a 'double entendre'; the family are ruined financially and thus exposed to spiritual misery. This constitutes another of the antitheses underpinning the narrative: affluence like that of the narrator's friends, is the prerequisite of spiritual well-being and autonomy, the protection against humiliation. His family, once deprived of their wealth, acquiesce with seeming ease to the degradations that increasingly afflict them, and the relatively independent spirit of the narrator is gradually cowed, by the two-fold circumstances of poverty and adolescence. He says of their straitened circumstances:

'Anche quella casa che tanto amavo non era più tutta nostra e mi parve che ce la potessero portar via da un momento all'altro.... Triste cosa essere

caduti in miseria. E la miseria vibrava i suoi  
colpi uno dopo l'altro, uno più violento dell'altro...  
Era un continuo degradarsi il nostro, un continuo  
perdere di libertà.' (76)

(He adds that this misery, like a fatality, afflicts him especially, because he attempts to resist it.) This description is, of course, equally valid as a portrayal of the condition of the dissident individual in Fascist society, and as an allegory of the gradual Fascist encroachment of the freedom of the individual. The narrator's resistance is finally checked by the 'despotic' widow's manoeuvres. She appears and appoints herself as 'friend of the family' in their hard times. She signifies the consummation of their shame and reduced social status; she tyrannizes them and renders their predicament still more disagreeable, yet the mother and grandmother seek to curry her favour. But whether her despotism symbolizes the despotism of Fascism, or whether she epitomizes the advancement under the regime of an unscrupulous and ruffianly class of dubious origins, is, in fact, a less important consideration than the acquiescence of her victims; which is exemplified by the case of the narrator. The widow plots to confound him through an absurdly premature project of marriage to her daughter, and he resolves to seek refuge and save his independence through a closer association with his rich friends. And then, quite gratuitously, he robs her of a small sum of money. She denounces him to his family - then reassures him. He says:

'Come al solito l'accompagnai fino alla porta.  
Essa... m'accarezzò dicendomi di non preoccuparmi  
per i rimproveri che avrei ricevuto dalla nonna  
e dalla mamma perchè avrebbe aggiustato tutto lei.  
Allora sentii d'essere ormai caduto nelle sue mani.  
Se non avessi preso quei soldi mi sarei ancora  
potuto salvare.' (77)

The significant aspect of this scene is, of course, the boy's complicity; he lets himself be intimidated, albeit unconsciously. As much as the

widow's talent for corruption what is remarkable is the boy's corruptibility. This constant - but unconscious - complicity of tyrant and tyrannized, corruptor and corruptible, is a predominant theme of 'La miseria' and highly suggestive whether as an allegory, or as a portrayal of the atmosphere of the regime. It is remarkable also as an illustration of the author's unrelieved pessimism. 'La miseria' finishes on a marvellous note of tragedy manqué: the boy's acquiescence has eliminated the momentary possibility of the pathetic grandeur of tragedy.

Pratolini's spiritual journey under the regime followed a similar course to that of Bilenchi and Vittorini: from a vague 'fascismo di sinistra' to a position of anti-Fascism. In 'Il tappeto verde' (1941) in a series of brief, interconnected sketches, he develops the theme (which now seems to constitute something of an anti-Fascist tradition) of a more or less autobiographical childhood, in both its happy and problematic aspects. Pratolini's treatment of these aspects is, however, characteristically colourful: Enrico, the narrator, recounts his neglectful mother's attempt to strangle him, when she is moribund. Like Vittorini and Pavese, Pratolini acknowledges a debt to American culture. Of the gang with whom he associated as an adolescent he says:

'Forse un'idea approssimativa, ma abbastanza impropria, di ciò che noi eravamo, possono darla certi film americani.' (78)

but his technique of depicting working-class Tuscan life through sketches, (bozzettismo) is in the tradition of Pratesi and Tozzi, and his language reminiscent of the 'prosa d'arte'. The collocation of Enrico's adolescence in a working-class area of Florence, the adventures, aspirations and sentiments he shares with his friends in part prefigure 'Il quartiere', although crystallized and further elaborated in the latter. Like other non Fascist literature, 'Il tappeto verde' moves, not

altogether successfully, from a portrayal of the almost mythical childhood of the individual, to a - somewhat abstruse - attempt to state the universal predicament of Fascist Italy, and the supplication with which the book ends. The narrator says:

'Finchè non basta più il nostro nome a riconoscersi, ora che qualcosa di crudele lo sommerge, ed è un'immane cadenza di scarpe chiodate che ci ha sorpreso a colloquio con la chioma d'oro. Potremo posare il nostro cuore ma sapere che lo consegniamo *insieme*: se la guerra può darci la ragione dell'umano, confortiamola; per un avvenire che ci trovasse finalmente impietosi e crudeli daremmo la nostra ostinazione: siamo saturi di dolore, povere creature di Dio che noi siamo, e saliremo il Tempio se la scalinata ove molti precipiteranno ci permetterà di fendere con la corda che ci fece il peggior male disprezzando la nostra povertà, la nostra incapacità di vivere. Oh come anche noi dovremo ripetere l'illusione perchè l'errore si perpetui senza fine! Eppure questa non era la promessa che ci facemmo: e tu hai vergogna di aver tentato di salvare la pietà nel tuo cuore ora che la pietà non basta più e non basta amore: gli uomini credono di sapere che nemmeno Gesù basta, sulle loro braccia armate riposa la Sua giusta bontà. (Nulla ci sazia, nulla ci soccorre, il vizio è in noi, vizio è rinnovare la nostra quotidiana paura di vivere. Io so che bisogna liberarsi della nostra paura, *trovarsi*: avremo mazzi di rose, canestri di pane nel giorno della salvezza.)' (79)

This vice, termed the fear of living (which suggests that it comprises a measure of personal responsibility as well as external constraint exerted by the regime) constitutes an anguished acknowledgement of complicity and culpability for Italy's disastrous situation. Bilenchi's short story 'La miseria' denounces this same vice - but in a significantly different tone of acerbity. The admission of a weakness tantamount to complicity with the regime is important, especially because more or less peculiar to the acutely demoralized atmosphere of the war years. In the post-war years the tendency is all too frequently to reduce the issue to absolute right (on the side of the anti-Fascists) and absolute wrong (on

the part of the Fascists); a simplification from which Pratolini too is not exempt in certain novels, like 'Cronache di poveri amanti'. The elements of dissent that emerge from 'Il tappeto verde' then, consist of the above cited attitude towards Italy's participation in the Second World War, the alleged debt to American culture and Enrico's adolescent rebellion against his working-class tradition; he refuses to remain in his factory job. His friends also rebel against the existing order, through acts of petty delinquency, in the manner of adolescents: (although it seems unlikely the regime would tolerate adolescent rebellion any more gladly than any other kind) and Foffò, perhaps the most mature of the band, leaves to fight in the Spanish Civil War with the following comment:

"Quella è una guerra.... nella quale un uomo sa cosa cercare. È come quando da ragazzi ci si batteva per volersi più bene." (80)

But Foffò's ingenuous faith in humanity of 1936-37 clearly succumbs to the demoralized and despairing impotence of the war years, which concludes the sentimental journey of 'Il tappeto verde'.

Pavese, like Bilenchi and Pratolini, considers childhood a kind of Golden Age passed in innocence of the complexities of adult life. Pavese, however, considers the predicament of the adult an essentially personal concern; constituted by a diminished sense of personal identity, and by the lack of 'roots' or a firm foundation, both emotional and geographical, for his existence. Doubtless this sense of depersonalization derived at least in part from the anti-individualism of Fascist propaganda, and presumably it reflected the disorientation of the individual under the regime which extended even to his attitude towards himself. Certainly within the context of the times this purely personal preoccupation constitutes a valid manifestation of disenchantment and dissent. For Pavese the emotional roots of the individual reside in the experience of



childhood, and the geographical in the countryside in which he grew up; specifically the Langhe, since Pavese's preoccupation with the definition of identity is primarily autobiographical. Pavese defines the parallels between myth and the roots of the individual thus:

'Ora, carattere, non dico della poesia, ma della fiaba mitica è la consacrazione dei *luoghi unici*, legati a un fatto a una gesta a un evento. A un luogo, tra tutti, si dà un significato assoluto, isolandolo nel mondo. Così sono nati i santuari. Così a ciascuno i luoghi dell'infanzia ritornano alla memoria; in essi accaddero cose che li han fatti unici e li trascelgono sul resto del mondo con questo suggello mitico.' (81)

The emotional and geographical are, then, inextricably linked. Pavese's protagonist is frequently the disoriented town-dweller, the man who apparently 'functions' reasonably well in his urban environment, but who lacks a fundamental sense of purpose, of meaningfulness. In a word he suffers from the 'mal du siècle'.

The two poles of Pavese's thinking, town and country, are contained in the minor, but in a sense complementary novels 'Paesi tuoi' (1941) and 'La spiaggia' (1942). 'La spiaggia', somewhat reminiscently of Scott Fitzgerald's 'Tender is the night', depicts the emptiness of the bourgeois way of life, in its most extreme manifestation; the ritual summer month by the sea. The various characters all have what is ostensibly a 'good time', with the predictable round of social activities and badinage. However, the narrator (whose namelessness is perhaps a confirmation of his depersonalization) explains his ex-student's conduct thus:

'Presi a spiegare che la sfacciataggine di Berti era soltanto timidezza che per autodifesa diventava aggressiva... Gli era accaduto quel che succede a tutti: la realtà si travestiva nel suo opposto. Come gli animi teneri che si atteggiavano a ruvidezza.' (82)

Certainly, this misleading social behaviour is true of all the company - and true of Fascist posturing also. Clelia, unloved and neglected as a child, still feels a deprivation her social standing would seem to belie. She says she swims alone because:

"Nella vita non ho niente di mio. Mi lasci almeno il mare." (83)

The narrator affects impassibility, Doro declares Clelia is a 'good vocation' but admits he would become a painter if he had the courage, and Guido, the man of action, will not rid himself of a mistress who bores him. Nevertheless Guido differs from the other characters through a certain disagreeable vulgarity: vaguely reminiscent of that of Leo in 'Gli indifferenti'. He tends to reduce matters to a question of sexual hygiene, diagnosing Doro's 'trouble' as the failure to satisfy his wife. He explains to the narrator:

'che il lavoro cerebrale e nervoso indeboliva la potenza virile, ragione per cui a ogni pittore toccano periodi di depressione tremenda... "Vita sana", disse. "Lavorare ma senza foga. Svagarsi, nutrirsi e discorrere. Soprattutto svagarsi.'" (84)

This uncomplicated outlook, taken in conjunction with his physical appearance, which has 'la falsa virilità dell'abbronzatura' (85) suggests a Fascistic characterization, like that of Leo which, if not accordant with Fascist propaganda perhaps, is nonetheless illustrative of a frequent and unheroic interpretation of it. Guido's essential simplicity is contrasted with the greater complexity of the narrator and friends; they are more cultivated, more sensitive and more disenchanted. Their social conduct, which has a pathetic charm is, in fact, the expression of their personal failure. Clearly, like Doro, they all lack determination, or a sense of purpose; Doro and the narrator especially seem to suffer from a kind of emotional atrophy. Doro's estrangement from Clelia is not caused by an argument or grievance, but by apathy;

the absence of positive feeling towards her. Similarly, the narrator simply does not consider travelling to Genoa to see Doro, notwithstanding their friendship.

In a sense the two men's friendship is in the past. Doro came to the town, significantly, because of his wife, and was claimed by it, no less than by the bourgeoisie. The narrator says:

'Doro con la sua disinvoltura pareva benissimo trapiantato nell'ambiente della moglie. O dovrei dire piuttosto ch'era l'ambiente della moglie che aveva riconosciuto in lui il suo uomo e Doro li lasciava fare noncurante e innamorato.' (86)

The narrator intuits that Doro's curtailment of his clandestine return to his native region (the 'groundsnake' of American literature) constitutes an acceptance of the impossibility of returning where one was once happy. This, together with his depersonalization, tends to suggest that Doro's accommodation to middle-class life has been far from easy. Doro refutes the notion that he has returned to the country to rediscover his roots:

"Che ti credi ? Che io faccia il ritorno alle origini ? Quello che importa ce l'ho nel sangue e nessuno me lo toglie." (87)

but this was evidently his purpose. He regrets his lost intimacy with the narrator, and the lost possibility of intimacy generally - which belonged to the mythical period of youth in the country. For the narrator this mythical time culminated in their walking holiday through the region:

'Anni e anni prima che lui si sposasse, avevamo fatto, a piedi e col sacco, il giro di tutta la regione, noi soli, spensierati e pronti a tutto, tra le cascine, sotto le ville, lungo i torrenti, dormendo a volte nei fienili..... Avevamo allora l'età che si ascolta parlare l'amico come se parlassimo noi, che si vive a due quella vita in comune.....' (88)

Thus 'La spiaggia' illustrates the depersonalization of the individual in the town, and the consequent preoccupation with the need to preserve a personal myth as the foundation of identity.

Now whereas 'La spiaggia' portrays the mythical quality Pavese attributed to the native region of the individual, 'Paesi tuoi' more or less resumes the values of vitality, innate justice and purposefulness, attributed to the peasants by non-Fascist writers, like Alvaro. The primitive or barbarous characteristics of Talino and Vinverra merely reproduce the malevolent fatality of nature, the summer, and the harvest. These fatalities appear as little more than the consequence of the overabundance of natural vitality. Gisella's death is the necessary, placatory ritual sacrifice made to ensure a good harvest, and yet Berto, the narrator, remarks:

'Si vedevano ancora nel portico le macchie di sangue. Cosa c'è di speciale, pensavo, tutti i giorni le strade ne bevono. Ma a guardarlo e pensare che quel fango era il calore de Gisella che se ne andava, veniva freddo anche a me.' (89)

Gisella's death assumes a horrifying tragic relief, notwithstanding its impassive treatment. 'Paesi tuoi' represents a return to essentiality; in contrast with Fascist propaganda's obsession with an abstraction of violence and death, it depicts realistic violence, credible death. It attempts a return to meaningfulness. (Similarly, the mutual attraction of Berto and Gisella is instinctive, sexual, without justification and without explanation.) Pavese's laconic and seemingly impassive style constitutes an antithesis to the overstated rhetoric of the regime that avoids clichés and stereotypes. The language and content of 'Paesi tuoi' are correspondent in that both serve to create a more realistic perspective. Pavese's language attempts to follow the rhythm of speech or thought; its success must be evaluated in terms of its chronological

innovation, and the significance of this. Clearly Pavese owes a stylistic and thematic debt to American literature, (a more or less regional preoccupation was manifest in contemporary American literature also) but his emulation of American models is, perhaps, also a statement of solidarity with the country and culture which, at the time, seemed most vital and most democratic. (References to a less idealized and more materialistic, bourgeois America emerge through the comments of Mlle. Delaney in Gadda's 'La Madonna dei filosofi' and the description of Peggy and her origins in Palazzeschi's 'Le sorelle Materassi'.)

'Paesi tuoi' and 'La spiaggia', then, indicate the dismal failure of Fascist propaganda to substitute a collective artifact for individual identity. After almost twenty years of Fascist rule, the individual is perhaps more depersonalized than ever before. He feels little or no sense of purpose in his own existence and no sense of community; Fascist propaganda having long insisted on a 'common purpose' and a national pride to the deliberate detriment of a sense of individuality. He is obliged to seek his roots in his native region because Fascist Italy, the donor of his 'instant' jingoistic national identity, has only disoriented him. Pavese's novels imply that the propaganda of the regime offers nothing, but only aggravates the predicament of the sensitive, cogitative individual in urban society.

Notwithstanding Pavese's conviction that a cruel fatality dominates rural life, Alvaro and Pavese share an essentially similar vision of the peasant. But Pavese is obliged to seek in his native region a personal identity that Fascism denies its followers and subjects; whereas Alvaro has no doubts regarding his roots. Pavese's quest for roots indicates the insecurity of modern man, and the degree of infiltration into personal life achieved by Fascist propaganda.

In 'Conversazione in Sicilia', Silvestro, like Pavese's protagonists, commences his search for a revitalized awareness of his own identity with a regression of sorts into the domain of his childhood. Childhood, which is always individual and unique, is something of a 'virgin territory', the least penetrable sphere of personal life, and therefore the sole to avoid the contamination and usurpation of the spiritual imperialism of Fascist propaganda. But for Vittorini, unlike Pavese, this rediscovery of the mainsprings of his identity is the first stage of a journey that culminates in an expression of human solidarity, and affirms the necessity of a renewed moral obligation. For Pavese, the emotional heritage of his youth is generally little more than a prop for the harrowing business of day to day living.

'Conversazione in Sicilia' is often termed the spiritual testimony of a generation, and the epithet is impeccably merited. Its universal significance is stressed by the author's concluding note which states:

*'Ad evitare equivoci o fraintendimenti avverto che, come il protagonista di questa Conversazione non è autobiografico, così la Sicilia che lo inquadra e accompagna è solo per avventura Sicilia; solo perché il nome Sicilia mi suona meglio del nome Persia o Venezuela. Del resto immagino che tutti i manoscritti vengano trovati in una bottiglia.'* (90)

(Presumably the Fascist censor did not share this last conviction and the author's note might have served a dual purpose.) Silvestro defines the contemporary predicament of the individual in the opening sentences of the novel:

*'Io ero, quell'inverno in preda ad astratti furori. Non dirò quali, non di questo mi son messo a raccontare. Ma bisogna dica ch'erano astratti, non eroici, non vivi; furori, in qualche modo, per il genere umano perduto. Da molto tempo questo, ed ero col capo chino.... Pioveva intanto e passavano i giorni, i mesi, e io avevo le scarpe rotte, l'acqua che mi entrava nelle scarpe, e non vi era più altro che questo: pioggia,*

massacri sui manifesti dei giornali, e acqua  
nelle mie scarpe rotte, muti amici, la vita in  
me come un sordo sogno, e non speranza, quiete.

Questo era il terribile: la quiete nella non  
speranza. Credere il genere umano perduto e non  
aver febbre di fare qualcosa in contrario, voglia  
di perdersi, ad esempio, con lui. Ero agitato da  
astratti furori, non nel sangue, ed ero quieto,  
non avevo voglia di nulla.' (91)

The 'massacri', of course, refer to the Spanish Civil War, whose effect on Vittorini was to make him abandon the unfinished 'Erica e i suoi fratelli' and begin 'Conversazione in Sicilia'. Folco Zanobini says of the suspension of 'Erica e i suoi fratelli':

'Alla disposizione infantile e fiabesca subentra  
l'angoscia virile, il senso di "altri doveri" da  
compiere, il bisogno di ritrovare le radici pure  
dell'essere per esorcizzare il male, di pronunciare  
nuove parole intense e rivelatrici, come sa  
pronunciarle, per virtù di musica, il melodramma.'  
(92)

The above cited passage from 'Conversazione in Sicilia' illustrates Vittorini's stylistic innovation: the capacity to compress and depict an objective truth (Silvestro's apathy) through metaphors of universal applicability. The expression of Silvestro's condition is a wonderful statement of almost total depersonalization that has outstripped despair, and the capacity for affection and compassion. The only anguish Silvestro can feel is the anguish of feelinglessness, the 'quiete nella non speranza'; yet he is simultaneously aware of the need to feel compassion for an oppressed humanity. (Therein he differs from most other figures of contemporary Italian literature.) There is, further, a suggestive complementary relationship between the bombardment of dehumanized Fascist propaganda to which he is subjected, and his total spiritual withdrawal into himself: the dictionary, he says, is the only book he can bear to read. In a callous world - Silvestro's depersonalization is a bitter reflection on the society in which he lives - he cannot feel compassion, but only 'astratti furori'. The memory, or spiritual inheritance of his

childhood, has also been submerged by his depersonalization.

His father's letter provides the necessary external stimulus inducing Silvestro to return to Sicily, and there his mother acts as his guide through the first part of his spiritual journey; the rediscovery of his youthful self. He rediscovers intact a mythical childhood and finds himself in a situation 'reale due volte' consisting of intuitive revelation, and now intellectual reminiscence, enhanced by the experiences of the present. In the 'quarta dimensione', having explored his own roots and reconnected himself to the source of his primal spontaneous goodness and joy, Silvestro is able to draw certain conclusions about what constitutes man's humanity. He says:

'Un uomo ride e un altro uomo piange. Tutti e due sono uomini; anche quello che ride è stato malato, è malato; eppure egli ride perché l'altro piange. Egli può massacrare, perseguitare, e uno che, nella non speranza, lo vede che ride sui suoi giornali e manifesti di giornali, non va con lui che ride ma semmai piange, nella quiete, con l'altro che piange. Non ogni uomo è uomo, allora. Uno perseguita e uno è perseguitato; e genere umano non è tutto il genere umano, ma quello soltanto del perseguitato. Uccidete un uomo; egli sarà piú uomo. E così è piú uomo un malato, un affamato; e piú genere umano il genere umano dei morti di fame.' (93)

This judgement, with its reference to newspapers and massacres, contains an implicit condemnation of the Italian Fascist attitude towards the Spanish Civil War; on moral grounds. Silvestro articulates the author's conviction that it is the weak and persecuted who are most human; a judgement that evidently belies the notions of superiority and élitism fundamental to Fascist myths and propaganda. This judgement, although accordant with the tenets of Christianity, derives from an essentially human empathy, which was to lead Vittorini into the Communist Party. Silvestro's solidarity with the weak, with the 'uman genere offeso' is primarily a moral rather than a political choice. In the context of



the times, and within Italy (Silone was expounding a similar conviction in exile in Switzerland) this constitutes an uncommon expression of faith. In contrast *Coi e Senza Baffi*, the police functionaries, (who would not be termed men according to Silvestro's definition) illustrate the predicament of those overcome by despair, who lack faith and love for themselves and others. The *Gran Lombardo* defines the nature of the Sicilian who reduces himself to the odious occupation of police spy, thus:

'-Sempre sperando qualcosa d'altro, di meglio, e sempre disperando di poterla avere.... Sempre sconfortati. Sempre abbattuti..... E sempre con la tentazione in corpo di toglierci la vita.... Che fa uno quando si abbandona? Quando si butta via per perduto? Fa la cosa che piú odia di fare.... Credo che sia questo.... Credo che è comprensibile se sono quasi tutti siciliani.' (94)

Objective testimonies more or less corroborate the fact that the majority of the Fascist police come from Sicily or at least Southern Italy; but it should be remembered that Vittorini ultimately depicts a universal, rather than a regional truth.

Silvestro experiences a reintegration of his past with his present more or less simultaneously with the discovery of the humanizing virtue of vulnerability, for his personal condition has, from the beginning of the novel, been indivisible from his awareness of, and compassion for, the condition of a lost humanity. It is these qualities that differentiate him and also the friends he makes during his journey, from the abased *Coi e Senza Baffi*. Thus reintegrated, and led by the knife-grinder Calogero into the 'cuore puro della Sicilia' (95) Silvestro encounters the small company who suffer for the injustices of others and not for themselves. Ezechiele declares their faith:

'-Il mondo è grande ed è bello, ma è molto offeso. Tutti soffrono ognuno per se stesso, ma non soffrono per il mondo che è offeso e così il mondo continua ad essere offeso.' (96)

Compassion and community then are envisaged as ways of redressing the wrongs of the world; but this episode ends in a drinking session that Silvestro deems futile. He says:

'e io pensai alle notti di mio nonno, le notti di mio padre, e le notti di Noè, le notti dell'uomo, ignudo nel vino e inerme, umiliato, meno uomo d'un fanciullo o d'un morte.' (97)

The next stage of Silvestro's journey (although he is not yet aware of its significance) fittingly takes place in the village cemetery. Through the encounter with the dead soldier, (his brother, Liborio), and subsequently through his mother's response to the news of her son's death, Silvestro is forced to re-evaluate certain notions of death and militarism that are the common currency of the Fascist regime. Hitherto assuefaction and their abstraction had rendered these notions more or less acceptable. However, Silvestro's compassion is aroused by the supernatural conversation with the soldier, who defines the nature of his nightly performance (rappresentazione) to him. Typically, Silvestro approaches the question according to the tenets of human solidarity, seeking the human reaction, the suffering with which he can empathize. He asks:

'.....È una brutta cosa ?

-Ohimè, sí, - rispose lui. -Legato schiavo, trafitto ogni giorno di piú sul campo di neve e di sangue.

-Ah! - io gridai. È questo che rappresentate ?

-Per l'appunto - il soldato rispose. -A questa gloria appartengo.

Dissi io: -Ed è molto soffrire ?

-Molto, - disse lui. -Per milioni di volte.

Io: -Per milioni di volte?

Lui: -Per ogni parola stampata, ogni parola pronunciata, per ogni millimetro di bronzo innalzato.' (98)

The glory to which the soldier belongs, and the phraseology of this is significant, is the Fascist patent on death. That his death, as grist

for the Fascist propaganda mill, constitutes an 'offesa', is illustrated by the fact that the soldier suffers for each and every manifestation of militarism, for the 'patriotic' rhetoric that - induces and - exploits death to its own ends. The enactor of the Fascist 'collective will' does not then necessarily endorse its policies; and nor does the mother, who is the wife and daughter of a Gran Lombardo who has retained her humanity. Silvestro offers her the consolations of the regime for the death of a son, and she in all simplicity refutes them:

'Disse mia madre: -Non pensar male di lui, ora.

-Male? - io gridai. -Che ti salta in mente? Sarà stato un eroe.

Mia madre mi guardò come se io parlassi con amarezza.

-No! - disse. -Era un povero ragazzo. Voleva vedere il mondo. Amava il mondo.

Perché mi guardi così? - gridai. -È stato bravo. Ha conquistato. Ha vinto.

Ancora più forte gridai: -Ed è morto per noi. Per me, per te, tutti questi siciliani, per far continuare tutte queste cose, e questa Sicilia, questo mondo.... Amava il mondo! .....' (99)

The fact that Liborio's death helps perpetuate the existing order - the underlying effect of its propagandist potential - is another facet of the 'offesa' which he suffers. Silvestro's mother reduces her son's death not so much to the proportions of a mother's grief (for she has the self-control befitting the spiritual grandeur of her menfolk) but rather to the proportions of a mother's instinctive wisdom - which denounces Fascist rhetoric in all its emptiness and callousness. She asks:

'Perché quella signora mi ha chiamato fortunata?' (100)

Silvestro manages to convince her momentarily of the invidiousness of her situation, of the distinction it confers upon her, but his own conviction has been correspondingly shaken. The process of persuasion ends thus:

'Conclusi: -Una medaglia per il merito di lui.

Ma mia madre, proprio qui, cominciò a crollare.  
 -Com'è possibile? disse. -Era solo un povero  
 ragazzo.

E io cominciai a temere. Cominciai anche a  
 ricordare. (101)

and the next chapter begins:

'Che significava un povero ragazzo?' (102)

Silvestro, followed by the assembled cast of characters he has met during his Sicilian journey, goes to stand beneath the Fascist war monument in the village. The monument, a bronze statue of an unrealistically large woman possesses a certain impure voluptuousness, that reflects all the coarseness of Fascist tenets. (It also implicitly contrasts with the pure heart of Sicily Silvestro has discovered, and his own pure discovery of sexuality as a child of seven.) Beneath the monument, as if seeking the protection of an amulet, Silvestro again starts to laud the policies and even the delicacy of the regime, but he finds himself unable to do so; Silvestro's empathy for the soldier has, imperceptibly, effected the internalization of his views. Silvestro says, of the Fascist dead:

'-Essi non sono morti comuni, non appartengono  
 al mondo, appartengono ad altro, ed hanno questa  
 donna per loro.

-Ehm! - aveva detto il soldato.

-Non è gentile da parte nostra dedicar loro una donna?

-continuai. -In questa donna li celebriamo.

-Ehm! il soldato aveva detto. -Ehm! Ehm!

-E in questa donna - io continuai, -in questa donna...

M'interruppi, e il soldato parlò in me, disse forte:

-Ehm!' (103)

Now, the importance of this dissent from such crucial Fascist myths as those of glorious death and militarism lies in the fact that it is the inevitable consequence of Silvestro's human solidarity; since the two must be mutually exclusive. Silvestro's gradual realization of his

position is, obviously, a deliberate device, which suggests the difficulty of refuting the fundamental assumptions of Fascism, and even the difficulty of discerning between truth and falsehood under a regime that undermines and denies objective criteria. The location of Silvestro's realization is, no doubt, significant: having rebutted the fundamental myths of Fascist propaganda, the whole edifice is shown to be unsustainable and, in fact, somewhat indecent. Silvestro's revelation is naturally shared by the companions of his journey, since Vittorini implies that awareness only acquires validity and personal relevance if it is intuitive shared knowledge, (thus Silvestro only fully experiences the soldier's outlook when the latter speaks in him) and the novel ends with the refrain of human solidarity.

'-Ed è molto soffrire? - chiesero i siciliani.' (104)

The complement of compassion is the 'altri doveri' first suggested by the Gran Lombardo, who says:

'Credo che l'uomo sia maturo per altro, - disse.  
-Non soltanto per non rubare, non uccidere, eccetera,  
e per essere buon cittadino.... Credo che sia maturo  
per altro, per nuovi, per altri doveri. È questo che  
si sente, io credo, la mancanza di altri doveri, altre  
cose da compiere..... Cose da fare per la nostra  
coscienza in un senso nuovo.' (105)

(This quotation illustrates perfectly Vittorini's mythologizing technique of enhancing and multiplying allusions, through the repetition and careful juxtaposition of generic terms or seemingly insignificant single actions.) Perhaps the obstacle to the realization of 'altri doveri' lies in the very nature of the Fascist regime. The Gran Lombardo, with his faith in man's capacity to improve himself morally, to attain higher achievements, is the continuation of the 'ragazzino' of 'Il garofano rosso'. The problem of course is to define those 'altri doveri'. Porfirio, Ezechiele, and

Calogero failed to find them, and perhaps betrayed their aspirations in drink. Liborio suggests the means of fulfilling these duties to Silvestro, at which point the fiction and Vittorini's literary intention coincide.

The soldier says of the 'actors' who perform nightly:

'-Debbono farla. Essi appartengono alla storia.....  
 Io: E che rappresentano ?  
 Il soldato: Le azioni per le quali son gloriosi.  
 Io: -Come ? Ogni notte ?  
 Il soldato:- Sempre, signore. Fin quando Shakespeare non mette in versi il tutto di loro, e i vinti vendica, perdona ai vincitori.  
 .....Io: -Immagino che soffrono molto. Cesari non scritti. Macbeth non scritti.' (106)

'Conversazione in Sicilia' is, then, conceived as an expression of a fundamental human and social commitment, as a means of fulfilling a moral obligation, of effecting some change. However little this change may manifest itself in action, the novel bears witness to a change of heart from an apathy that posed no obstacle to the interests and policies of the regime, to a definition of human solidarity diametrically opposed to Fascist tenets. And while Fascism cannot be charged with creating the 'uman genere perduto', it can be charged with perpetuating if not aggravating, and even systematizing the 'offese' it suffers; such is, perhaps, the case in 'Erica e i suoi fratelli'. The rarity of 'Conversazione in Sicilia' does not reside solely in its remarkably emotive and evocative prose, but also in the content to which this prose so admirably moulds itself: for ultimately Vittorini's narrative constitutes the expression of a renewed faith and optimism. During some of the blackest days of the 'ventennio nero' and against the odds, Vittorini nurtured a hope for the future, for the perfectibility of mankind.

Almost contemporaneously with 'Conversazione in Sicilia' Buzzati completed his novel 'Il deserto dei tartari' (1939). His description of his own feelings of hopelessness at the time of writing it, - when

working for "Corriere della Sera" - suggest that like Silvestro he suffered from a depersonalization that drastically undermined his capacity for autonomy. Buzzati says:

'Dal 1933 al 1939 ci ho lavorato tutte le notti, ed era un lavoro piuttosto pesante e monotono, e i mesi passavano, passavano gli anni e io mi chiedevo se sarebbe andata avanti così, se le speranze, i sogni inevitabili quando si è giovani, si sarebbero atrofizzati a poco a poco, se la grande occasione sarebbe venuta o no,.....' (107)

That the life of the individual will, in the end, be proved to have been futile, to have served no useful purpose either for the individual or for society, is the preoccupation that permeates Buzzati's novel 'Il deserto dei tartari', also. (This anxiety is doubtless a product of the climate of the regime.) But Buzzati's hero Drogo vainly seeks his life's justification in heroism, which is of necessity an isolated condition - as is attested by his somewhat stereotyped dream of doing battle with the enemy almost single-handed, and despite fatigue and injury, showing such courage as to attract the attention of the King himself. As stated above, Silvestro discovered that human solidarity alone could confer validity upon his life. A confrontation of 'Il deserto dei tartari' and 'Conversazione in Sicilia' accentuates the degree to which the former was representative of the sense of futility born of Fascism, and the latter a rejection of the Fascist encroachment on the spirit of the individual.

Certainly, Drogo's heroic dream is somewhat hackneyed, but it is just one of the devices employed by Buzzati which suggest that much of the Fascist rhetoric regarding militarism, heroism and death was both hackneyed and empty. Admittedly, 'Il deserto dei tartari' is an allegory of the passage of time, even a kind of fairy tale whose significance is not limited to a comment on the Fascist regime; but nevertheless it appears to have its roots in the regime, and to be a personal reaction

against the regime: the military setting of the novel seems confirmation enough of this. Now, the Fortress, which exercises a morbid fascination over its inmates - as Drogo's name seems to suggest - might be an allegory of the Fascist endeavour to turn Italy into an armed camp (the famous boast of the eight million bayonets), or of the façade of invulnerability assumed by the weak and inadequate who opt for regimentation and the chance of having the distinction to which they aspire (heroism) thrust upon them, because they cannot contemplate accepting responsibility for rendering their own lives meaningful. Buzzati says, with reference to the demoralization that resulted from the reduction of the garrison:

'Pareva evidente che le speranze di un tempo, le illusioni guerriere, l'aspettazione del nemico del nord, non fossero stati che un pretesto per dare un senso alla vita.' (108)

The Fortress represents the necessity for those who dwell in it, of maintaining the edifice of illusion, for, like Drogo, if they were to renege, they would be obliged to recognise the pointlessness of their lives. (Their predicament is then more or less comparable to that of former supporters of the Fascist regime.) Brancati - whose own case was precisely that of the fervent and unquestioning supporter turned dissident - depicts in a similar fashion the predicament of Rodolfo dei Mei in 'Gli anni perduti' on discovering the failure of his hope in the 'Torre Panoramica' (another possible allegory of the illusory faith on which Fascism reposed) and in Buscaino, whose project it was. Rodolfo's situation is possibly autobiographical, and certainly essentially applicable to Drogo also. Brancati says:

'Rodolfo s'era accorto che la sua vita era legata per mille fili al pensar bene di Buscaino... l'avvertimento che vien fuori dall'aver scoperto, nell'uomo in cui più si aveva fiducia, un povero essere bislacco: l'avvertimento di difendere con la ragione quanto di pecorella nasce nel nostro cuore,



il giorno in cui, avendo esso deciso di fidare ciecamente in qualche cosa, acché non disturbi poi quella cara cecità, decide anche di fidare in tutte le cose indistintamente; l'avvertimento di riaprire gli occhi, di pensare, di dubitare, richiamava a una fatica cui non era facile sopportare, dopo dieci anni di disuso.' (109)

The Fortress sought to justify its existence by asserting its function as a defence against possible enemy invasion; thus, although there is little or no objective proof of the continued existence of the enemy, (which apparently existed once in some mythical past) the soldiers nevertheless conduct themselves as if under constant threat of an enemy attack and even occupy themselves with fabricating an enemy. This is perhaps characteristic of any closed, insular society, like Fascist Italy: in order to maintain internal unity, it has to have an external enemy, even if this requires the fabrication of an enemy, or the exaggeration of a negligible menace. Thus, in Alvaro's 'L'uomo è forte' the ruling 'partigiani' clique perpetuate a state of paranoia about the possibility - in reality highly unlikely - of a coup by the smaller 'bande' forces. Hence, perhaps, Fascist propaganda's obsession with Communists, Bolsheviks, and even at one point the League of Nations.

However, the lack of an enemy makes a mockery of heroism, and reduces it to a more or less useless commodity. The elegant and aristocratic lieutenant Angustina is alone in achieving what Drogo considers to be a heroic death, in the close proximity of the enemy (who, it should be noted, seems quite innocuous, even civil). But the death of Angustina was, in fact, caused by physical frailty, a pair of unsuitable boots and the determination to cut a fine figure at the cost of over-exertion; nonetheless he dies in the same posture as Prince Sebastian, who is depicted in an old painting hanging in the Fortress. Buzzati comments:

'Ora Angustina, oh non ch'egli ci pensasse, andava assomigliando al Principe Sebastiano ferito nel cuore

della foresta; Angustina non aveva come lui la lucente corazza, né ai suoi piedi giaceva l'elmo sanguinolento, né la spada spezzata; non appoggiava la schiena a un tronco bensì a un duro macigno; non l'ultimo raggio del sole lo illuminava in fronte ma soltanto una fioca lanterna. Eppure gli assomigliava moltissimo, identica la posizione delle membra, identico il drappeggio della mantella, identica quell'espressione di stanchezza definitiva.' (110)

Angustina's heroic death is then an artifact, a bathetic imitation of the conception of heroic death to which the Fortress has given its sanction, by actually hanging the painting. Angustina's death meets generally with respectful admiration and envy; for the inmates of the Fortress an uneventful life is, perhaps, more intolerable than a heroic death. As stated above, the garrison choose to remain within the Fortress out of an inadequacy which they seek to conceal with the glamorous myth of heroism, that is, a superior commitment, and the generous self-sacrifice to an all important cause. Drogo says:

'Ma, in fondo, qui alla Fortezza, si può sperare in qualche cosa di meglio.'" (111)

Drogo, however, will be cruelly disillusioned. Alone, ill and in inglorious middle age, Drogo realizes the vanity of this glamorous myth. His courage, ultimately, lies in the conscious consummation of his absolute solitude, his wasted life. Buzzati says of Drogo's last battle:

'Oh, è una ben più dura battaglia di quella che lui un tempo sperava. Anche vecchi uomini di guerra preferirebbero non provare. Perché può essere bello morire all'aria libera, nel furore della mischia, col proprio corpo ancora giovane e sano, fra trionfali echi di tromba; più triste è certo morire di ferita, dopo lunghe pene, in un camerone d'ospedale; più melancolico ancora finire nel letto domestico, in mezzo ad affettuosi lamenti, luci fioche e bottiglie di medicine. Ma nulla è più difficile che morire in un paese estraneo ed ignoto, sul generico letto di una locanda, vecchi e imbruttiti senza lasciare nessuno al mondo.' (112)

The sobering implication of this passage appears to be, then, that the attractions of a heroic death - as propounded by Fascism - by comparison with the undistinguished quality of a life, like Drogo's, spent in a closed society, should not be underestimated.

Brancati, like Buzzati, after and doubtless as a result of his disenchantment with Fascist positions, habitually depicted a closed society, of which Manacorda says:

'È questo il contributo che lo scrittore siciliano ha dato alla demolizione degli idoli imposti dal fascismo e cioè, si badi bene, non tanto la scoperta di un'altra e piú vera Italia che con le sue meschine passioni, il suo vuoto interiore, il suo velleitarismo impotente si contrapponeva a quella mussoliniana volitiva e quadrata, ma la rivelazione che quelle due Italie coincidevano.' (113)

Certainly Fascist Italy coincided with Brancati's closed Sicilian society, no less than with the closed world of Buzzati's Fortress; but Fascist Italy is also, in some way, responsible for the existence of these societies. In 'Gli anni perduti' Leopoldi dies while the Fascist radio blares the message:

"Forti, grandi e invincibili.... Lo slancio, la potenza, la durezza, la tenacia, l'ardire!" (114)

In 'Nataca' (115) these 'virtues' are conspicuous only by their absence and by the ubiquity of their corresponding vices. Brancati's work, no less than Buzzati's, illustrates the discrepancy between Fascist rhetoric and the contemporary reality. Indeed, perhaps it is this seemingly insurmountable discrepancy between the two, that caused Brancati to concentrate on a closed, apathetic, but in a sense self-sufficient, society. During the years of Brancati's gradual disillusionment with Fascism, he wrote 'In cerca di un sí', which may or may not constitute an allegory of the author's vain quest for reassurance that the regime had not corroded

human values, and had therefore retained credibility. The short story is set in 1935, thereby rendering the object of its satirical condemnation self-evident. In this year the protagonist Riccardo, as the result of an accident, dies prematurely. From his vantage point in the next world, he sees a happy-looking thief, and the 'Gran Segretario' explains what has happened to the thief's conscience, that permits him to feel no remorse for his numerous crimes.

'La poverina, che è anche superba, non potendo convenire che qualcosa di colui gli fosse del tutto sfuggita, inventò che aveva finto di non vedere, ma che in realtà aveva visto tutto, e non l'aveva disapprovato né impedito per il solo fatto che non era riprovevole.... Ma la coscienza ha poi a sua volta una coscienza; e quest'ultima assai più severa. Talché se essa tratta così bene lui, e lo lascia ingrassare, l'altra tormenta lei e, come vedi, l'ha ridotta in un pessimo stato.' (116)

This image of the conscience wasting away is pertinent to Riccardo's experiences when he returns to earth; his friends are obliging and sympathetic, so much so that he cannot summon any resentment against them, but they all decline to help him. They can remorselessly, even politely, reject what would once have been the dictates of conscience, whose fulfilment would, in any case, require no sacrifice on their part. On awakening from this dream, Riccardo realizes the pointlessness of appealing to the 'commendatore' for the 'sì' which would enable him to find employment. (Brancati has a fine contempt for state employees, like the Gran Segretario, whom he depicts as lacking intelligence, but possessing the qualities suited to their occupation: seemingly, stupidity, obtuseness and pedantry.) Riccardo, however, defines the torments suffered by the man not usefully employed:

'"La maggiore offesa che si possa fare a un uomo.... è quella di dirgli: Non c'è lavoro per te!" E come ci si convince subito di essere inutili!.... Diventi uno scheletro in cerca di una sepoltura.'" (117).

in 'Gli anni perduti', Roberto Luisi's condemnation of his nephew and friends hinges on a somewhat similar conviction: that these bachelors, although not reduced to skeletons (and possessing little or no personal awareness of the inherent tragedy of their wasted lives) have all more or less loosened their grasp on reality; that purposelessness has eliminated their capacity for an accurate evaluation of their merits and faults, and reduced them to self-delusion, and a certain degradation. Roberto says:

"Cosa c'è da fare? Ma c'è da lavorare, e poi da riposarsi! Ecco un bel programma per un galantuomo!... Voi,..... concepite la vita come un sacco vuoto, in cui si deve buttare alla rinfusa qualunque cosa, anche dello sterco, pur di riempirlo. Invece di lavorare secondo la coscienza e la modestia vi dettano (*O dignitosa coscienza natta! Come t'è picciol fallo amaro morso!*) dividete i vostri giorni fra l'ozio più vile e le imprese più balorde. *Sei savio e intendi me' ch'io non ragiono.* Vi giudicate a volta a volta deboli o colossi, palloni anche in questo, ora gonfi ora sgonfi, a seconda che vi riempia o no un rumoroso soffio." (118)

The description of the bachelors' lives is accurate enough; although it should perhaps be said that they are not entirely responsible for their idleness. Certainly they appear temperamentally and ethically inclined towards idleness, but their mothers encourage them along this course by subtly undermining their masculinity and independence both by an adroit use of emotional blackmail and by an over-protective affection. But Brancati suggests that there is at best little work for the middle-class Sicilian within Sicily, and that in Rome the business of finding work is governed by rigid and inhibiting procedures; it is, firstly, necessary to have a powerful friend or acquaintance in a government ministry (or an introduction to the same) and then to pester him at regular intervals to intercede in favour of the unemployed,

Leonardo, however, returned to Natàca and remained there in sloth for a different reason; the light has disappeared from his life,

He explains the phenomenon to Lisa Careni shortly after his return:

"Mi manca quella luce interna che rischiara la via, che fa vedere davanti a noi, che dà uno scopo a quello che si fa;... mi manca il permesso, un autorevole permesso, di vivere." (119)

Significantly, the novel spans a period of some fourteen years, and was written between 1934-36 - from which we might deduce a chronological correspondence between the extinguishment of Leonardo's light (together with an onset of nausea) and the seizure of power by Mussolini. Hence the meaning of the statement that he feels he lacks permission to live and enjoy his life, in all probability, reflects on the repressive, dictatorial nature of the regime, whose travesty of paternalism imposed upon its subjects all kinds of prohibitions, rather than permissions. Further, lacking the permission to actively mould his life, time weighs heavily and futilely on Leonardo, so much so that together with his friends, he devises modes of killing it. After seven years of this existence, Buscaino appears with the plan of building a 'panoramic tower'. This plan enlists the whole-hearted support of Leonardo's society, because it offers the illusion of doing something useful, although in fact the construction of the tower is an otiose project - precisely how otiose is illustrated by the novel's dénouement. They consider that the success of the tower, (deemed inevitable) will retrospectively justify their fallow period in Natàca, and that the profits derived from it will enable them to return to Rome, and assure them equal or greater advantage than would have done steady employment over the years. The tower, then, indicates that after years of inertia, an illusion may be mistaken for - and embraced as - reality. Possibly the tower is an allegory of the illusoriness of Fascism and its attractions to those devoid of purpose, and even, in the long run, to those whom Fascist domination has divested of a sense of meaningfulness; possibly it is a

materialization of the hackneyed 'ivory tower', whether of Fascism or insularity or both. At any rate, the novel suggests that stagnation, such as occurs in *Natàca* begets only stagnation, and that the inertia of Leonardo's society is apparently enduring and limitless.

In 'Don Giovanni in Sicilia' the illusion masking inertia is one of sexual prowess à la don Juan - which has however assumed a peculiarly Sicilian character. Now the myth of an ardent sensual nature by this time constituted an established tradition; Sicilians (and Southern Italians) especially seemed to consider it the quintessential characteristic of the stereotyped national identity they ascribed to themselves: and as a predictable complement of Fascist virility in other fields, it doubtless infiltrated Fascist mythology also. Brancati suggests that the Sicilian boast of sexual prowess or 'gallismo' is totally without foundation, and indeed that Giovanni's sexual preoccupation is curiously linked to impotence. Giovanni finds his own sexual fantasies infinitely more exciting than actually possessing women. Thus, after his marriage, migration to Milan and abortive affairs with three mistresses, he returns South to his own bed and resumes daydreaming. Brancati says:

'Rivide le signore lombarde; ma al paragone di come le aveva viste, sembrava che proprio allora fossero ricordi dilavati e ora invece donne vere. E che donne!.....' (120)

Prior to marriage he preferred his siesta to a potential mistress. In fact, Brancati implies that for Giovanni, his friends and the whole masculine society of Catania, there is a clearly defined distinction between the enjoyment of women and pleasure. He says:

'D'altronde, se la loro esperienza del piacere era enorme, quella delle donne era poverissima.' (121)

For Giovanni's generation it would appear that pleasure correlates

singularly to torpor: Giovanni discusses women with his friends, dreams about them, but within Sicily eschews any sensual exertion. In Milan, he becomes quite literally another person; he divests himself of the torpor that constitutes his true sensuality, and transforms himself into a 'man of action' and in most aspects an ascetic. The superficiality of this transformation, or at least its dependence on his environment, is illustrated by his immediate reversion to 'gallismo' on returning to Sicily. Thus, Giovanni might be considered something of a chameleon, inasmuch as he assumes the predominant illusion of his environment: but the significant fact is that both the 'gallo' of Sicily and the man of action of Northern Italy are fabrications, unfounded illusions; and therein comparable to the unfounded illusions of Fascism. The Fascist reality no more corresponds to its own propaganda, than does Giovanni embody the 'great sensualist' of his intimate conviction. Brancati depicts a closed, self-deluded, paradoxically arrogant society with a single preoccupation: nor are the women of Sicily exempt from a feminine form of 'gallismo', if the fantasies of ardent suitors indulged in by Giovanni's sisters are in any way representative.

In 'Gli anni perduti', Brancati makes the following generalization - with reference to the continued interest in the feminine form, manifested by the old men of Natàca:

'Se i vecchi erano così poco rassegnati, i giovani erano inaciditi.' (122)

In a sense the generation depicted in 'Don Giovanni in Sicilia' are also 'inaciditi'; the normal process of maturation, somehow, perhaps as a consequence of Fascism, has by-passed them, leaving indolence as their only fully developed characteristic. Lust or eroticism, in itself normal and spontaneous enough, has been first diverted to sex dolls and the promises of procurers, and then emasculated, more or less like purposefulness, in



'Gli anni perduti'. Perhaps it is the case that whatever fabrication is employed in the attempt to fill the vacuum of a closed society, it ultimately serves only to accentuate the vacuum. The central characters of Brancati's works discussed above, have all, in one way or another, severed their bond with objective reality; it would appear, however, that the delusions on which they base their existence and evaluate their own merit within their closed society, reflect the substitution of artifacts for reality of the outside world. Possibly Professor Solco of 'Gli anni perduti' functions as a mouthpiece for Brancati's conclusions on the state of contemporary society both within and beyond the confines of Fascist Italy when he declares:

'D'altronde, se gl'individui vanno male,  
malissimo, l'Europa va forse meglio? Dove?  
Chi dice: "Io cerco la felicità per i miei  
governati, la giusta misura, il benessere, la  
quiete; io cerco di procurar loro quelle  
condizioni sicure in cui fioriscono meglio i beni  
grandi della vita: l'arte, la famiglia, il lavoro,  
la dignità?"' (123)

A study of Brancati's works of the period would show these conditions to be conspicuous only by their absence; certainly the central characters all belong to families, but they fail to establish families of their own at an age when it might be expected of them. For love (with the exception of parental love) no less than sensuality, has been reduced to a travesty. Giovanni becomes emotionally involved (on the second Sunday in April 1939, it emerges) and this raises his self-estimation considerably; Ninetta acts as a reagent revealing previously unknown qualities in himself to the lumpish Giovanni, but the lack of a profound bond of affection is illustrated by his conduct on returning to Sicily. Nor would it appear that love motivated Ninetta to marry. Nonetheless the fact of Giovanni's marriage is, in itself, extraordinary: after Ninetta's glance, the amorous encounter par excellence of Catania, Giovanni crossed the gulf

from the 'sensualists' his former companions, to the 'lovers'. The latter adore from afar, indulging themselves in a bathetic and belated imitation of the 'trovatori' and they congregate to discuss glances, devotion, suffering and insomnia, tranquilly, in the assurance that their devotion will be without outcome. There is therefore an element of terror in Giovanni's conception of the nature of marriage. Brancati says:

'Il pensiero di dover dormire, tutte le notti, con una donna, gli dava le caldane, come quello del servizio militare a un cinquantenne che non ha fatto mai il soldato.' (124)

In Alvaro's novel 'L'uomo è forte' Dale says of the climate of the totalitarian country to which he has voluntarily immigrated:

'-Ecco un'atmosfera che è propria per i grandi amori, le grandi passioni.' (125)

but in response, his girl-friend Barbara states the attitude generated by the new regime in her country:

'-Noi non diciamo piú che la verità.... Ognuno per sè. Si è soli.' (126)

According to the author's preface, the novel is set in Russia, nor does there seem to be overmuch reason to doubt this assertion, since the material deprivation, uniform poverty of the town, bugging of hotel rooms, and ubiquitous surveillance are more characteristic of twentieth century Russia than of Fascist Italy. Such must have been the opinion of the Fascist censor, at any rate, since apart from insisting on a change of title - of which more will be said presently - and the omission of some twenty lines, the novel was published intact. The essential point of the novel (that possibly escaped the censor) is the author's attempt to portray the fundamental nature of totalitarianism. Under the circumstances this was a quite remarkable undertaking, and one which was,

moreover, evidently relevant to the state of Fascist Italy, since a repressive authoritarianism was common to both. In 'L'uomo è forte' (published in 1942), Alvaro defines totalitarianism primarily in terms of the corrosion of human and moral values it effects. The failure of Dale's and Barbara's love is inevitable in an atmosphere of constant surveillance and fear: the fact of belonging to a single person is tantamount to conspiracy against the collective ideal. Dale thinks:

'Essere di uno solo, riservargli qualcosa di profondo e di incomunicabile agli altri. Staccarsi dagli altri. Avere ripugnanza degli altri. Essere uno. Ecco la colpa. Bisognava essere tutti.'  
(127)

The terror provoked by the constant menace of culpability does not appear to be conducive to the development of a love affair, especially when culpability is a purely arbitrary notion. With reference to the recent arrest of three youths for conspiracy - they were actually employed in translating foreign literature - Dale's employer, the 'direttore' explains:

'-non è questione di sapere che siano o non siano veramente colpevoli. Spesso anche l'apparenza della colpevolezza è una colpa.' (128)

Certainly, this definition of the arbitrary nature of culpability can be validly interpreted as an implicit condemnation of Fascist Italy also.

Thus in Alvaro's totalitarian society the consideration of the risk to which it exposes the individual destroys love; nor does love figure largely in the - hopefully representative - selection of books surveyed by this chapter which examines attitudes of dissent from the Fascist regime. While terror, perhaps significantly, only appears in 'L'uomo è forte' depersonalization and sheer boredom generally account for the elimination of love in contemporary dissident literature. The

adolescent Mainardi experiences a temporary infatuation for both Giovanna and Zobeida, but it is only in Jovine's 'Signora Ava' that a mature, reciprocated, self-sacrificing love is depicted. Not that the love between Pietro and Antonietta is without an element of personal risk; rather it might be said to be characterized by a self-effacing heroism whose very modesty gives the lie to the loud travesty propounded by Fascism. 'Signora Ava' is set in Southern Italy during the period of the Risorgimento, and thereby avoids all overt dialogue with the reality of the regime. It is evidently indicative of Jovine's convictions that 'Un uomo provvisorio' which he terms a spiritual autobiography (129), portrays the disorientation of man in contemporary Italy, whereas 'Signora Ava' together with the brief but characteristic portrayal of the emptiness of the town-dweller, offers an affirmation of faith in humanity. If 'Un uomo provvisorio' depicts what man has become, the ending of 'Signora Ava' affirms what he can be. Don Matteo, Antonietta and Pietro confront certain death courageously, steadfast in their faith in human and divine love. Their death is almost an assertion of the final victory of love and Christianity over the disruptive forces which have only fully emerged into the light with the recent appearance of political upheavals and partisanship in the Molise. These upheavals, directly attributable to the Risorgimento, are characterized by the same personal disloyalty, the single-minded pursuit of class and self-interest and disregard for Christian attitudes that will subsequently manifest themselves during the Fascist period. Now it would be possible to adduce various similarities between Jovine's 'Signora Ava' and Alianello's 'L'alfiere'; both depict Southern Italy and both offer an alternative (Southern) evaluation of the Risorgimento, which repudiates the official (Northern - or Piedmontese and Garibaldian -) distortion of history; a point most succinctly made by Alianello's description of the protagonist

(and eponymous ex-standard-bearer) Pino who storms a barricade at Caiazzo in a way that is:

'Come in un'olegrafia del suo tempo, preciso. Solo che al posto del cacciatore del Re, i pittori ci mettevano sempre un garibaldino e sotto c'erano facce di sbirri urlanti, co' bassettoni arricciati dal terrore.' (130)

Further, both novels recount the revolt of the individual against the ignobleness of prevalent attitudes and both, ultimately, assert the superficial and illusory nature of the historical triumph of conventional values that are readily changeable in accordance with the exigencies of self-interest, by comparison with the spiritual - and real - triumph of an uncompromising Christian faith. We might infer from both novels that at the time of the Risorgimento (and, doubtless, in much the same way when the ascendancy of Fascism appeared assured) the privileged classes, for the most part, lent their support to the social and political movement or force that seemed most likely to benefit them and ensure their continued predominance. But if the injustices deriving from social class constitute a central - and indeed somewhat subversive - theme of Jovine's novel (after the Second World War in 'Le terre del Sacramento' [1950] Jovine will subsequently develop this theme of the predetermination, by class, of injustice and privilege, in the historical context of the Fascists' rise to power) it is of little relevance to Alianello's novel which, like 'Signora Ava', was published in 1942. For the novels' divergences are, in fact, at least as significant as are their similarities: If Jovine considers that the observance of Christian values and the individual's preservation of his integrity, even at the cost of his life, are of greater consequence than are political and social upheavals, this is not because he seeks to deny or minimize the importance of historical events but because of an overriding concern with the

conservation of the values of the individual which the Fascist regime was at pains to undermine. Certainly 'L'alfiere' reveals a preoccupation with the virtues of the individual and a contempt for politics, expressed by Pino's aristocratic father, which could hardly fail to reflect unfavourably - if only indirectly - on the regime; Pino's father admonishes him:

'-L'uomo è una bestia perfettibile con istinti ferini, ma con una coscienza che se lo lavora e tende a portarlo in alto. La tua coscienza però tu non la trovi sul "Giornale Ufficiale delle Due Sicilie" e nemmeno sulla "Gazzetta Piemontese"... in corpo ce l'hai e con lei ti devi mettere d'accordo se vuoi andare avanti o no. Non esistono buone leggi per un popolo corrotto e sono gli uomini che fanno le leggi, non le leggi gli uomini.... Ma a quel progresso che ti porge la politica, tu non ci credere, ch'è roba sporca.' (131)

This refutation of the primacy and even of the validity of politics in the life of the individual and further the assertion of the human fallibility of the citizen, of the law-maker, and of the politician especially are, in the context of the Fascist regime, subversive; dissentient; for they are obviously absolutely antithetical to the values the regime found it expedient to ascribe to Fascism. But the conclusion of 'L'alfiere' manifests a disregard for secular, historical events that appears more or less paradoxical: having fought with the Bourbon army until its final, humiliating defeat, and attached considerable importance to military and national honour, Pino suddenly remembers the pronouncements of a priest who died denouncing the ungodliness of his times, and he experiences a revelation. The narrator recounts:

'E allora ricordò le parole di fra Carmelo:  
"Ognuno ha dentro di sé Cristo e il proprio dolore e col Cristo dovrà vincere, e solo con Lui, il peccato del mondo.." Cos'era finito? Un governo, un regno, un'idea.... Ma non il male del mondo, né la sua anima... E Cristo c'è. La sua anima gli restava e Dio e la sua lotta.' (132)

In consequence of his Catholic revelation, Pino negates the importance of historical events and of his previous engagement. Bàrberi Squarotti comments:

'... la decisione di mettersi da un preteso punto di vista di Dio.... nasconde un'impostazione sostanzialmente reazionaria della realtà' (133)

The reactionary bias of 'L'alfiere' is unmistakable; but Alianello's novel is differentiated from the majority of anti-Fascist and dissident novels of both reactionary and populist persuasions by a disregard for human solidarity and more importantly by the articulation of the absolute irrelevance, for the individual, of the world of objective reality with which the novel ends. Certainly, having depicted the final defeat of the Bourbon monarchy, and chosen not to conclude the book with Pino's more or less heroic death, Alianello - given what we might infer are his own religious convictions - had little option but to make his protagonist discover a devout religious faith. The implications of this position are axiomatic; nonetheless it should perhaps be noted that Alianello's Catholicism is of an orthodox, institutional kind (that Silone wished to see replaced by the enactment of Christian values and by a profound sense of community) and also that this statement of the unimportance of man's real circumstances and of the primacy of the purely spiritual is reminiscent of the mysticism of Fascist praxis.

Now in 'L'uomo è forte' also there is a certain religiosity which Dale, coming from a democratic country, soon observes. He reflects:

"si trovava in un mondo in cui c'era qualcosa di proibito, e senza una ragione evidente; proibito come in un seminario, dove tutto obbedisce a motivi che sfuggono a un estraneo e che hanno la loro origine in una dottrina e in un metodo di vita per iniziati... Ma esisteva in questo mondo nuovo il peccato? Questa capacità di fare il male e di provocare con la sua presenza il male.. Esisteva un male, esisteva in castigo.' (134)

Sin consists of the internalization of the totalitarian regime's notion of culpability, with the consequence, as it appears in the novel, that rational and irrational fears of wrong-doing and surveillance become indistinguishable, and the individual lives in a state of anxiety, if not terror, from which only spiritual conformity can exempt him. Thus, Barbara feels she can reintegrate herself into society by denouncing Dale to the Public Inquisitor. Alvaro says:

'Denunziandolo, ella sentiva di aver preso una decisione che l'avrebbe difesa e che avrebbe significato il suo diritto alla vita.' (135)

Her denunciation is, however, naïve and untimely; for Dale is useful to the regime. The Inquisitor explains the underhand machinations of the totalitarian state thus:

'-Noi .... vogliamo che i nostri cittadini siano felici. Devono essere felici per forza. Tutto quello che li turba è delittuoso. Essi hanno la verità, la giustizia, la felicità. Essi non hanno misteri. Possono vivere pubblicamente uno di fronte all'altro, senza nascondersi nulla.... Ora esiste una pianta umana che non siamo riusciti a estirpare del tutto. È una intera razza di uomini. Essa deve scomparire. Dopo il mondo sarà felice, soltanto dopo. Deve essere felice.' (136)

'-Abbiamo bisogno..... di corruttori come d'un servizio pubblico. E se non ci fossero dovremmo inventarli, incoraggiarli. Il colpevole c'interessa enormemente. Come faremmo senza di lui?' (137)

The obligatory aspect of the citizen's happiness is more than a little reminiscent of Fascist tenets; although it seems probable that happiness is merely a euphemism for conformity. Clearly, the regime urgently needs its dissidents in order to maintain the necessary atmosphere of paranoia, thereby perpetuating its own dominance; and to this end it would, if necessary, either create them (agents provocateurs) or otherwise manipulate vaguely independent individuals into positions of dissent or criminality



or whatever (as is the case with Dale). Dale fulfils the Public Inquisitor's expectation, that hangs over him like a fatality, by killing the 'direttore', the last surviving representative of the old democratic world, who defines the peculiarities of twentieth century totalitarian society thus:

'-ogni epoca ha la civiltà che corrisponde ai mezzi meccanici di cui si serve. E gli uomini d'oggi non sono altro che a immagine e somiglianza degli apparecchi radio... Noi siamo dominati e abitati di continuo da spiriti non nostri. Saremmo ripiombati nella vita degli aggregati molecolari che non esistono per sé e formano un insieme vivente soltanto in massa. Siamo unicellari.... Noi non apparteniamoci piú. Qualche cosa ci ha invaso. Qualcuno è padrone di noi. Non materialmente, ma moralmente. Ha invaso i nostri sogni, i nostri pensieri, i nostri propositi e la nostra volontà..... Nessuno si sente solo. Lei (Dale) non si sente solo neppure nei suoi pensieri. Questo è il grande fenomeno... Qualcosa si è rotto. Probabilmente il volontà. Penso che sia la volontà.... in questo fenomeno della piú profonda passività che abbia mai conosciuto la storia umana, ognuno si crede un personaggio.'" (138)

Indubitably, at this point Alvaro's fiction coincides with the indoctrination effected by the Fascist propaganda machine and the illusion of self-importance it managed to create in those whose support for the regime constituted an abdication of personal activity. Further, although the privacy fundamental to the retention of a sense of individuality has been eliminated, man is more isolated than ever before.

The theme of the destruction of individuality under a totalitarian regime is accentuated by the circumstances of Dale's own case, which evidently also functions as a refutation of the totalitarian myth regarding democracy. Dale originally returned from the democratic West to his native land because he considered life in the West to be decadent, meaningless and 'soft'; he was therefore susceptible to the totalitarian myth of a revitalized, purposeful, virile existence.

His experiences, however, teach him that the laxity of the democratic way of life is conducive to individuality, whereas the authoritarianism of the totalitarian state is merely punitive and intolerably repressive; democracy, then, is the preferable form of government. The first title of the novel was the generic 'Paura sul mondo' - evidently the substitute 'L'uomo è forte' would have seemed more accordant with Fascist notions of man's invulnerability - and certainly Dale is initially attracted by this myth, and its embodiment (which had its counterpart in Fascist Italy) in the huge statues of powerfully built men and women, etc. But this second title is ambivalent, even paradoxical; the strength to which Alvaro refers is man's resilience, his capacity to endure; the complement of his frailty. Thus, at the beginning of the novel, after a brief description of the ancient monuments in the seemingly eternal city Dale arrives at, Alvaro comments:

'Il fragile uomo che si aggirava per quelle strade sembrava piú forte e piú resistente di tutto, eterno lui solo come è eterno un fiume osservato nel suo corso.' (139)

This notion of a strength that is in absolute contradiction to the Fascist myth of superhumanity, is further emphasized by the novel's dénouement. Having miraculously escaped death during his abortive attempt to flee the country, Dale lies weakly in his hospital bed and contemplates a new plan of escape. His physical weakness, the dangers and virtually insurmountable difficulties he will encounter, are not enough to cower his resolve. Thus Alvaro intimates, by the exercise of an indomitable strength of character, the fragile individual can reject conformity and challenge the omnipotence of the totalitarian regime.

Palazzeschi's novel 'Sorelle Materassi' is also concerned with human frailty, and the implicit negation of Fascist myths, although his approach is very different from that of Alvaro. Perhaps the

concluding note of 'Due imperi .... mancati', illustrates Palazzeschi's intimate convictions, and in consequence serves to explain his individualistic treatment of personalities and events. He evaluates the importance of his attempt to divest the First World War of its ominous heroic mythology thus:

'Troppo fu scritto e con troppo smaglianti colori descritto da quelli che rappresentarono una esigua se pur vincente minoranza, troppo poco dagli altri. Sarà bene che uno almeno lasci intravedere se pur pietosamente velato quale fu il vero quadro del nostro tempo.... E così si compirà il mio dovere di cittadino e di poeta, il dovere di chi si accorse non volendo, di avere un cuore e un cervello puri e sani.' (140)

Perhaps 'Sorelle Materassi' is also the testimony of one of the pure of heart, who seeks to redress the balance that has for some time inclined towards the vociferous and impure; that is the Fascists, whose faithful may or may not still number a minority. As was only to be expected 'Due imperi.... mancati' (1920) an a priori rejection of Fascism, created a certain hostility and isolation around the author which endured for some considerable time. We might then speculate on the implications of Palazzeschi's appeal to Boccaccio:

'Fra le scope, le ginestre e le mortelle, come chi cerchi erbe miracolose, tutti i miei sensi cercano avidamente dove si nasconda se non ne sia smarrito il seme, messer Giovanni, la tua purissima giocondità.' (141)

when taken in conjunction with his earlier statement regarding the situation of Santa Maria a Coverciano (the village where the Materassi sisters live):

'fra questi due ruscelli pare fosse la case dove Giovanni Boccaccio visse il suo Decamerone, o tutto lo sognò e forse ve lo scrisse, non si sa bene;' (142)

Possibly Palazzeschi is likening his own circumstances to those of the author of 'The Decameron'; perhaps the secluded location of 'Sorelle Materassi' is a retreat from the epidemic of Fascism that has overcome the city, and the predominant cultural environment. Certainly, the whole prefatory section of the novel, entitled 'Santa Maria a Coverciano', expresses the author's deliberate eschewance of the universally esteemed, stressing his election of the humble, the things - like the village - usually deemed either unworthy of consideration, or of merely secondary importance. Further the simile of the lady and her maid suggests the author's solidarity with the exploited, the victims of the small, daily injustices. The relationship between Remo and his aunts is obviously an unjust one of the master servant type - and Palazzeschi's sympathies lie with the sisters - but he does not for that reason minimize the gratification Remo affords them. Vittorini, during his 'fascismo di sinistra' days, condemned the novel thus:

'il tono dell'opera è casalingo e i personaggi s'impongono al lettore, dico si fanno sentire, per via soprattutto del puzzo che trasudano dalle gonne e dai piedi.....' (143)

Palazzeschi refutes the very tone of the Fascist regime, with its tendency to exaggeration, dramatization and hero-worship, by his portrayal of the inescapably modest; and Vittorini's comment seems to suggest that even among those not altogether in accordance with the regime, long assuefaction to this tone caused humbleness to be mistaken for triviality. The younger dissidents tended to counter the rhetoric of the regime with their own brand of rhetoric and mythology, whereas Palazzeschi confines himself to the unpretentious. He has a profound but detached sympathy for his little world of ageing spinsters; we do not smell their unwashed clothes, but we sense their pathos, and the author's acceptance of his creatures, even his affection for their faults. Having described their virtues, Palazzeschi says:

'...è bene che ora sappiate.... delle loro debolezze che non offuscano la virtù ma anzi, concedono umanità alle creature che spogliate di esse non risultano più né simpatiche né vere, ma aride, artificiose, monotone e false.' (144)

An alternative hypothesis for Vittorini's antipathy towards 'Sorelle Materassi' is that like 'Il garofano rosso' it depicts the 'generation gap' that appeared in post-war society; but from a diametrically opposed viewpoint to Vittorini's own. It is not merely incidental that the novel spans the decade 1918-28, for it portrays the predicament and accommodation of old-world virtues and values in the radically different post-war world. Teresa and Carolina embody the time-honoured virtues of hard work, economy, regard for craftsmanship and for the client, and respectable spinsterhood: Remo, the nephew they discover in 1918 represents a new type of young man, irresponsible, over-indulged, adventurous, vacant, who lives only for the day. Remo is a creation of the post-war era; perhaps rather than saying that he is representative of an implicitly Fascist type it would be more correct to say that the atmosphere of the regime gave birth to a new kind of young man, like Remo; the 'enfant gâté' the darling of an indulgent society. The relationship between these two worlds is perhaps facilitated by Remo's beauty and his aunts' frustrated spinsterhood, but it develops according to its own inherent logic. Teresa and Carolina (and Niobe) 'give' to Remo everything they have in terms of money and affection, for it is all they know to do, and their sole usefulness; Remo 'takes' from them everything they can give and demands more, for it is all he needs to do. He realizes - before meeting Peggy - that money is in the hands of the old and seems to consider he has the irresistible rights of youth and beauty to appropriate to himself as much as possible. Yet the transaction between Remo and his aunts is not as one-sided as it might sound: at the end of

the novel Teresa and Carolina emerge spiritually enriched. Through Remo they have experienced love and pain, joy and humiliation. The novel ends with the accommodation of their rigid and perhaps anachronistic virtues to their new circumstances. Work is now motivated by financial necessity; their emotional satisfactions are derived from the memory of Remo, from his photo. Thus the older generation humbles itself and adapts to a changed world. Morally, perhaps, Remo is reprehensible for his conduct - that is if such a creature as Remo can be judged by standards that have no relevance in his own life - but Palazzeschi avoids the contemporary inclination to define issues in terms of 'right' and 'wrong', justice and injustice.

In 'Lettere di una novizia' Piovene, like Palazzeschi, does not attempt to define fundamental moral issues; but for a very different reason. Palazzeschi, depicting his characters from an external, independent vantage point subordinates moral judgement to his primary concern; a humanizing portrayal of his characters which perhaps concentrates on their weaknesses and their vulnerability. Piovene, who adopts a psychological approach and admits to a certain identification with his characters, is, according to his own admission, unwilling to pass moral judgements. Piovene says of his stance:

'la qualità umana di questo libro è, piaccia o non piaccia, la mia, s'intende come scrittore;' (145)

and of his characters:

'I personaggi di questo romanzo, sebbene diversi tra loro, hanno un punto comune: tutti ripugnano dal conoscersi a fondo. Ognuno capisce solo quanto gli occorre; ognuno tiene i suoi pensieri sospesi, fluidi, indecifrati, pronti a mutare secondo la sua convenienza, senza contraddizione, né bugia, né riforma; ognuno sembra pensare la propria anima non come sua essenzialmente, ma come un altro essere con cui convive, seguendo una regola di diplomazia, traendone di volta in volta o voluttà, o medicina, o perdono.' (146)

That this comment is pertinent to contemporary Fascist reality is, perhaps, confirmed by the similarity of content of a comment of Alvaro's penned in 1936; the tone is, of course, quite different. He says:

'Del resto, basta osservare il pubblico dei teatri.  
Non si fida delle sue impressioni e dei suoi impulsi.  
È un popolo politico che fa dappertutto politica,  
cioè esteriorità, calcolo, convenienza, apparenza.'  
(147)

Piovene's novel is a kind of half-way house between Fascist and non Fascist attitudes; it is an expression of disenchantment certainly but not of dissent. Piovene appears either unwilling, or unable, to objectify and formulate his emotional convictions into a condemnation of his chosen society. In fact, the difficulty of critically evaluating 'Lettere di una novizia' lies in the fact that its tone and its evasion of justice coincide with the predominant attitudes of Fascist Italy. Piovene defines the above cited attitude thus:

Se noi, più esatti o meno pietosi di lui,  
vogliamo dare a questo comportamento il nome  
che gli compete, siamo forse costretti a  
definirlo malafede. La malafede è un'arte  
di non conoscersi, o meglio di regolare la  
conoscenza di noi stessi sul metro della convenienza.  
..... Dico che un uomo è sempre, o mai, in  
malafede; la malafede non è uno stato dell'anima,  
è una sua qualità.' (148)

And the author? It would appear that his stance is a conscious reflection, but not a conscious denunciation, of malafede or bad faith; that inasmuch as bad faith is a personality trait, it is one that Piovene possesses. Nevertheless, it appears somewhat dubious, if not untenable, to suggest that bad faith is an innate characteristic, since it is tantamount to saying that deceit, hypocrisy and immorality are also innate characteristics, and therefore less reprehensible. Ultimately, however, the author refutes the idea of his characters' responsibility for

their own actions, by arguing from a distorted concept of Divine Grace.

He says:

'Solamente la grazia potrebbe mutarli a tal punto, da volgere ad altri fini la pietà e la prudenza di cui si rivelano ricchi; ma, se venisse, troverebbe un terreno che non mi sembra refrattario.' (149)

We can only speculate that Piovene's Catholicism unconsciously echoed contemporary secular attitudes. The problematic ambivalence of the novel, I would suggest, lies in the fact that the author is either unconscious of the provenance of his basic assumptions, or unable to evaluate them. This is, of course, an interesting illustration of the infiltration, in this case amounting almost to 'brainwashing', effected more or less directly by the Fascist regime; which had done much to destroy the notion of personal responsibility and was itself the necessitating cause of bad faith, given that its propaganda was inevitably and often inescapably at variance with its conduct. The cloistered society of Piovene's novel mirrors the closed society in which the author lived. He says that little attempt has been made towards verisimilitude, and the setting of the novel is only vaguely ecclesiastical. This being the case, we can only assume that the setting of the novel is most apposite to portray the isolation, deceit, tortuousness, subterfuges, arrogance and monumental egoism which characterize Piovene's personages.

The novel employs an epistolary form reminiscent of 'Les liaisons dangereuses'; although it might be said that Laclos's novel ultimately conformed to a moral intention by showing that disastrous consequences follow inevitably from vicious conduct, whereas Piovene's attitude of ambivalence is perhaps emphasized by the concluding note of 'Lettere di una novizia':

'Rita non era buona, sebbene simpatica a tutti.'  
(150)



Far from being good, Rita was actually quite a reprobate, but bad faith makes conclusive moral judgement impossible and unnecessary. Don Paolo Conti, the bishop's secretary, assesses Rita's character with considerable perspicacity, but far from acting in accordance with his assessment, his actions belie both personal judgement and his ecclesiastic duty. He justly reproaches her for her first letter to him:

'Nulla v'è di sincero, ma solo il gusto di esibire voi stessa, l'ostentazione dei lati piú riprovevoli di un carattere infido, la vanteria delle azioni peccaminose sotto il pretesto ipocrita di giustificarle. Le vostre azioni, siano buone o cattive, solo perchè sono vostre, vi sembrano tutte eguali ed altrettanto appetitose. Capite solo e chiaramente quello che vi giova capire;.... Il vostro fine è poi sempre lo stesso, evitare ogni disturbo.'  
(151)

Yet he helps Rita to escape from her convent and feels an incongruous sense of moral elevation for this act, of which he later says:

'Vedo ora che lo sfacelo morale si accompagna in noi quasi sempre con l'illusione di elevarsi.'  
(152)

Perhaps don Paolo's example is indicative not only of the corruptibility of everyone - even those whose virtue seems most unassailable - but of the attraction of corruption. All the characters of 'Lettere di una novizia' are susceptible to corruption, indeed they are almost seduced by its attraction, and their good opinion of themselves constitutes the justification of their unconventional behaviour. Bad faith is possibly more attractive than good; given that the individual in bad faith can effortlessly retain his good opinion of himself. Rita, a murderess and habitual liar, considers herself an inherently good person because (like Piovene) she loves her native region, solitude and meditation; in other words she hates her fellows; the 'positive' qualities ascribed to her are, quite simply the obverse of her misanthropy. 'Lettere di una

novizia' conveys an atmosphere of bad faith, hypocrisy and partial truth or spiritual blinkering, which reflects the Fascist reality, through the accommodations all too frequently and easily made to it. Piovene declines to depict a single concrete truth, but seems to accept a multi-faceted unfathomable reality. Conceivably his distorted notion of the Catholic tenet that good is born from evil, derived from the atmosphere in which he lived, and to which he was seemingly susceptible. Certainly Bacchelli expresses the same notion of good springing from evil, in 'Il mulino del Po' - specifically regarding Lazzaro's acceptance of desecrated Church property; but Lazzaro is humble, sincere and devout, and moreover he strives towards his ultimate salvation. In contrast, Piovene's characters seem to personify the spiritual passivity described by the 'direttore' in 'L'uomo è forte' when he said it seemed as if man's will had been broken by the modern totalitarian state. 'Lettere di una novizia', more than the other novels previously discussed, illustrates the degree of accommodation and internalized compromise to the Fascist regime experienced by Piovene - and presumably, by means of the same unconscious process, by considerable numbers of people who did little more than inhale the atmosphere of the times.

In conclusion, it should be stated that since the object of this chapter is to examine elements of disenchantment and dissent in the non and anti-Fascist novel, it is almost inevitable that the import of these elements will be somewhat exaggerated. In contrast, there has been insufficient comment on the fact that non-Fascist literature was consistently of a far higher standard and of far greater artistic merit, than the output of the Fascist writers, who, in the main, produced 'pot-boilers' or custom made glorifications of Fascism. However, the stagnation of language (encouraged by the hyperbolic rhetoric of the regime)

and of literature (aggravated by the tendency towards commonplaces and over-simplification) were ultimately not without a positive outcome. The rejection of Fascist rhetoric caused many writers to evolve a more accessible, meaningful and unadulterated language, and a more universally valid imagery. The depiction of conventional stereotyped situations caused and in part provoked dissidents to attempt a more realistic portrayal of human emotions and affairs; from this attempt arose the Neorealist movement. The predictable fiction of evasion - the love affair - was replaced by a greater concentration on social reality and areas of life like childhood and adolescence that had previously been more or less disregarded. But it would be incorrect to ascribe these new developments solely to the stimulus - for in a sense it was a reactive stimulus - of the Fascist regime; the depersonalization and disorientation depicted under the regime, were not peculiar to the regime, although certainly aggravated by it. Ultimately the debt of the non Fascist writers to American literature is sufficient indication that the same process of depersonalization and redefinition of identity was occurring in democratic America as it was in Fascist Italy. This does not in any way diminish the problems and achievements of Italian novelists; rather it proves the degree to which they were able to overcome Fascist encouraged provincialism, and that their very concern with man's loss of identity in modern society, was confirmation of their adhesion to the traditions of contemporary North American (and European) literature.

## Notes

- (1) Giuliano Manacorda *Letteratura e cultura del periodo fascista*, p.22
- (2) Op. cit. p.21: Vittorio Mussolini, 'È inutile che ci si sforzi a far nascere una letteratura fascista. Finora degli aborti e nulla più'.
- (3) Umberto Silva *Ideologia e arte del fascismo*, p.39
- (4) Curzio Malaparte *Strapaese e stracittà* "Il Selvaggio" 10th November 1927 in Manacorda *Letteratura e cultura del periodo fascista*, p.29. Manacorda assesses the ultimate importance and the relative positions of the Strapaese Stracittà polemic thus: 'Modesto episodio, in realtà, che testimonia più la limitatezza che non la vitalità del mondo letterario; tanto più se si pensa che, dietro le vistose accuse, in diversa maniera - gli uni più verbosa e popolana, gli altri più accademica e esterofila - i principali rappresentanti dell'una e dell'altra corrente sostennero *toto corde* il regime, salvo a distaccarsene in anni ormai molto avanzati.' Op. cit p.101.
- (5) Giuseppe de Robertis from an article written in 1930 and collected in *Scrittori del Novecento* (Florence 1953). Quoted in *Corrado Alvaro I miti della società* Antonio Palermo, p.11
- (6) Giovanni Battista Angioletti in E. Falqui and E. Vittorini *Scrittori nuovi: Antologia italiana contemporanea* Lanciano 1930, Quoted in *Corrado Alvari I miti della società* Antonio Palermo, p.12
- (7) Corrado Alvaro *Gente in Aspromonte*, p.3
- (8) Op. cit. p.11
- (9) Op. cit. p.11
- (10) Comment in 'Il Bargello' Florence 22nd July 1934, quoted in *Tre operai* in author's note of 1965 p.240. Despite the fact that this statement was made with particular reference to *Tre operai* it seems justifiable to extend its application to *Gente in Aspromonte* both because of the generic terms in which it is couched, and because Alvaro's work is, perhaps, more indicative of underlying human solidarity.
- (11) Corrado Alvaro *Vent'anni* p.64
- (12) Op. cit. p.358-9
- (13) Op. cit. p.353
- (14) Op. cit. p.358
- (15) Corrado Alvaro *Gente in Aspromonte* p.13
- (16) Op. cit. p.56
- (17) Op. cit. p.83
- (18) Alberto Moravia *Gli indifferenti* p.8
- (19) Op. cit. p.8
- (20) Op. cit. p.306
- (21) E. Sanguineti *Alberto Moravia* quoted in Giuliano Manacorda *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940-1965)* p.101

- (22) Aristide Campanile 'Gli indifferenti di Moravia' from 'Antieuropa' 15th November, 1929, quoted in Manacorda *Letteratura e cultura del periodo fascista* p.194-5
- (23) Silvio Guarnieri *Cinquant'anni di letteratura italiana* p.364 'Il lettore banale considerava il romanzo come caso eccezionale, non come punto limite e fatale di una mentalità, sicchè la necessaria conclusione egli non sentiva ricadere a propria condanna, anzi a quella semmai reagiva rifugiandosi in un autoelogio della propria mediocrità.'
- (24) Moravia *Gli indifferenti* p.62
- (25) In fact Digbens's philosophy is based on the same aristocracy of feeling which characterizes Gadda's outlook. Another illustration of this is Gadda's seemingly whimsical preoccupation with pears in *La cognizione del dolore*. In the introduction to the 1963 edition of the novel, entitled 'L'editore chiede venia del recupero chiamando in causa l'Autore' Gadda comments p.240: 'Si celebra nella follemente burocratizzata e bisantizzata storia della società umana un paradosso o meglio un rito ossedente, per che il buono e magari il migliore non perverrà mai, non che a carpire, ma nemmeno ad annusare quella scartoffiescamente matura pera, quella sovvenzione, quella borsa di studio, quel prestipendio....'
- (26) Carlo Emilio Gadda *Il castello di Udine* p.59
- (27) Op. cit. p.67 note 7
- (28) Op. cit. 'Tendo al mio fine' p.13
- (29) Manacorda *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940-1965)* p.247
- (30) Gadda *Il castello di Udine* p.54
- (31) Op. cit. p.38
- (32) Manacorda *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940-1965)* p.247
- (33) Gadda *Il castello di Udine* p.38
- (34) Op. cit. p.24
- (35) Gadda *La Madonna dei filosofi* p.95
- (36) Gadda *Il castello di Udine* p.74-5
- (37) Gadda *La cognizione del dolore*, p.64. Gonzalo, on his encounter with the doctor is described thus: 'Un lieve prognatismo facciale, quasi un desiderio di bimbo che si fosse poi tramutato nel muso d'una malinconica bestia, veniva conferendo al suo dire, ma non sempre, quel tono sgradevole di perplessità e d'incertezza: e pareva dar ragione di certo distacco dai vivi. Distacco, opinò il dottore, più forse patito che voluto'.
- (38) Gadda *La Madonna dei filosofi* p.105-6
- (39) Gadda *La cognizione del dolore* p.166
- (40) Op. cit. p.102
- (41) Riccardo Bacchelli *Il mulino del Po* p.364-5
- (42) Gadda *Il castello di Udine* p.176
- (43) Guarnieri *Cinquant'anni di letteratura italiana* p.463

- (44) Op. cit. p.462-3. While it does not invalidate his criticism, it is nevertheless noteworthy that the predominant tone of Guarnieri's essay is one of personal resentment. It appears that on an occasion when the two met, Guarnieri expressed his belief for the need of active commitment in life and literature, and Bacchelli responded with the same kind of pessimistic resignation born of omniscience as permeates *Il mulino del Po*. Guarnieri evidently could not tolerate this - for him evasive - facet of Bacchelli's personality.
- (45) Bacchelli *Il mulino del Po* III p.712
- (46) Benito Mussolini *La dottrina del fascismo* vol VIII of 'Scritti e discorsi' quoted in Manacorda *Letteratura e cultura del periodo fascista*, p.256
- (47) Bacchelli *Il mulino del Po* II p.454
- (48) Op. cit. I p.541-2
- (49) Op. cit. II p.160-1
- (50) Op. cit. I p.531
- (51) Op. cit. III p.149-50
- (52) Op. cit. III p.744
- (53) In *Diario in pubblico* p.508 Vittorini states that this empathy only consciously became 'elezione operaia' with *Conversazione in Sicilia* and the figure of Silvestro's mother's lover.
- (54) Elio Vittorini *Il garofano rosso* p.140
- (55) Op. cit. p.126
- (56) Edward R. Tannenbaum. *Fascism in Italy* p.253-4
- (57) E. Vittorini *Il garofano rosso* p.69
- (59) Op. cit. p.44
- (60) Manacorda *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940-1965)* p.98
- (60) C. Bernari *Tre operai* p.174
- (61) Paolo Arcari *La letteratura italiana e i disfattisti suoi* footnote p.203
- (62) Vittorini *Il garofano rosso* p.128
- (63) Vittorini *Erica e i suoi fratelli*. p.23
- (64) Op. cit. p.19
- (65) Op. cit. p.58
- (66) Op. cit. p.55
- (67) Op. cit. p.78
- (68) Op. cit. p.75-6
- (69) I have used the 1941 edition of *La siccità*. It is however perhaps noteworthy that this edition does not differ fundamentally from the revised edition of the *Racconti* of 1958. As Maria Corti observes: 'Bilenchi ha evitato nella revisione dei suoi scritti il pericolo di accorciare le distanze fra i primi e gli ultimi racconti, cioè di riportarli tutti a una più recente tonalità stilistica, a un'equivoca unicità espressiva, ponendosi quindi sulla riva stessa del critico nel rispettare e significare le tappe della propria evoluzione letteraria.' (Paolo Petroni *Bilenchi*, p.37). Further,

such revisions as occur in the texts of *La siccità* and *La miseria* - most notably an elaborated characterization of the protagonist and a marginal accentuation of the evocative dimension of the two novellas - are not sufficient to transform the author's attitude of more or less unfocused dissent into a statement of concrete, implacable anti-Fascism, of the type frequently encountered in the post-war novel.

- (70) Op. cit. p.7
- (71) Bilenchi *La siccità* p.16-17
- (72) Op. cit. p.25
- (73) Op. cit. p.29
- (74) Op. cit. p.45-6
- (75) Op. cit. p.38-9
- (76) Op. cit. p.84-6
- (77) Op. cit. p.113-4
- (78) Vasco Pratolini *Il tappeto verde* p.31
- (79) Op. cit. p.78-9
- (80) Op. cit. p.35
- (81) Cesare Pavese *Feria d'agosto* p.187
- (82) Pavese *La spiaggia* p.74
- (83) Op. cit. p.97
- (84) Op. cit. p.80
- (85) Op. cit. p.134
- (86) Op. cit. p.40
- (87) Op. cit. p.48
- (88) Op. cit. p.45-6
- (89) Pavese *Paesi tuoi* p.177
- (90) Vittorini *Conversazione in Sicilia* p.186
- (91) Op. cit. p.5
- (92) Folco Zanobini *Elio Vittorini* p.112
- (93) Vittorini *Conversazione in Sicilia,* p.100
- (94) Op. cit. p.26
- (95) Op. cit. p.132
- (96) Op. cit. p.135
- (97) Op. cit. p.153
- (98) Op. cit. p.166
- (99) Op. cit. p.171-2
- (100) Op. cit. p.173
- (101) Op. cit. p.176
- (102) Op. cit. p.177

- (103) Op. cit. p.181  
(104) Op. cit. p.182  
(105) Op. cit. p.27-28  
(106) Op. cit. p.164-5  
(107) Dino Buzzati *Il deserto dei tartari* p.11-12  
(108) Op. cit. p.191  
(109) Vitaliano Brancati *Gli anni perduti* p.172-3  
(110) Buzzati *Il deserto dei tartari* p.157-8  
(111) Op. cit. p.163  
(112) Op. cit. p.253  
(113) Manacorda *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940-1965)* p.110  
(114) Brancati *Gli anni perduti* p.178  
(115) Perhaps it should be stated that Natàca, the imaginary town in which the story of *Gli anni perduti* occurs, appears suggestively similar to natica - with whatever insinuations that may connote.  
(116) Brancati *In cerca di un sì* p.8-9  
(117) Op. cit. p.26  
(118) Brancati *Gli anni perduti* p.154-5  
(119) Op. cit. p.37  
(120) Brancati *Don Giovanni in Sicilia* p.142  
(121) Op. cit. p.29  
(122) Brancati *Gli anni perduti* p.11  
(123) Op. cit. p.96  
(124) Brancati *Don Giovanni in Sicilia* p.30  
(125) Alvaro *L'uomo è forte* p.75  
(126) Op. cit. p.132  
(127) Op. cit. p.102  
(128) Op. cit. p.86  
(129) Francesco Jovine *Signora Ava* p.VIII  
(130) Carla Alianello *L'Alfiere* p.457  
(131) Op. cit. p.199  
(132) Op. cit. p.633  
(133) Barberi Squarotti *La narrativa italiana del dopoguerra* p.229-30  
(134) Alvaro *L'uomo è forte* p.20  
(135) Op. cit. p.200  
(136) Op. cit. p.115-6  
(137) Op. cit. p.118  
(138) Op. cit. p.232-3  
(139) Op. cit. p.16



- (140) Aldo Palazzeschi *Due imperi...mancati* Note p.227
- (141) Palazzeschi *Sorelle Materassi* p.29-30
- (142) Op. cit. p.27
- (143) Giacinto Spagnoletti *Palazzeschi* p.233
- (144) Palazzeschi *Sorelle Materassi* p.78-9
- (145) Guido Piovene *Lettere di una novizia* p.4
- (146) Op. cit. p.3
- (147) Alvaro *Quasi una vita* in Antonio Palermo *Corrado Alvaro I miti della società* p.53
- (148) Piovene *Lettere di una novizia* p.3-4
- (149) Op. cit. p.7
- (150) Op. cit. p.263
- (151) Op. cit. p.66-7
- (152) Op. cit. p.246

## CHAPTER 4

*Silone and Ferrero: two special cases*

A self-evident correspondence exists between the events of Silone's life, his experiences, beliefs and spiritual watersheds and those of the characters who populate his fiction; most notably Pietro Spina, whose spiritual journey is depicted in 'Pane e vino' (1937) and 'Il seme sotto la neve' (1941). Although any examination of the correlation of Silone's life and works prior to 1945 would exceed the scope of this study, it is perhaps justifiable to allude to the origin of the author's name, as this seems to embody several essential aspects of Silone's thought. Born Secondo Tranquilli, he elected the alias of 'Ignazio Silone' whilst a member of the Italian Communist Party - since the necessarily clandestine circumstances of the Communist Party at the time required its members to assume one, or several, false identities. Significantly, Silone chose to retain that name after his expulsion from the Party in 1931. Ignazio was the saint cited by Jesus as the exemplification of humility, and Silone the Italianized version of Silo (1): Pompeius Silo being the commander of the Marsica who led a successful revolt against Rome, as a result of which, the Marsicans were declared to be allies and not subjects of Rome. Hence this assumed name illustrates both Silone's involvement with revolutionary politics and a continuing faith in Christianity. More relevant to this study however are what we might almost term the obverse of these concerns; Silone's rediscovery and gradual exploration of the nature and possibilities of the peasants (specifically the peasants of his native Abruzzi) and the redefinition of the spiritual foundations of the individual, based on a kind of primitive Christianity. For Silone these qualities alone could foster the creation of a more valid community based on the Christian

virtues of charity and humility, such as appears towards the end of 'Il seme sotto la neve' and, similarly, in 'Una manciata di more'.

Summarizing these beliefs - which more or less coincide in the figure of Pietro Spina in the latter part of 'Il seme sotto la neve' - Silone declares in 'Uscita di sicurezza':

'Presso i più sofferenti, sotto la cenere dello scetticismo, non s'è mai spenta l'antica speranza del Regno, l'antica attesa della carità che sostituisca la legge, l'antico sogno di Gioacchino da Fiore, degli Spirituali, dei Celestini. E questo è un fatto d'importanza enorme, fondamentale, sul quale nessuno ancora ha riflettuto abbastanza. In un paese deluso esaurito stanco come il nostro, questa mi è sempre apparsa una ricchezza autentica, una miracolosa riserva.' (2)

For Silone, the oppressed, those whose suffering is the greatest, are, of course, the peasants. Eventually, by emulating their poverty and creating a utopian community, almost a monastic brotherhood, based on charity and manual labour, Spina comes to embody Silone's concept of medieval Christianity, as mentioned above. Ultimately he becomes a Christ figure. The preoccupation with the peasant is a constant in Silone's work; although the treatment accorded to him becomes proportionately more profound and compassionate as Silone's protagonist, in every sense a pivotal figure, becomes spiritually enriched by the return to his geographical and emotional origins.

Silone's initial attitude towards the peasants can perhaps best be summarized by the question that concludes the first edition of 'Fontamara':

'Che dobbiamo fare?' (3)

an interrogative which perhaps significantly becomes:

'Che fare' (4)

in the revised edition. Evidently the first formulation of the demand

implies the profound personal involvement of the author with his subject matter, and seems to postulate a like response on the part of the reader, whereas the second formulation attests to a certain increased effacement of the author. (This second formulation of the peasants' dilemma is, moreover, obviously more reminiscent of the title of Lenin's famous pamphlet.) The first edition bears traces of Silone's adherence to revolutionary criteria (5) and manifests a more obvious insistence than the revised edition on the injustices sustained by the peasants, who are essentially the victims of exploitation by the rich; once the local landowners, now the recently emerged but seemingly omnipotent Fascist élite. However, although it in no way belies this underlying conviction, the revised edition of 'Fontamara' (1949) adopts a slightly different bias that permits the author to elaborate upon the characterization of his peasant protagonists, thereby enhancing both the inherent logic and the inner cohesion of the novel (6). Overall, the subsequent revision of the three novels written prior to, or during, the Second World War, testifies to the process of the author's artistic maturation (and possibly also to the crystallization of his disenchantment with party politics). In fact, in the preface to the American translation of 'Vino e pane' published in 1962, Silone defines the criteria that led him to revise the earlier 'Pane e vino'. This explanation would seem to be equally applicable to 'Fontamara' and to 'Il seme sotto la neve'. Silone says:

'Devo ora specificare che cosa mi sembra di avere imparato? In primo luogo, che lo scrittore ispirato da un forte senso di responsabilità sociale è piú di ogni altro esposto alla tentazione dell'enfasi, del teatrale, del romanzesco, e alla descrizione puramente esteriore delle cose e dei fatti, mentre quello che solo conta in ogni opera letteraria sono ovviamente le vicende della vita interiore dei personaggi.' (7)

and of his own outlook at the time of writing 'Pane e vino':

'il mio stato d'animo era piú proclive all'enfasi,  
al sarcasmo, al melodramma che a una pacata narrazione.' (8)

We might speculate that an attempt to construe adequately the reason for Silone's revision of these three novels would have to allow for these elements; the author's subsequent artistic development, and a significant shift in outlook, caused doubtless by numerous factors, but principally by the evanescence of the Fascist regime. A certain urgency both to denounce Fascism, to communicate (9) - and perhaps to enlist the sympathies of his readers in favour of the peasants and against the injustices of Fascism - manifests itself in the sarcasms of the first editions, and renders these preferable for the present study. The later editions demonstrate the author's aspiration towards a more universal significance. Thus, the peasant narrator objects to the reduced wages for agricultural workers:

'-La legge di Mosè dice: Non rubare,'

and in the first edition don Circostanza replies:

'-Adesso non c'è Mosè, ma Musolino,.....' (10)

whereas in the revised edition, to the same observation he replies:

"La legge di Mosè serve per il tribunale di Dio.....  
quaggiù comanda la legge del Governo" (11)

As don Circostanza's original retort attests, not only did Silone need to communicate but his condition as an exile offered him the rare opportunity - of which he took full advantage - to do so unhampered and uninhibited by the Fascist censor. (He nevertheless encountered difficulties in finding a publisher and eventually published the novel at his own expense.) Unlike Nazi Germany, few novelists who opposed Fascism left Italy (although considerable numbers of intellectuals in other disciplines did so) and therefore few could denounce or expose various aspects of the real

situation within Italy as overtly as did Silone and, to a point, Ferrero. Moreover, in the first edition of 'Fontamara', Silone constantly emphasizes the dichotomy between the 'official' or propagandist statement of the situation within Italy - which was intended for both internal and external diffusion - and the circumstances this disregarded and sought to conceal. (That this propaganda was not without effect on the urban middle classes, who elected to be dupes to the myth of the paradisiacal life of the peasantry, is further confirmed by the treatment of 'rural themes' by such novelists as Saponi and Gotta.)

It should however be noted that the above cited mention of Mussolini is one of the rare direct references to him that appears in Silone's work - with the exception of 'La scuola dei dittatori'; although another somewhat vaguer reference is made in the course of Peppino Goriano's account of his 'political career' as a Fascist. Taken to the printing works of 'Giornale d'Italia' Peppino meets his old friends from Regina Coeli, once housebreakers, now a 'rentamob' in the employ of the Fascists. Peppino continues:

'Sulla scena apparve un signore che cominciò a parlare. Anzitutto rivolse un saluto vibrante a Peppino Goriano e ai suoi amici, "la nuova aristocrazia del lavoro", la parte più cosciente degli operai di fabbrica, pronti a versare fin l'ultima goccia del loro sangue per la salvezza della patria. Poi cominciò a dire delle cose incomprensibili.' (12)

Peppino Goriano and his friends indeed represented a 'new aristocracy', the politically conscious vanguard of Fascism - although not quite in the sense the 'gentleman' intended. They were, ultimately, conscious of the fact that they would, in all likelihood, starve in Rome, were they not to join the Fascist rentamob. Hence, in this espousal of Fascism, Peppino and his friends constitute a vanguard of emblematic significance; inasmuch as their espousal is born of necessity and in

the absence of hope. It is a consequence of the realization of their fundamental impotence, both as individuals and as a social group. As the tale of Peppino's years in Rome suggests, he and presumably his associates also, given the organization prior to, and to some degree causal of, the Fascist seizure of power, were unable to find valid employment. They were therefore unable to save the small sum of money that would permit them to marry, or more important, buy the small piece of land that would, in a very real sense, give direction and purpose to their lives, by becoming their predominant concern. (Silone's peasant narrator observes that it is the landless and shiftless peasants in and around Fontamara who become the local Fascists.) Yet such is Fascism's new aristocracy of labour; an epithet which reflects upon both the hyperbolic rhetoric of the regime and Silone's talent for satirizing the ludicrous discrepancies on and by which the edifice of Fascism maintains itself. The effects, however, of these ludicrous discrepancies between propaganda and policy (of which more will be said later) on the life of the individual are inevitably tragic.

Thus, while Silone's novels generally decline to satirize either Mussolini or the high-ranking Fascist party functionaries, whole sections of Fascistized society are lampooned through the device of emblematic figures like 'L'eroe di Porta Pia' in 'Fontamara', 'Il piè veloce' and 'Il mostro di fuori Porta' in 'Pane e vino' and the entire provincial 'good society' of 'Il seme sotto la neve'. The effects of Fascism on such people, Silone implies, are to foster their fatuousness and their dependency; qualities which flourish with the complete erosion of dignity, autonomy, integrity and Christian charity. As Silone suggests in 'Il seme sotto la neve', the Fascist regime made a signal contribution to the erosion of these qualities. It is the vestiges of autonomy the peasants of Fontamara cannot relinquish, irreparably linked as they are to the

peasants' very survival, that lead inevitably and tragically to their destruction. But perhaps hardly less tragic is the fundamental erosion of personality of all those who support or acquiesce to Fascism; their lives are reduced to an empty show and Italy to a stage on which to play out their fantasies. Moreover, all the adherents to Fascism are by nature, and in one form or another, parasitic: the climate of the Fascist regime clearly imposes no restraints on their parasitism, but rather permits them to transform it into a source of general admiration and self-congratulation. Hence the episode of 'Il piè veloce' who, as a source of revenue, 'rescues' female tourists from his -unintimidating-accomplice and finishes by believing in his own heroism, and passion for these women. Hence the more curious and perhaps more typical episode of the inn called the 'Buon Ladrone'; a name inevitably reminiscent of the Penitent Thief crucified at the right hand of Jesus, but now endowed with a new and peculiarly Fascist significance. The young peasant narrator says:

'Ma la Locanda del Buon Ladrone, in realtà, giustificava il suo nome dall'esempio del proprietario, il quale, dopo essere stato varie volte in carcere per furto, assieme all'Eroe di Porta Pia, verso il tramonto della sua vita si era messo al seguito dei fascisti ed aveva partecipato a numerose spedizioni punitive contro i nemici del regime, specializzandosi nei furti patriottici a danno delle cooperative e delle amministrazioni operaie, si da meritare che, in una solenne cerimonia patriottica, il capo stesso della polizia lo insignisse col titolo di Buon Ladrone.....' (13)

The episode of the Penitent Thief further implies the nature of the relationship, or collusion, entered into by police and Church with the Fascists. One point emerging from Peppino's story is the political opportunism and corruptibility of the police force who, in a short space of time, transfer their active support from Miti to Mussolini. The crucial importance of police support during the Fascist struggle for



power is discussed by Tommaso il Cinico in 'La scuola dei dittatori' (14); the corollary, as in the case of the Penitent Thief being that the law, ultimately, is neither impartial nor absolute; it is as arbitrary as the political sympathies of those who enforce it.

The story of the Penitent Thief also illustrates the deliberate manipulation of Christian imagery and mythology indulged in, on occasion, by the regime. Both are vast and powerful institutions, but for Silone there can be no doubt that the Church although the accomplice of the State remains its subordinate. By accepting the sum of 2,000,000,000 lire (the figure quoted by Peppino) from the Fascist state, the Church has, as it were, sold itself into the hands of the regime, and become party to its corruption. Thus various wealthy, and hence materialistically inclined priests, are mentioned in 'Fontamara' and indeed, in this context, grouped together with the professional classes, and Prince Torlonia, as the perpetrators of injustice against the peasants. But Silone's predominant concern remains with the functioning of the Church as an institution; and with the contrast between its failure to preserve the spirit of primitive Christianity, its preoccupation with its material survival, and its consequent partisanship in temporal affairs. The Church, Silone implies, has betrayed the teachings of Christianity and rejected the sovereignty of Christ, as the episode regarding the Pope, Christ and the new kind of lice that appear in Fontamara attests. In 'Pane e vino' the point is made that the Church has actually assumed the role of Pontius Pilate. Don Girasole recounts to don Paolo a recent conversation with don Benedetto regarding the Church's support for the war in Ethiopia, in which he justified the Church's position, in terms of making the best of a difficult situation:

"La teoria del minor male".....ha detto (don Benedetto) seccamente "può valere per una società politica, ma non per una società religiosa....Gli ho .....replicato: "Ma ti immagini che succederebbe se la Chiesa condannasse apertamente l'attuale guerra? Quante persecuzioni le si rovescerebbero sopra? Quali danni materiali e morali ne deriverebbero?" Lei non ha un'idea di quello che don Benedetto ha osato rispondermi: "Mio caro don Girasole" mi ha risposto, "t'immagini tu il Battista offrire un concordato a Erode per sfuggire alla decapitazione? Ti immagini tu Gesù offrire un concordato a Ponzio Pilato per evitare la crocefissione?" ....  
 "Ma la Chiesa non è una società astratta" ribatte don Girasole. "Essa è quella che è. Essa ha quasi duemila anni di vita." (15)

The Church's attitude towards the Ethiopian war evidently constitutes not a mere condonation of, but rather complicity with the militaristic goals of the Fascist regime; as the benediction of the cannons in 'Pane e vino' confirms. This is perhaps the most conspicuous example of the way in which the Church has compromised Christianity and itself; but Silone's thesis is that the Concordat between Church and State has rendered inevitable this kind of dishonourable compromise. In 'Fontamara' Michele Zompa quotes don Abbacchio's pronouncement that the Concordat augurs well for the peasants. But the account of his dream offers a succinct - if unwitting - illustration of the fact that the Church has thereby irrevocably committed itself to the policies and goals of the Fascist regime. Thus:

"Il Crocefisso diceva:

- Per festeggiare questa pace sarebbe bene dispensare i cafoni dal pagare le tasse.

Il papa rispondeva:

- Signore, il governo non vorrà..... Non dimenticare che è con le tasse che pagano i cafoni che il governo deve versare due miliardi di lire alla cassetta di S. Pietro.

Il Crocefisso diceva:

- Per festeggiare questa pace, quest'anno farò fare un raccolto abbondante soprattutto ai cafoni e ai piccoli proprietari.

Il papa rispondeva:

- Signore, se il raccolto dei cafoni sarà abbondante, i prezzi dei prodotti agricoli ribasseranno. Non dimenticare che i nostri vescovi e cardinali sono tutti dei grandi proprietari di terra." (16)

As Zompa's dream emblemizes, the Church and regime concord in their cynical treatment of the peasants; the Church, it might almost be said, washes its hands of them, and it is again, as Silone observes (17) Good Friday on earth. However it should be remembered that the Church's collusion with the temporal powers in a certain sense precedes and even creates the necessary preconditions for Fascist rule. One of the central themes of 'Pane e vino' is that for centuries the Church has preached submission to the peasants of the Abruzzi; a submission of a subtly sacrilegious nature. The Church has taught the peasants to humble themselves before a punitive authoritarian God. It has, moreover, somehow omitted to impress upon them the significance of Christ's crucifixion. For they identify and empathize with the hardships of His life and death, He is emblematic of their suffering; yet, as Zompa's dream attests, they are dubious of his omnipotence and his powers to save. The Church's abandonment of the peasants is confirmed by the account of the practical joke played on them, in which their eagerly awaited parish priest turns out to be a donkey; the Church has clearly sided with the townsfolk against the peasants. Their condition is rendered more abject and confusing by the manifest disregard for the tenets of his religion, shown by the compromising don Abbacchio.

However, if the Church in 'Fontamara' has more or less overtly abandoned the peasants, the regime has discovered them and takes them into account in a hitherto unprecedented fashion thereby - and on both counts - confounding their expectations and experience. The Hon. Pelino explains the attitude of the Fascist government towards the peasants thus:

'È finito il tempo in cui i cafoni erano ignorati e disprezzati.' (18)

Previously the peasants had been ignored because beneath State

surveillance, a situation which, by contrast with the new circumstances generated by Fascism, is shown to have been not without a certain privilege and immunity; if the peasants knew nothing about the outside world, and indeed never discovered against whom the First World War was waged, the outside world, in return, rarely intruded into their lives. In 'Fontamara', Fascism gradually emerges as a more or less faceless bureaucracy of unprecedented magnitude, endowed with unprecedented powers, that nevertheless grinds small enough to incorporate the peasants in its machinations. In fact, as the author declares in his preface:

'Fontamara, un villaggio che nessunacarta geografica menziona, divenne presto oggetto di molte discussioni e da alcuni fu assunto a simbolo attuale di una gran parte d'Italia, della parte meridionale.' (19)

'Fontamara' functions both as symbol and allegory; it offers a microcosmic portrayal of conditions in rural Italy - specifically Southern Italy - and of the nature of the Fascist exercise of power, at a time when Fascist Italy enjoyed considerable prestige within Europe based both on admiration for Mussolini's stern repression of the 'Bolshevik menace' (20) and on a somewhat uncritical acceptance of the Fascist evaluation of its own achievement. Hence Ward Price in the 'Daily Mail' of 1932:

*'The greatest evolution of the last decade of world history has been the regeneration of the national genius of Italy.'* (21)

'Fontamara' serves as an incontrovertible refutation of the myth of 'the regeneration of the national genius of Italy' - a phrase which smacks curiously of Fascist propaganda translated literally. Primarily, 'Fontamara' constitutes a symbolic depiction of the workings of a ruthlessly punitive totalitarian regime and of the living conditions it imposes upon the most underprivileged and defenceless sector of the population subjected to it. As cited above, the Hon. Pelino correctly

observes that the existence of the peasants is no longer ignored by the Fascist regime. Silone, however, is at pains to illustrate that this heightened awareness accompanies a callous disregard on the part of the regime towards the minimum requirements of the peasants. Examples abound; the discontinuance of the right to emigrate, the agricultural policy of the regime as it is represented by the account of the redistribution of the Fucino basin, the sequestration of the common grazing lands, and the theft of the peasants' stream; all indicate the regime's destruction of a hitherto seemingly immutable and eternal order, that was ultimately sufferable for the peasants, although barely so, since its statical quality constituted their sole security. Hence their bewildered reaction to the appropriation of their grazing lands:

"Dalle nostre montagne fino alle Puglie, sono sempre stati di tutti.....Cristo non era ancora nato e si racconta che le cose andavano già in questo modo. Dopo, sono successi tanti avvenimenti, guerre, invasioni, cambiamenti di papi e di re, ma i tratturi sono sempre rimasti di tutti." (22)

Such episodes clearly differentiate the Fascist regime from its predecessors. Ultimately, the peasants are induced to infer the nature of the difference between Fascism and the previous orders by the gravity and frequency of the injustices committed against them. The peasant narrator enumerates these injustices:

'I militi erano venuti a Fontamara e avevano oltraggiato varie donne, questo era chiaro. Ma l'avevano fatto in nome della legge e alla presenza di un commissario di polizia, e questo non era chiaro.....

I cosiddetti fascisti, a varie riprese, avevano bastonato, ferito e anche ucciso delle persone contro le quali la giustizia non aveva nulla da dire e solo perchè davano noia all'Impresario e questo era chiaro. Ma i feritori e gli assassini erano stati sempre premiati dalle autorità e questo non era chiaro.

Si può dire che tutti i guai che ci capitavano, esaminati a uno a uno, non erano nuovi e di essi si potevano trovare molti esempi nelle storie del passato. Ma il modo come ci capitavano era nuovo e assurdo.' (23)

and he concludes, with specific reference to the Impresario's profiteering on their corn:

'Si poteva protestare ? Non si poteva nemmeno protestare. Tutto era legale, legalissimo. Solo la nostra protesta sarebbe stata illegale.

Da vario tempo tutti i furti contro i cafoni erano legali. Quando non bastavano le leggi vecchie, venivano fatte delle leggi nuove.' (24)

The inference to be drawn from the above evaluation of the situation, and from the anecdote of the Penitent Thief is, obviously, that a Fascist regime constitutes the institutionalization of injustice and criminality.

To return to Ward Price's exemplary panegyric, the 'regeneration of the national genius of Italy' - such as it was - occurred to the exclusion of, and ultimately at the expense of the peasants of 'Fontamara'. Certainly Fascism managed successfully to project a semblance of 'progress'; to cite only the most hackneyed observation of Italy's advance into the modern age - which reflects significantly on those who proffered it - the trains finally ran on time. Such progress, however, appears less conclusive when counterbalanced against the fact that the trains have become less, rather than more, accessible to the peasants. The obverse of the punctual train is that, as Berardo learns in 'Fontamara', in order to travel an identity card has become necessary, that a necessary mobility in the search for work has become 'internal migration' and that hitherto more or less non-existent political concerns ultimately govern what was previously a question of individual welfare. In Saporì's 'Sotto il sole' and indeed in the pamphlet Peppino Goriano produces, the Fascist regime emerges as a paternalistic welfare state, whereas in 'Fontamara' any intervention by the regime is shown to impose a detrimental limitation on the individual's circumstances: Silone's peasants are no longer able to pursue without institutionalized opposition

their traditional livelihood. Nor is the regime concerned to offer them any alternative. (25) As the government official in Avezzano succinctly remarks:

'-.....(questi) piccoli fittavoli devono essere eliminati..' (26)

he elaborates:

'-.....Molti di essi han ricevuto la terra, perchè ex-combattenti, ma questo non è giusto criterio economico..... ' (27)

The charge of special privilege on account of military service is one that is applicable to the enthusiastically Fascist smallholders of Saponi's novel - who at any rate merit consideration as a special case since the Littorio was something of a showcase for Fascist achievements - but not to the Fontamarese, whose only distinction - like that of many of Silone's central figures - is a heritage of unmitigated travail. This charge of privilege, however, exemplifies the regime's infinite capacity for dissociation from its own pronouncements, and for executing political volte-face, since it was not without responsibility for the distribution of land to ex-servicemen. The government official duly proceeds to explain the regime's realpolitik through a series of syllogisms:

'Fucino a chi lo coltiva.....Fucino a chi ha mezzi per coltivarlo o farlo coltivare.....In altre parole, Fucino a chi ha i capitali sufficienti.....Fucino deve essere liberato dai piccoli fittavoli miserabili e concesso ai contadini ricchi. Quelli che non hanno grandi mezzi di fortuna non hanno diritto di affittare terre a Fucino....'  
(28)

In elementary terms, the government official is declaring the regime's support for the rich; its championship of the right of the rich to grow richer while thereby aggravating the poverty of the poor. The gulf between the wealthy landowning class and the peasants is then insuperable; its continued existence, not to mention its considerable increase, obviously discredits the regime. 'Fontamara', like Carlo Levi's later,

fictionalized reminiscences 'Cristo si è fermato a Eboli' depicts the coexistence of the primitive conditions of the peasants with the technological advances and political machinery of the Fascist state - by contemporary European standards a modern state. Especially when confrontation occurs, as when Berardo and the narrator's son go to Rome, or when the Fascists appear in Fontamara in their lorries, this coexistence accentuates what is most reprehensible in the circumstances of each. In the case of the peasants it is extreme backwardness, for which they are obviously not responsible, and a certain vulnerability, a product of the ignorance that even prior to Fascism the local ruling clique sought to maintain, the better to exploit them. In the case of the government there is a neglect to ameliorate the peasants' conditions that must be deemed deliberate, given the Hon. Pelino's assurance that the regime is aware of the existence of the peasants. Ultimately there is little common ground between the peasants and Fascist Italy, not even a common national identity; a point that emerges from Zabaglione's speech to the peasants on the eve of the war in Ethiopia, in 'Pane e vino'. Zabaglione addresses his audience, with questionable accuracy, as

'-Discendente di Roma eterna, o tu, popolo mio.....' (29)

and inquires of them:

'-Ditemi, chi dunque portò la civiltà e la cultura nel Mediterraneo e su tutta l'Africa una volta conosciuta ?

-Noi ! rispondono alcune voci.....

.....Ditemi ancora, vi imploro, chi ha inventato l'elettricità, il telegrafo senza fili e tutte le altre cose sulle quali si basa la vita moderna ?

-Noi ! rispondono delle voci.

-Ma gli altri se la godono. Ditemi infine, di grazia, chi ha emigrato in tutti i paesi del mondo per scavare miniere, costruire ponti, tracciare strade, prosciugare paludi ?'

....questa volta tutti si alzano in piedi e urlano:

-Noi ! Noi ! Noi !' (30)



Although the treatment of the peasants in 'Pane e vino' differs slightly from that of the Fontamarese, inasmuch as it is, perhaps, more overtly compassionate, more grotesque and in a sense marginally less idealized, both groups of peasants nevertheless share a common sense of identity. As the above quotation suggests, the peasants of 'Pane e vino' cannot relate to the technological advances that barely affect their lives, any more than the Fontamarese can to the civilization of the towns, lacking, as they do, a common culture and even a common language. Thus, with a certain clarity they recognize themselves to be a race of peasants. Fascism's pre-occupation with nationality and Italianism altogether fails to touch them.

Now, much of the polemic of 'Fontamara' lies in the inter-relationship - loosely speaking - between the peasants and the outside world of urban culture that we shall term simply 'the town'. As this relationship is crucial to an understanding of the novel, it is worth retracing it even prior to the advent of Fascism, particularly since the appearance of Fascism in Fontamara marked the emergence of a new class, almost a new breed of men as exemplified by the Impresario, of whom more will be said later. The peasant narrator recalls that the peasants' misfortunes began with the intervention of the Piedmontese - a view that is seconded by the awful zia Eufemia (in 'Il seme sotto la neve') - the last offshoot of an old Southern aristocratic family. Prior to the arrival of the Piedmontese - the villagers tending, perhaps not incorrectly, to consider the Unification of Italy merely as another occupation - situations were clearly defined and governed, as the peasant narrator says, by two or three simple laws. (31) The Piedmontese introduced innumerable new laws and created innumerable officials; laws which hitherto had concerned landowners only, became applicable to the peasants also, and thus in order to evade the laws the peasants began to require lawyers. Thenceforth the caste of lawyers and notaries

multiplied at the peasants' expense; this point is elaborated upon more in the first edition than the second. (Perhaps this greater insistence on the large number of lawyers in the first edition, especially at the Impresario's banquet, accentuates their parasitic social role.) Don Circostanza in Fontamara and don Paziienza in Rome emblemize the lawyers' exploitation of the peasants' ignorance. Nor is it an accident that the fortunes of the Torlonia family also date back to the Risorgimento and the Piedmontese dynasty; a Frenchman, the merchant Torlogne, he came to Italy around 1830, according to Berardo (32), speculated profitably on anything and everything and was ultimately ennobled and given eternal rights to the produce of the lands of the newly drained Fucino basin. As the author observes:

'La dinastia piemontese gli regalò una cosa che non le apparteneva.' (33)

This, then, is the crucial point in the relation between the town and the peasants; the wealth of the town has been accumulated at the expense of the peasants. One illustration of this is sufficient; the anecdote regarding San Berardo and white bread, that it is made from country-grown wheat and consumed solely in the town. But although even the dogs and cats of the town eat it, the peasants are obliged to consume maize bread. The gratuitous, often mocking, cruelty of the townsfolk for the peasants, born of intense almost unconscious contempt, is manifested by such anecdotes as the appointment of the parish priest to Fontamara, and the trick regarding the drinking fountain that is played on the women of Fontamara. As Silone comments in his preface, this scorn for the Southern peasants extends also to their crafts and to their mode of story-telling. The peasants - and this conditions their sense of their own identity - are aware of the contempt in which they are held by the townsfolk. Particularly significant in this respect is the lowly position ascribed to themselves in what they deem the natural hierarchical order;

they rank well below Prince Torlonia's dogs.

But prior to the advent of Fascism, the social order in and around Fontamara was relatively clear and predictable; spiritual power residing with the Church, and temporal power being monopolized by the local landowner and the predominant lawyer. (Prince Torlonia, by reason of his extreme wealth, is excluded from any active involvement in the peasants' existence, save that of requiring and drawing labour to work his estate from the peasant auction held daily in Fucino.) As his nickname suggests, the *Impresario*, who appears in Fontamara a few years before the novel begins, emblemizes a new breed of man; the entrepreneur, or tycoon, a man distinguished by, what is to the peasants, little short of financial wizardry. He differs from the old ruling class inasmuch as, where they are habitually idle, gluttonous and lecherous, he is indefatigably industrious. The peasants remain amazed at the industriousness of one they consider belongs to the leisured class; they observe:

'Egli era in abito da lavoro, ....le scarpe bruciate di calce, i pantaloni e le spalle scorse di gesso e di calce. Nessuno, che non lo conoscesse, avrebbe creduto ch'egli fosse l'uomo più ricco della nostra regione e il capo del comune.....' (34)

He differs more fundamentally from the leisured class of Fontamara in that he incorporates in his person, and within his particular locality, economic and political power - the latter following from the former. (To judge from don Abbacchio's appearance at his inaugural banquet and the priest's servilely ingratiating manner, he even exercises a certain power over the Church.) He manifests no penchant for the sensual pleasures enjoyed by don Circostanza, don Carlo Magna and don Abbacchio, emerging by contrast as a relative ascetic. His motivation appears to be the lust for, and exercise of, power for power's sake. Clearly the

inertia and stagnation of the old ruling class aids his rapid success, although no more than does the support of the Bank. As in 'Il seme sotto la neve' we see the old landowning class supplanted by a new type of speculator and - while wishing to avoid political jargon - capitalist. Indeed the Impresario is something of a 'colonial imperialist', a fact more overtly stressed in the second edition of 'Fontamara' where Matalè comments:

"L'Impresario ha scoperto l'America dalle nostre parti." (35)

The novelty of the Impresario's circumstances is illustrated by the peasants' incredulity towards the intervention of the banks in business enterprises. Matalè says:

'-Per nostra esperienza e per sentito dire, noi sapevamo che una Banca può servire per conservare i soldi, oppure per spedirli dall'America in Italia, oppure per cambiarli nella moneta di un altro paese. Ma che cosa c'entrava la Banca con gli affari? Come poteva interessarsi una Banca nell'allevamento dei porci, nella costruzione di case, nella conceria delle pelli, nella fabbrica di mattoni?' (36)

The Impresario is the agent of radical change in methods of production, both agricultural and industrial, in Fontamara. (According to Donna Zizzola, another such Impresario operates in nearby Sulmona.) The Impresario further distinguishes himself from his predecessors by virtue of degree, and this ultimately implies a measure of intention previously lacking; whereas his predecessors - the local landowners and lawyers - cheated and exploited the peasants, in accordance with his single-mindedness and the exigencies of his rapidly expanding business ventures, he must, inevitably, bleed them dry. A situation that duly - and almost literally - occurs, with the theft of the stream. Whereas the conditions of the peasants have previously been far from satisfactory, they now become not so much intolerable as impossible. The Impresario's personal

empire is created by sequestering the minimal assets of the peasants, in a nominally legal fashion. The regime behaves in a like manner thereby reinforcing the notion that the Impresario reproduces on a small scale its attitudes and attributes. Even the peasants' ultimate asset, the value of their labour, is divested of much of its worth by the governmental reduction in wages for agricultural workers; a law observed by don Circostanza, but passed apparently by the regime.

The Impresario's appointment as podestà seemingly implies the cooperation or collusion between capital and the Fascist regime; an irresistibly powerful alliance. The change in the title of his public office from 'sindaco' to 'podestà' is perhaps indicative of the Fascist abuse of language, but also of a correspondingly changed exercise of role. The Impresario's abuse of language and power is epitomized by his declaration to the women of Fontamara, regarding the diversion of the stream:

'-Finché io sarò capo del comune, prepotenze non ce ne saranno. Tanto meno contro dei lavoratori come i Fontamaresi.....Ma in questo caso, non si tratta di una prepotenza.....' (37)

There can be no arrogation where abuse has the sanction of legality. Given this considerable freedom of action, the Impresario, on this occasion, expediently adopts the verbal defence of the Fontamarese. The official posturing of the regime is hardly dissimilar; the pamphlet produced by Peppino Goriano, that meets, understandably, with total incredulity on the part of the peasants, constitutes the regime's formal announcement of its protective championship of the peasants' interests, of the immense ameliorations it has effected in their standard of living. Peppino Goriano, with his first-hand knowledge of the workings of the regime, tries to explain its motivation in publishing such a pamphlet: the peasants, lacking his experience of political reality,

had judged it the work of a lunatic or an enemy of the government.

Peppino explains, starting from the crucial historical premise:

'Il governo è stato sempre contro i poveri.....  
 ma l'attuale governo è un governo speciale....Esso  
 è contro i poveri, ma in un modo speciale. Tutta la  
 sua forza è contro i poveri, ma in un modo speciale....  
 Tra quelli che hanno versato il loro sangue per creare  
 l'attuale governo vi sono stati molti poveri....Senza  
 di essi, il governo attuale non si reggerebbe a lungo.  
 L'attuale governo ha bisogno di essi. Il governo  
 del principe Torlonia e della Banca ha bisogno di essi.  
 Quanto più il governo fa gli interessi del principe  
 Torlonia e della Banca, tanto più ha bisogno di essi,  
 tanto più ha bisogno di far credere di essere il governo  
 dei cafoni e di tutti i lavoratori.' (38)

In order to maintain itself, the government desires the support of precisely those classes it mercilessly exploits, seeking to portray itself as a popular government. This analysis of Peppino Goriano's might be said to be accurate in so far as it goes, while failing to take into account various factors. Primarily, as the later novels demonstrate, 'Pane e vino' and 'Il seme sotto la neve' especially, and as Peppino observes in 'Fontamara' fear pervades Fascist Italy and affects the rich and powerful no less than the poor. Secondly, and this obviously correlates with this fear, the government maintains itself by the constant, brutal exercise of its might, notwithstanding the image it seeks to create. Thirdly, as is indicated by the curious episode of the mass turn-out in Avezzano over the 'Fucino question', the myth of the Fascist government as a popular government is an illusion cherished by the Fascist hierarchy even as they despoil the peasants. We might speculate that inasmuch as the members of the Fascist hierarchy are prone to the common human desire for approbation, in order to attain this, they dupe themselves with the very illusions they propagate. On the occasion of the resolution of the Fucino question, the peasants' function appears to be to express their loyal and enthusiastic support

for the podestà, the prefect, and the minister.

Furthermore, the Fascist government not infrequently sets peasant against peasant: it is the landless peasants who, as Fascist militiamen, rape the women of Fontamara. It is, we must assume, militiamen of the same provenance who execute the massacre of the Fontamarese, at the end of the novel. Mistrust is, moreover, rife between urban workers and peasants; Berardo is incredulous that a person from the town - like the Solito Sconosciuto - could concern himself with the predicament of the peasant. However, given that prior to the advent of Fascism, a certain class consciousness, even solidarity was apparent in national life - perhaps more so in Northern than Southern Italy - the regime considered the illusion of paternalism convenient. In 'La scuola dei dittatori' Tommaso il Cinico suggests (39) that the originality of Fascism resides in the fact that, although a party of reaction, it challenged the parties of reform or revolution with their own symbols, tactics and techniques. Fascism, the party of reaction, also, to a point, officially arrogated their programme of social reform, and increased equality. Thence Fascism's verbal preoccupation with the betterment of the lot of the peasant (and the worker whose importance was 'recognised' in the creation of the corporate state). The expression of the former was, predictably, coloured by various alien and emotive considerations like the age-old myth of idyllic peasant life that the regime had reason to insist upon, and the tone of heroic self-congratulation that marked the relation of the glorious achievements of the regime. Peppino Goriano's pamphlet conveys the official position of the government; it is, in effect, a droll pastiche of Fascist propaganda, but inspired closely enough from authentic pronouncements to demonstrate that the regime's detractors could find adequate ammunition in a confrontation between the propaganda projection and the reality of the

peasants' condition in Southern Italy. The pamphlet includes an idyll to the ploughman's life, written, doubtless, according to the tenets of the new 'Fascist art', and naturally totally incomprehensible to the peasants, whether because their ears are unattuned to poetry, or because the mood of the poem is alien to their experience or both. The author observes in his preface as an indication of the peasants' cultural and spiritual destitution, that no separate vocabulary exists for joy or sorrow in their dialect; and this perhaps, apart from the preciousness of the style, helps render the mood of the poem incomprehensible. It begins:

"Sotto il garrulo sol, per ardue cime  
 Il mietitor ne l'opera s'avanza  
 Mentre in cor gli sorride la speranza  
 Letiziante delle masse opime." (40)

(As in 'Pane e vino' where the schoolmistress and political commissary of the village tells the peasants that other nations would give anything for a leader like Mussolini, and the peasants inquire as to exactly what or how much they would give (41), the regime fails to strike the right note in its peasant directed propaganda. The tone of shared exultation is inapplicable to the peasants, and thus leaves them unmoved and incredulous.)

Peppino's pamphlet proceeds, with characteristic crassness, between the obvious and the absurd:

"Donde provengono il burro fresco, l'olio  
 trasparente, la farina bianca, la frutta squisita.  
 Dalla campagna !  
 Gli abitanti delle città sono magri, nervosi,  
 pallidi, malinconici.  
 Gli abitanti delle campagne sono robusti,  
 allegri, rosei, ottimisti." (42)

and finally enumerates the radical reforms passed by a beneficent regime:

"Per merito del nuovo governo i cafoni non  
 lavorano più di otto ore al giorno."



I cafoni sono assicurati contro gli infortuni, le malattie e la disoccupazione.

Le tasse che una volta pagavano i cafoni, sono state diminuite.

Le banche sono alla disposizione dei cafoni per il credito." (43)

'Fontamara' serves as a conspicuous refutation of these extravagant claims; too conspicuous indeed to merit detailed clarification. A pointer to the regime's privately disenchanting assessment of conditions in the Mezzogiorno, that cannot but give the lie to its own propaganda, is the fact that political prisoners were often interned there. Evidently this presupposes that the regime - privately - came to much the same evaluation as did Silone and Alvaro of the almost infinite capacity for tolerance and passivity of the peasants, and of the paralyzing backwardness of the Mezzogiorno.

As stated above, the peasants of 'Fontamara' are increasingly bewildered by the new and strange circumstances in which they find themselves, resulting from the intervention of Fascism in what were once purely local or personal concerns - and the nature of the intervention - together with the emergence of the Impresario as a local 'colonial imperialist'. In such instances the peasants generally turn to their political mentor, General Baldissera for clarification. In fact, there are two such mentors in Fontamara, General Baldissera, the loyal supporter of conservatism and the old order, whose outlook is personified in his devotion to Queen Margherita, and Berardo who preaches the doctrine of violence to the youth of Fontamara. Ultimately, force of circumstances causes General Baldissera to adopt Berardo's stance, that violence must be answered by violence. Thus, at a time when Berardo has renounced his social for his personal commitment, Baldissera evaluates the regime according to his experience and reaches the same conclusions as Berardo

once held; he says:

'-Nessuno è stato mai, come me, rispettoso dell'ordine e della calma. Ma adesso non c'è più ordine, non c'è più calma, non c'è più governo; non c'è più giustizia, non ci sono più leggi..... Adesso nessuno può farsi i fatti suoi. Adesso nessuno può aver pace..... Se i custodi della legge vengono di notte e straziano le donne del tuo paese, puoi tu dire: nessuna di quelle donne è mia moglie ?' (44).

Berardo, by a process common to Silone's heroes, notwithstanding different underlying motives, loses faith in his original doctrine (in this case violence, Communism in the case of Pietro Spina and Rocco, protagonist of 'Una manciata di more') undergoes a crisis or more correctly an agony, and is finally restored to a new, intensified and more personal faith. Berardo's restoration to his destiny (while only implicit in the first (45)) is clearly stated in the second edition of 'Fontamara', through the arguments with which Berardo opposes the young man from Avezzano, which are, in reality, objections thrown up against himself, and through the young peasant narrator's observation that on waking next day in prison, Berardo is 'his old self again'. Nevertheless this comment disregards a crucial change in Berardo's outlook; that is, essentially, the change from doctrine to faith. For the nature of Berardo's death constitutes the supreme expression of his newly articulated faith in community, a community into which town and country enter equally, and for which, with an obvious parallel to Christ, he sacrifices his life. Berardo, then, moves from a political theory, and even a reasonably sophisticated political theory - as where he observes that there are different ways of reaping according to the wage paid (46) - to the kind of primitive Christianity, that for Silone's protagonists constitutes the sole valid foundation for social reform. (47) The social validity of Berardo's faith is confirmed by the vast change his death effects in the Fontamarese; from disunity, from the exclusive pre-

occupation with their own interests, predictable enough in their circumstances, to a sense of community that manifests itself in the writing and style of the local newspaper 'Che dobbiamo fare ?'.

Prior to Berardo's death, however, the Fontamarese are bewildered. By reason of the superior knowledge of - democratic - law and government he gained in the service of donna Zizzola's parents, Baldissera acts as the local arbiter and critic of the Fascist regime. He emerges from the novel as a rather pathetic old man, perhaps even a little senile - nor are the other peasants less pathetic or vulnerable in their naïvety. (A confrontation of the views held by Baldissera, and the conduct of the regime in which he finds himself show him up as an anachronism.) It is nonetheless one of the most consistent and remarkable aspects of 'Fontamara' that the seemingly artless comments of its characters are astute and accurate observations of their real circumstances. One of the most suggestive examples regards the curfew that is to be imposed on Fontamara; Innocenzo La Legge replies to the peasants' practical objections with the kind of illogical evasion characteristic of Fascism:

'-Voi non avete capito..... Chi vi ha detto, che voi dovete cambiare le vostre abitudini ? Voi restate cafoni e farete i vostri lavori quando vi pare. Ma l'Impresario è podestà e voi non potete impedirgli di fare il podestà. Ed io, che cosa sono, io ? Cursore del comune e non potete impedirmi di fare il cursore. L'Impresario, come podestà, decide, per lavarsi le mani dalle proteste e dai reclami delle altre autorità, che voi, durante la notte dovete stare in casa. Io, come cursore, vi porto il suo ordine. Voi, come cafoni, fate quel che vi pare.

-E la legge ? - si mise a urlare il generale Baldissera - la legge dove va a finire in questo modo ? La legge è, o non è, la legge ?' (48)

General Baldissera's question obviously begs an answer. Baldissera's evaluation of the government circular stating the need for identity papers

(la tessera) is equally acute, although the premises on which he bases his reasoning may seem incorrect; he comments that only in case of war are papers necessary, and deduces that Italy is at war, although he is uncertain of the enemy until the Fascist 'punitive expedition' arrives in Fontamara, firing their guns. He then concludes that the war is against the peasants. The subsequent rape of the women, the theft of the stream - tantamount to a siege - the ambush and massacre of the Fontamarese all corroborate his opinion; such is the conduct of warfare. So too the campaign against the *Solito Sconosciuto*, which consists of the pursuit, torture and murder of the political opponents of the regime. Silone, sadly, had more occasion than most to be aware that the Fascist regime resorted to torture and murder in its jails, and he is one of the few Italian novelists to mention this, or the existence of agents provocateurs, either before or after the Second World War. His own brother was a victim of the regime, and his treatment is revindicated in Silone's portrayal of Berardo's death (together with the sacrificial nature of the relationship between Berardo and the Avezzanese) and also, we might assume, in the evidently Christ-like passion of Luigi Murica in 'Pane e vino'.

Reference to torture and 'suicide', the verdict recorded on Berardo's death, are one means of factually discrediting the Fascist regime. Thus also the description of the rape of the women and the terrorist tactics employed against the Fontamarese. Such tactics as punitive expeditions were a well known aspect of Fascist strategy, although possibly not as late as 1930. Nevertheless, the climate conveyed by their portrayal is probably exact. Similarly, rape occurs also in 'Pane e vino' and its significance is evidently, at least partly, symbolic. The sadistic treatment to which the innocent and defenceless are deliberately subjected, often in preference to the designated opponents

of the regime, is a deterrent characteristic of terrorism (and cowardice). Rape executed by Fascist militiamen, perhaps, also symbolizes the complete perversion of love under the regime, the dreadful devaluation of sexual intercourse; dreadful because it reflects precisely the depravity predominant in other spheres of social intercourse. It would not be fanciful to say that the chastity of Pietro Spina (which is more apparent in 'Pane e vino' than in 'Vino e pane') is a reaction to this defilement, a repurification. (49) The corruption of the regime is evidently mirrored in the criminality and depravity of its followers, like the Penitent Thief, but also by the exploitation of such abject characters as Peppino Goriano, and the landless peasants brutalized in its service. Further, the regime is shown to be contemptible in that having attained power, it seeks to reform its image and therefore abandons the supporters who championed it and were previously proclaimed heroes. Moreover, the account of Peppino Goriano's life suggests that prior to the seizure of power, Mussolini found it necessary to recruit mercenaries, and this, to some degree, invalidates the regime's claim to popular government. (Although Silone's necessarily partisan stance, the urgency of discrediting an indisputably unjust and tyrannical regime, and his acute sense of the inevitably tragic consequences of Fascism on the lives of those subjected to it, understandably obscured the obvious; and that is that notwithstanding the veracity of his accusations Fascism nevertheless enjoyed a certain popularity - the bases of which are discussed with reference to the pro-Fascist writers.) Similarly, the account of the 'Fucino question' refutes the myth of the spontaneity of Fascism's oceanic assemblies. (50)

The massacre of the Fontamarese is the supreme demonstration of the total disregard evinced by the regime for its helpless subjects, and of the implacable suppression of its 'troublesome' elements; it also

appears regrettably logical in the context of the novel. In fact, the novel manifests a certain logical continuity on two counts; the systematization of corruption and the escalation of hostility and violence on the part of the Fascist regime, against the Fontamarese.

As stated above, the account in 'Fontamara' of the emergence of a caste of lawyers, and the role they assume, suggests that the Unification of Italy marked the birth of a new era in the Abruzzi; however, nowhere is it suggested that this new era is democratic. The peasant narrator characterized it by the sudden proliferation of laws which destroy the previous age-old order and initiate the pejoration of the peasants' lot. Paradoxically, these laws brought into being deceit, injustice and corruption, inasmuch as those who made them (the Piedmontese) and those who interpreted them (the local lawyers), did so in accordance with their own best interests. Thus, while they were applicable to the peasants, in practice they afforded the peasants no protection against the offences suffered at the hands of the local ruling classes. The Fascists differ from their predecessors largely by degree; they are possibly more cynical, certainly more adept and resolute in their pursuit of self-interest - their own and that of their supporters insofar as the two coincide - and if indeed the Impresario is an emblematic figure - they are also far more energetic. Their predecessors, the local lawyers and landowners, have stagnated in the hitherto unchallenged security of their position. In a certain sense, even the ruthlessness with which the Impresario pursues his interests, is a manifestation of energy. Having seized power, the Fascist regime endorsed its position by the legalization and gradual systematization of corruption; a fairly logical step, which was also the quickest and most efficacious way of 'eliminating' crime, and violation of the law. As the captain of the gendarmes observes, with reference to the diversion

of the stream:

'-Sotto il nuovo governo, prepotenze non ne possono più succedere. Si tratta di un atto legale, legalissimo.....' (51)

The ambiguity of this remark is indubitably intentional and illustrates Fascism's deliberate subversion of language; a crucial factor in the predominance of the regime. As the above quotation proves, Fascist manipulation of language served to obscure the issue in question; it was a hindrance, rather than a help to communication. Furthermore, the Fascist regime differed from the previous 'democratic' order, not so much in its awareness of the peasants, as in its peasant-orientated propaganda. This however remained in constant contradiction with the reality. The regime's expressions of concern for the peasants' welfare were not translated into effective, beneficial reforms; rather they constituted an expedient substitute for reform, since its pronouncements were often accorded credibility. But more important, the divorce of language and meaning, permitted the total divorce of words from deeds, of the convenient myth from reality. Thus the Fucino question is 'resolved', the peasants' life is infinitely improved by the benevolent paternalistic regime; whose very official benevolence it is that facilitates the despotic enforcement of its policies. It is, then, appearances that count, and the Fontamarese are finally killed to preserve appearances of unity and benevolence. Violence is a logical tool within the given context. In 'Fontamara' it seems that violence is the most efficacious and least costly way of altering or suppressing the reality to fit the façade - given that the land was deemed more valuable than the peasants who worked it, and, ultimately, that the destruction of a small village was considered preferable to the establishment of a small and relatively powerless opposition.

The workings of the regime are consistent and subject to a

certain logic. It is Silone's hypothesis that far from being a 'freak phenomenon' - an expression of the type frequently encountered that seems to constitute an exemption from judgement - or a revolution, understood in the sense of representing a complete break with the previous tradition of government, the Fascist regime is a logical, if not inevitable, consequence of the previous tradition. As the peasant narrator of 'Fontamara' says, prior to the massacre of the villagers, none of the abuses inflicted on them are unprecedented; only the fact that they have become lawful is without precedent. Nor is chicanery new to them; don Circostanza appears to be a past-master of it. Fascism exists largely as the consummation of the abuse and injustice initially called into being by the Piedmontese. The portrayal of the 'good society' of 'Il seme sotto la neve' suggests that aside from its political incarnation, Fascism mirrors a certain mentality and indeed represents the institutionalization of people's basest, most anti-social tendencies; an incompassionate Weltanschauung, dominated by the glorification of self-interest, that is obviously - although far from exclusively - a bourgeois attitude. This attitude met with encouragement and even had a certain social respectability conferred upon it by the regime - since it rendered those who held it more compliant. The inference to be drawn from 'Il segreto di Luca' is that the acceptability of this attitude survived the regime's destruction and continued to govern the mores of society in post-war Italy.

In a somewhat comic scene Innocenzo La Legge tells the Fontamarese that the podestà has forbidden all political discussions, which in practice means any dialogue whatsoever, and the puzzled peasant narrator inquires:

'-Se i ragionamenti sono a vantaggio solo dei padroni e delle autorità..... perchè il podestà ha deciso di proibire tutti i ragionamenti ?....' (52)



An ironic reflection on the regime's practice of maintaining its predominance by force, this question also implies the regime's vulnerability, its inability to withstand critical evaluation. In 'Pane e vino', Pietro Spina states that the whole edifice of Fascism can be threatened by a single individual who speaks the truth, however secluded the place in which he does so. In Leo Ferrero's 'Diario di un privilegiato sotto il fascismo', the Questore's secretary seemingly comes close to corroborating Spina's - and Silone's - belief, in conversation with the author's father, Guglielmo Ferrero. The conversation between the two proceeds thus from the secretary's cautionary remark:

"...lei, appunto perchè intellettuale,  
può essere pericoloso...."

"Ma come, scusi ? Se non posso più nè scrivere  
nè parlare ?"

"Sì, lei parla ancora."

"In casa."

"Sì, ma parla troppo. Lei dovrebbe limitarsi,  
certe cose, a pensarle !" (53)

The obvious implication of the secretary's admonition is that the regime will brook no dissent. Further, as emerges clearly from Ferrero's diary - written in Italy - by expressing hostility to the regime, the refractory individual renders himself guilty of 'damaging' Italy's newly restored prestige (generally synonymous with the international image or façade projected by Fascism) and therefore liable to be punished. Predictably, in a totalitarian state - and one which made extravagant boasts for itself - the category of calumny expanded almost indefinitely so as to include veracious observations and the trivial - which the Fascist state felt justified in treating with a severity worthy of treason. Thus the rather banal story of Madame X who sends for a nurse from Switzerland and writes that she may travel third class on Swiss trains, but only second on Italian trains, since the latter are dirty, ends with a summons to the

police station and a harsh reprimand:

"Un italiano dovrebbe sapere che certe cose sono offese contro la patria. Le terze italiane non sono sporche. Sa lei che potremmo per quelle parole mandarla al confino?" (54)

Apparently it is only the favour with which her husband is viewed by high-ranking Fascists that saves her from internment. Overall, however, neither the Fascist functionaries portrayed in Ferrero's diary, nor Ferrero himself, can envisage the dissent of an individual seriously challenging the authority and stability of the regime within Italy. Indeed Ferrero's play 'Angelica' depicts a situation diametrically opposed to the conclusion of 'Pane e vino' and to 'Il seme sotto la neve'. In 'Angelica', a single upright individual, Orlando, stands in opposition to a tyrannical Regent, reminiscent of Mussolini, and whom he overthrows only to be spontaneously rejected by the unwilling citizens on whom he has endowed democratic freedom. Unlike Silone, who is sustained by an ultimately Christian faith or optimism, Ferrero reveals a profound pessimism, both in 'Diario di un privilegiato sotto il fascismo', an account of the injustices perpetrated against his family by the Fascist regime (that fails to cultivate any long term perspective in which it might be possible to contemplate the overthrow of the regime) and in 'Angelica', which expresses his most politicized thesis, that the middle class are, through personal inadequacy and self-interest, the natural enemies of democracy.

Ferrero, son of Guglielmo Ferrero and Gina Lombroso was born into a family with a strong conservative intellectual tradition and considerable social prestige: a heritage of which he was acutely sensible, to judge from the evidence of his diary. His preoccupations, like those of his parents, were mainly academic; his parents' acquaintance and influence were extensive in Europe and America. The latter fact apparently

conditioned their treatment by the regime. After the passing of the *leggi eccezionali* in 1926, Guglielmo Ferrero, according to his son, attracted the attention of the regime by his protestations against the withholding of passports. His refusal then and subsequently to retract statements and attitudes 'damaging' to the regime (by their discordance with official propaganda) caused him and his family to be subjected to constant surveillance. This took various forms from the interception of letters and inducement of his servants to 'inform' on the family, to the presence of policemen in his garden and car. Ferrero argues that the relative levity of his family's persecution was - given their celebrity - due to the regime's fear of creating a bad international impression. His diary includes brief accounts of many people who fared far worse at the hands of the Fascists, prior to 1926 being beaten, or having their property damaged or destroyed, and after the promulgation of the *leggi eccezionali*, being denied their livelihood or interned. Ferrero, then, was aware of the two-fold privilege of his condition. The title of the diary establishes a certain perspective that Ferrero failed to observe in what was essentially a personal record, not intended for publication.

It is precisely the privilege of Ferrero's situation that constitutes the rarity and value of his testimony and justifies its inclusion in this study, despite the fact that he is a playwright and essayist, rather than a novelist. (He was engaged in writing a family saga at the time of his premature death.) His work, further, creates an interesting counterpoint with that of Silone; which only serves to enhance the suggestivity of their occasionally similar images. The basic premise of 'Angelica' is the Regent's restoration of the medieval Right of the First Night to symbolize his cynical violation of the moral and legal codes; this is, clearly, not too dissimilar from Silone's use of

rape, although the themes are subsequently developed somewhat differently, according to their different convictions.

Ferrero, like Silone went into exile; although, unlike Silone, his exile was ostensibly voluntarily undertaken. However, police harassment of his family during the preceding year 1926-27, and the resultant limitations imposed on his autonomy, were responsible for his decision to leave Italy. Unlike Silone, he was forced into a political and class consciousness, that might otherwise have remained foreign to his nature, by the direct intervention of Fascism in his life. This experience teaches him that the observation of law has been replaced by obedience to orders that frequently run counter to the law.

He says:

'Tra la legge e l'ordine concreto, tangibile,  
personale del superiore che ti può punire  
(anche ingiustamente) un Italiano non esita mai.' (55)

and quotes an instructive conversation between his father and the local Comissario on the subject. Guglielmo begins:

"Sono pur costretto a dirvi che violate la legge".

"Ma ce l'ordinano."

"....Bella ragione. E se le ordinassero di uccidermi."

Il comissario, uomo sensibile alle *nuances* e navigato, risponde:

"Non mi ordineranno mai di uccidere un uomo come lei." (56)

In fact, Ferrero's diary documents the normalization of Fascist Italy, in the wake of the *leggi eccezionali*, although not perhaps in any allegedly Fascist sense of the word. Rather, this diary conveys the gradual coming to terms with a most abnormal political and social reality - with regard to the experience and expectations of Ferrero's circle - following the official dismemberment of the judicial code. He portrays

the evolution of a new *modus vivendi*, and the accommodations, however small, that he and his circle inevitably made to it; like the tendency to avoid mentioning either Mussolini or the Fascists, instead designating them with a special group or family name, in his case Bal and the balisti. To what degree was this new *modus vivendi* voluntary and to what degree involuntary? Perhaps Arlequin's response, on behalf of his fellow citizens, to the Regent's resuscitation of the Right of the First Night in 'Angelica', is applicable to this circumstance also. He says:

"Nous ne le tolérons pas, mais tout se passera  
comme si nous le tolérions." (57)

Such intolerance as remains against the existing order does not materialize into rejection, and indeed appears indistinguishable from acceptance. (The bourgeoisie of 'Angelica' subsequently and quite vociferously decide that the Regent's violation of the law is less intolerable to them than living in a state of freedom.) The inference of Ferrero's diary is that after 1926 traditional forms of social interchange were, of necessity, all but eliminated to be replaced not by a new form, or not among Ferrero's intimates at least, but by the institution of innumerable taboos, marking so many lost freedoms; the privilege to remark on the dirty trains, the poor quality of bread and the withholding of passports, the privilege of speaking one's thoughts aloud within the family circle. The class that had previously been entrusted with upholding the law now found it necessary to learn the 'ropes' of their new situation and to acquire the knowledge - crucial in a totalitarian regime - of what constituted a crime against the Mother-country (a category now vastly expanded by Fascism) and the corresponding punishment. In their new and precarious position, the only safeguards Ferrero's family possessed, were influential friends at home and abroad.

Whereas Silone felt an urgency to communicate primarily and then to discredit the regime, Ferrero, by reason of the injustice of his situation, manifests a need to denounce the guilty. In his diary he writes, at one point, that the absence of a show of intolerance to Fascism, both in Italy and abroad, is responsible for its endurance:

'Se il fascismo avesse incontrato una certa resistenza all'interno o all'estero, si sarebbe dissolto ormai da un pezzo. Ma per opporsi a un regime illegittimo bisogna avere dei principi, aver coscienza dei propri doveri e di quelli altrui, e soprattutto di aver fede in questi principi. Quello che ha permesso al fascismo di divampare in Italia e attraverso il mondo è che la gente manca di fede anche nei principi che proclama più sacri.' (58)

The concept of 'principles' is fundamental to Ferrero's thought; adherence to principles is the yardstick by which he evaluates individuals, and social or national groups, virtue and vice. Orlando is a man of principle, that is to say incorruptible, otherwise the cast of 'Angelica' are unprincipled; that is refractory to virtue, morality and freedom. The Ferrero family, too, are a family of strong principles; their persecutors, the Fascist functionaries, are clearly totally devoid of principles. Elsewhere, Ferrero levels a more specific accusation against the middle and ruling class; his own class and the subject of the drama 'Angelica'. He declares:

'Decisamente la classe dominante borghese si mostra inferiore alla classe dominante dei tempi passati..... La segreta simpatia che essa dimostra in tutti i paesi per Bal significa l'ammirazione per chi ha saputo far trionfare la violenza sulla giustizia. C'è nella classe dominante di tutti i paesi un desiderio folle di scaricarsi di quel poco di giustizia che dopo la rivoluzione francese i borghesi dovevano pure al popolo.' (59)

Ferrero's hostility towards Fascism's international admirers (he mentions the French in 'Diario di un privilegiato sotto il fascismo' and the

English and Americans in 'Angelica') derives from his conviction of the irresponsible and morally reprehensible fashion in which these admirers extoll, and by their approbation endorse, weakness or inadequate behaviour. They appear to consider an authoritarian state immensely beneficial to its subjects, while asserting their own inviolable right to inhabit a more liberal environment. Thus Ferrero satirizes the attitudes of the foreign observers who opine order to be preferable to freedom, and even adopt a 'metaphysical' approach to the question of freedom. The intellectual dishonesty and sheer hypocrisy of such an approach are parodied in the allegorical declaration of a common fate made by the British philosopher to the political prisoner:

"Oh ! Monsieur, croyez-vous que nous soyons plus libres que vous.... Vous vous trompez Monsieur: nous sommes tous les esclaves de nous-mêmes, de nos passions, de nos vices, de nos intérêts....." (60)

Predictably, when the philosopher and the American newspaper correspondent are arrested for talking to a prisoner, they hasten to insist on the sanctity of their freedom.

In the introduction to 'Angelica' Guglielmo Ferrero states:

*Angelica* est un drame fantastique, hors du temps et de l'espace. Mais le jeune poète l'a conçu en songeant à son pays.' (61)

It is, moreover, Ferrero's personal revision and modernization of the myth of Orlando. The play is indisputably inspired by Ferrero's experience of, and attitude towards, Fascism. Like 'Pane e vino' and 'Il seme sotto la neve' it manifests a certain element of autobiographical fantasy; both Pietro Spina and Orlando return to their native land, or region, to oppose the injustice of the existing totalitarian order. Nevertheless, Ferrero noticeably is not primarily concerned with

depicting the specific attributes of a Fascist regime. He merely establishes sufficient similarities between his fictional state and Fascist Italy to make the object of his satire unmistakable. (Hence the Regent's preoccupation with appearances and his irresistible attraction for his female subjects, his - unfounded - preoccupation with his own artistic merits, the ubiquity of agents provocateurs, and even agents provocateurs commissioned to verify the loyalty of the agents provocateurs !) As his view of the agents provocateurs suggests, Ferrero is aware of - though unamused by - the more ludicrous aspects of Fascism, like the elaborate but counterproductive precautions taken to conceal its incompetence. Ultimately, for Ferrero, the appellation 'Fascism' is merely the official rallying-cry for those who violate and destroy the legal code that is the basis of freedom. Thus 'Angelica' constitutes an exposition of the particular nature and guilt of the lawbreaker; but unlike that of Silone his exposition attests to little empathy or compassion for his subjects.

As stated above Orlando is the personification of righteousness; the man of principle who conceives of Angelica as a symbol of freedom, and her deliverance from the Regent's execution of the Right of the First Night, as synonymous with the people's deliverance from tyranny. He introduces himself to the Regent's passive subjects by the declaration of his knowledge of human weakness and the particular qualities he possesses that permit him to combat it. He says:

"-Je ne me fais point d'illusions sur les hommes, mais je cherche tout de même à aider les plus faibles. La plupart des gens se moquent d'une vocation aussi surannée; quelques-uns l'admirent; tout le monde se trompe en me jugeant. Il est très facile pour moi de lutter contre l'injustice et contre la violence. Je n'ai aucune ambition, je ne désire aucun titre, je ne convoite pas le pouvoir et la richesse m'est indifférente." (62)



It is not merely specious to observe that Orlando lacks an equally disenchanted understanding of women; for he still remains a dupe to the chivalry of his namesake.

Given his upright character, he is no more equipped to understand Angelica's collusion with the Regent, than are the citizens to understand his disinterested and altruistic instigation to overthrow their Regent. It emerges that Angelica, although beautiful, is not the innocent victim of a despot's lusts - as Orlando construed the situation; rather, the Regent, as Angelica says, restored an obsolete law for her, in order to fulfil his desire, and in accordance with a ruse she devised, presumably to gratify her vanity. For, as she somewhat wantonly informs Orlando, she deliberately and repeatedly enticed the Regent only to frustrate his expectations. Thus, far from protecting her presumed chastity (and thereby preserving the last foundations for decency and self-respect in her fellow citizens) he has thwarted her triumph, which was to have been her public and popular reinstatement as the Regent's mistress. The Regent's attraction for Angelica, and for the other women in the play, apparently derives less from his person, than from his role; Angelica states succinctly:

"Et alors il était Régent - et j'adorais, comme toutes les femmes, le pouvoir." (63)

Ferrero implies that unlimited power, power untrammelled by the restraint of law, exercises a certain voluptuous fascination over women that is perhaps more urgent than sexual attraction.

Clearly Angelica colludes with the Regent; she is largely responsible for the restoration of the Right of the First Night; a practice Orlando mistakenly assumes to be injurious and abhorrent to women, having failed to intuit the underlying sexual conspiracy. By

entering into a sexual liaison with the Regent Angelica would (in her own mind and that of her fellow citizens) become party to his power. In fact, the particular form of her campaign of seduction suggests that it was his power, rather than his person, she had resolved to seduce. Equally, the advantages the Regent can reasonably expect to derive from this liaison obviously exceed mere sexual gratification; the projected liaison confirms his omnipotence, or to be precise, the Regent's deliberate violation of his subjects' ethical norms actually confers omnipotence upon him. The good favour he enjoys with his female subjects at a time when the chastity of all is legally 'threatened', implies that Angelica expresses the predominant feminine sentiment. Giandua makes the following pertinent comment regarding the Regent (it would seem a not inappropriate epithet for Mussolini also):

'Il parle tout le temps de la mort, et ne fait que la noce.' (64)

The triumphal entry into Angelica's house which the Regent stage-manages for himself attests to his awareness of the political capital to be made from the publication of his sexual exploits.

The Regent, it should be noted, is a shrewd opportunist; a politician with a fine instinct for the exploitation of men, and his circumstances. He knows that the norms he flouts have become redundant, that they no longer correspond to his citizens' functional system of values, and that he can, therefore, flout them with impunity. In so doing, he acts on their behalf, discarding detritus they lack the courage to discard themselves. Thus, prior to Orlando's appearance, his middle-class citizens (the working-classes are defined as 'sentimental', swayed, that is, by their emotions) retain their illusion of acting in good faith and even a sense of injured virtue, for they, so far, fail to overtly recognise that interests have replaced principles and morals as a mode of

regulating conduct. Orlando's arrival, and the Regent's deposition, reveal their motivation and convictions. Their motivation is, indisputably, the self-interest to which they collude to 'sacrifice' Angelica. The element of collusion is made manifest when Angelica's father and fiancé angrily demand the basis for the avenging Orlando's intervention, since he lacks their intimate involvement in the affair, and should therefore, such is their inference, respect their quiescence. The Regent's possession of Angelica guarantees the father a virtual monopoly on the machinery he manufactures, and the future son-in-law advancement in his diplomatic career. The conviction they are obliged to formulate by Orlando's attempts to establish an - idealistically - democratic society during the term of caretaker government, is that, for them, freedom represents their inviolable right to impose themselves and further their interests. They are then noticeably refractory to the principles of democratic freedom. Orlando states:

'Personne ne comprend que la liberté exige le respect des droits et des légitimes aspirations des autres. Personne ne comprend que s'il est plus difficile de convaincre les gens que de les terroriser, tout ce qu'on obtient par le consentement a une valeur bien plus grande que ce que nous donne la force. ' (65)

Orlando, the man of principle, approaches the question in the only way he can, from a theoretical premise; his is an abstract exercise in the conquest of freedom. He strives and hopes to make freedom desirable by rendering it comprehensible. However, if the citizens are ignorant of the democratic code, as they indubitably are, they do not seek and will not benefit by enlightenment. Such enlightenment as is forced upon them - by Orlando's policies - only makes them antagonistic, for they feel the freedom he represents to be a diminution, a negation of themselves. Tartaglia, the unscrupulous government minister, who has

survived the Regent's deposition, epitomizes the outlook of Ferrero's bourgeoisie or ruling class. He demands:

'Était-ce la peine de renverser un ty-tyran, pour n'avoir à sa suite qu'un tyran plus dur?' (66)

The sense of having been outraged common to this class determines and justifies their indifference on Orlando's murder - according to their own standards at least. Prior to Orlando's death, representative figures of various middle-class occupations articulate the grounds for their hostility to Orlando's liberal government; Pantalón, Angelica's decidedly unheroic father, who risked nothing demands:

'"J'ai donc payé le prix d'une révolution, j'ai risqué ma vie, ma fortune et le bonheur de ma famille pour en arriver à ce désordre?"' (67)

Scaramouche, the War Minister, expresses a predictable hostility for Orlando's pacific and evidently justifiable foreign policy:

'"Orlando a décidé de réduire l'armée de moitié..... Parce qu'il faut faire (paraît-il) des économies et qu'aucun peuple ne nous menace..... Sans armée nous ne ferons jamais l'empire."' (68)

and Francatrippa, Catholic editor of a right-wing newspaper, reveals himself to be the most implacable enemy of democracy; his seemingly paradoxical statements are, in fact, consistent and reveal his loyalty to the Church - a hierarchical institution - and his hatred of Christianity - the doctrine of equality. He declares:

'Je suis catholique et anti-chrétien. Je vénère le pape parce qu'il est l'Anté-Christ. Je pense que dans le monde il faut établir avant tout, selon l'enseignement de l'Église, cette hiérarchie qui signifie l'ordre. Notre peuple est celui qui doit l'établir; elle ne peut être établie que par la force, et la force c'est l'armée.' (69)

All seem totally, constitutionally unsuited to a climate of freedom and

equality. (Nor are intellectuals and artists entirely exempted from Ferrero's condemnation; they too are guilty of 'selling' themselves to the Regent's regime, in order to acquire commissions or acclaim.) The minor characters of 'Angelica' are, as Guglielmo Ferrero observes, in his introduction, revitalized stock characters of the 'Commedia dell'arte'; they are also, we might assume, recognisable caricatures and stereotypes of Ferrero's middle-class acquaintance within Italy. Orlando, ultimately, presumes on the power of his virtue to force freedom on his involuntary subjects - and miscalculates the degree and intractability of their hostility. Angelica, the personification of collusion, kills him, and significantly disappears from the scene of the crime, without admitting to responsibility for it.

Now the foregoing tends to suggest the appositeness of a misquotation of Voltaire: that if the Regent did not exist the bourgeoisie would have had to create him. There is reason to suppose that he was more or less the same raw material as them when he started his career, only perhaps more astute and more adept at manipulating his fellows. Hence, if they did not actually create him, they have a certain responsibility for moulding him, and perhaps for projecting on to him desires and fantasies they were too weak, too cowardly or cautious to fulfil. The Regent explains his conduct thus:

'Un gouvernement qui tient dans ses mains tous les intérêts de ses citoyens, ne croyez-vous pas qu'il tient aussi leur âme ? Ces hommes, que sont-ils ? Des lâches ! Je les ai piétinés et ils m'ont acclamé ; je les ai dépouillés et ils m'ont souri ; je les ai achetés, bafoués, injuriés, embastillés, tués, violés, et ils m'ont répondu avec des courbattes..... Vous ne respectez que ceux qui vous surpassent dans vos vices. Eh bien, je serai plus bête et plus malhonnête que vous tous !' (70)

Paradoxically, the Regent is far more aware of his citizens' degradation than they are. Degraded - although seemingly unconscious and unashamed

of the fact - they hate virtue and only respect those in their own image. Whether, indeed, the Regent is more vicious than his citizens is questionable. It is only logical that he should appear so; since they exact from him a show of viciousness. This is not to say that the Regent is in any way exempt from guilt; his self-confessed ruthlessness and lust for power are, evidently, deemed contemptible by Orlando and Ferrero. Such a hypothesis merely stresses the degree of collusion. Further, while the list of crimes the Regent enumerates are applicable to Mussolini - so too in all probability their inconsequent response - they find little confirmation in the action of 'Angelica' - presumably because such techniques of coercion would have been futile given the a priori authoritarian (or Fascist) disposition of the middle-class citizens. Rather, the unforeseen ease with which Orlando overthrows the Regent outside Angelica's house - as much by his quick exploitation of a fortuitous situation as anything else - suggests that the Regent's regime was far from impregnable; that he governed by a kind of mandate. The precipitate transference of loyalty of his high-ranking officials and of the minister Tartaglia to Orlando, in order to retain their own positions - regardless of the political persuasions of his government - (a feat of political opportunism with numerous precedents in pre-Fascist and Fascist Italy) indicates that the Regent is, in the last instance, expendable and this also corroborates the thesis of fundamental collusion.

Ultimately, we must accept the Regent's argument that the citizens of 'Angelica' collude in the creation of the myth of a violent and omnipotent tyrant to compensate for their personal inadequacies. They admire in violence the antithesis or exorcism or weakness; failing to comprehend that violence is only another manifestation of weakness. They admire in the figure of the tyrant a sham of heroism: real heroism they will not tolerate, as the Regent more or less prophetically admonishes

Orlando, after his deposition. He explains:

"Les hommes n'aiment pas les vrais héros; ils ..  
détestent les martyrs. Ils n'aiment que les égoïstes;  
ils n'admirent que ceux qui réussissent à faire leur  
bien propre....." (71)

and illustrates this conviction by reference to Napoleon:

"N'a-t-il pas exprimé, avec sa réussite, le  
rêve latent des bourgeois ? Il bénéficie maintenant  
de toutes les ambitions réprimées qui cherchent une  
formule éclatante et glorieuse pour se confesser sans  
honte. Mais qu'un homme se sacrifie pour les hommes,  
n'est-ce pas une provocation ?..... Un démenti, un  
reproche vivant, la preuve qu'ils ont été lâches, le  
modèle de ce qu'ils ne seront jamais, de ce qu'ils  
ne voudront jamais être." (72)

The Regent then embodies the unfulfilled urges and desires of his citizens; he represents their egoism on a grand scale. Weakness, apparently, is sublimated into the lust for power, the 'Napoleon complex' that can take hold of a whole nation. Orlando, moribund, cautions the citizens of 'Angelica' that so long as they project their own mediocre values onto the world at large, they will never attain happiness; a statement, which although true, is probably more or less irrelevant to them since, for them, Orlando's values are incomprehensible. This statement is, in any case, offset by two observations that appear in 'Diario di un privilegiato sotto il fascismo'. Ferrero bitterly notes:

'Per far sopportare alle vittime le leggi ingiuste,  
il fascismo ha trovato questo segreto: perseguitare  
una dopo l'altra tutte le categorie di cittadini.....  
"Mal commune mezzo gaudio." (73)

and:

'Tutto lungo la sua storia i governi in Italia hanno  
coltivato questo vizio del pubblico, di godere i mali  
altrui.' (74)

This theory offers an interesting conclusion to Ferrero's theme of

collusion in degradation. It is likely that the citizens of 'Angelica', living in a common debasement feel neither debasement nor unhappiness, since all conform to a common standard, which is accepted and therefore acceptable; until Orlando arrives to challenge it and unwittingly realizes the prophecy inherent in the Regent's admonition.

In conclusion, it remains to be stated that the chief point of convergence between Silone and Ferrero, two exiled anti-Fascist writers and contemporaries, is their portrayal of the - paradoxical - legalization of the violation of the law. However, the forms their anti-Fascism assumes remain clearly differentiated, and inspired, we might assume, by very different motives. Ferrero's anti-Fascism, provoked as it was by unfortunate personal experiences, failed to attain a universal perspective. It remained abstract or personal, for he - like his protagonist Orlando - seemingly lacked the compassion that would have enabled him to move from the particular to the general. His exposition of Fascism is, presumably, accurate, often bitterly humorous, but essentially flawed by what appears to be an underlying concern primarily with his own circumstances. His awareness of the injustice of the Fascist regime is conditioned by and inseparable from the injustice he has encountered in his literary career. Orlando's description of man's predicament in an unlawful regime, suggests that Ferrero is unable to appreciate the considerable qualitative distinctions. Orlando says:

"Là où l'on ne respecte pas la loi, les hommes sont inquiets. Chaque citoyen devient la proie de tous les autres. On se promène dans les rues des villes comme dans les forêts vierges. Les frères vous trahissent. Les amis vous abandonnent et vous ne comptez que par votre astuce et par votre bassesse. On sait que les juges condamneront l'innocent, que les critiques loueront les mauvais livres, et que les filous deviendront ministres." (75)

While it is probably inevitable that in lawless - and other - societies,



critics will praise bad books, this remark in the given context nevertheless seems somewhat frivolous.

Silone, while starting from a similar premise regarding the Fascist erosion of law, nevertheless develops a very different and essentially Christian thesis, the necessity of reforming humanity according to the precepts of Charity and Community. His experience of the enforcement of the law in his native region, even prior to the institutionalization of Fascism, convinced him that law is synonymous neither with freedom nor with justice. For Silone the moral bankruptcy that characterized the Fascist period first revealed itself in the earthquake that devastated the Abruzzi in 1915; a belief that is illustrated in the conversation about their experiences of the earthquake between Simone and Faustina in 'Il seme sotto la neve' and reiterated in that between Pietro and don Bastiano. However, as stated above, Silone's thesis is that under a Fascist regime it is still Good Friday on earth. The inference of Silone's early fiction (only slightly modified in the plays and novels written after the Second World War) is that whenever and wherever a man lives according to the Gospel he will, ultimately, be crucified - such is the animosity of society - but that in order to achieve a society founded on Christ's Word, otherwise Paradise on Earth, all must nevertheless practise the Gospel, thereby modelling themselves on Christ's image. Silone, like Simone in 'Il seme sotto la neve' retains a certain measured optimism (76) notwithstanding almost overwhelming adversity. The conclusion of this novel also manifests a certain optimism: Pietro surrenders himself to the police thereby saving Infante, after the latter has murdered his father. Pietro is responsible for the murder, in a sense, inasmuch as he has taught Infante the self-love that alone makes love of one's fellows possible - and therefore renders Community realizable - but equally made it impossible for him to

submit himself to a brutalized and brutal father and master. This thesis of personalized moral responsibility makes a very significant counterpoint with Ferrero who conceptualizes only in the abstract, and in terms of principles. We might speculate that 'principles' as a means of regulating the conduct of the individual might prove more or less pointless in times of social crisis, and especially when his fellows are manifestly unprincipled. The Gospel, crudely speaking, represents a programme of unity, particularly suited to times of crisis or social disintegration.

## Notes

- (1) R.E.B. Lewis *The picaresque saint* p.115
- (2) Ignazio Silone *Uscita di sicurezza* p.81
- (3) Ignazio Silone *Fontamara* p.164
- (4) Silone *Fontamara* revised edition p.246
- (5) Silone later commented '.....elimina i alcuni particolari di documentazione economica (prezzi e salari) che erano rimasugli di marxismo volgare;' Luce d'Eramo *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* p.33
- (6) Luce d'Eramo observes: 'A parer nostro la differenza tra le due stesure nasce dalla messa a fuoco della relazione di Silone con i suoi visitatori notturni. Ne risulta una più nitida visuale del mondo rappresentato, con l'affiorare in rilievo di fatti e vicende prima sottintesi o soltanto accennati' Luce d'Eramo *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* p.33
- (7) Silone Now included in the Oscar Mondadori edition of *Vino e pane* p.21
- (8) Silone *Vino e pane* p.20
- (9) Silone describes the special circumstances of writing *Fontamara* as an exile, in poor health thus: 'Poiché ero lì, solo, sconosciuto, con falso nome, scrivere divenne per me l'unico mezzo di difesa contro il terrore dell'abbandono; e poiché il tempo probabile che mi restava da vivere non pareva lungo, scrivevo in fretta, con indicibile affanno e ansia, per fabbricarmi alla meglio quel villaggio, in cui mettevo la quintessenza di me e della mia contrada nativa, in modo da morire almeno fra i miei.' d'Eramo *L'opera di Ignazio Silone* p.31
- (10) Silone *Fontamara* question and answer p.113
- (11) Silone *Fontamara* revised edition question and answer p.166
- (12) Silone *Fontamara* p.100-01
- (13) Ibid p.138
- (14) Silone *La scuola dei cittadini* p.212
- (15) Silone *Pane e vino* p.266
- (16) Silone *Fontamara* p.20-21
- (17) Silone *Ed Egli si nascose* p.10
- (18) Silone *Fontamara* p.18
- (19) Ibid p.8
- (20) On January 20th 1927, Winston Churchill made a speech in Rome to the Italian and foreign press, quoted in *The trial of Mussolini* by 'Cassius' alias Michael Foot. 'If I had been an Italian I am sure that I should have been wholeheartedly with you from the start to finish in your triumphant struggle against the bestial appetites and passions of Leninism. I will, however, say a word on an international aspect of Fascism. Externally your movement has rendered a service to the whole world. The great fear which has always beset every democratic leader or a working class leader has been that of being undermined or overbid by someone more extreme than he.

Italy has shown that there is a way of fighting the subversive forces which can rally the masses of the people, properly led, to value and wish to defend the honour and stability of civilized society. She has provided the necessary antidote to the Russian poison.' *The trial of Mussolini* p.23. Winston Churchill was then Chancellor of the Exchequer.

- (21) Quoted in *The trial of Mussolini* Cassius p.19
- (22) Silone *Fontamara* p.36
- (23) Ibid p.110
- (24) Ibid p.111
- (25) In *Politics and the novel* p.223. Irving Howe observes with literal accuracy: 'The peasants are shown in their non-political actuality and the political actuality is shown as it moves in upon them threatening to starve and destroy them; Silone does not assume the desired relationship between the two, though he shows the possibilities for a movement into that relationship;' It is nevertheless a relationship that can be readily inferred by the reader. As General Baldissera says, the peasants are totally uninformed of events in any part of Italy outside their own immediate vicinity, and it is they who recount their story. The events they report, from the encounter with the agent provocateur in Avezzano, to the Fascist raids and the diversion of the stream, all attest to a certain consistent attitude of hostility towards them, whose goal is, indisputably, as the government official himself affirms, their elimination. Perhaps this hostility or the 'relationship' to which Howe refers, remains disembodied or abstract, merely an inference, because of the depersonalization of the regime's machinery; the achievement of the goal is unmistakably a foregone conclusion; the means of its execution immaterial. Clearly, this abstracted hostility constitutes another aspect of Fascism's totalitarianism, that is self-evident to the contemporary reader, but perhaps at the time of writing almost inconceivable in its novelty.
- (26) Silone *Fontamara* p.68
- (27) Ibid p.68
- (28) Ibid p.68
- (29) Silone *Pane e vino* p.236
- (30) Ibid p.236-37
- (31) Silone *Fontamara* p.126
- (32) Ibid p.152. Berardo's informant is the Solito Sconosciuto.
- (33) Ibid p.7
- (34) Ibid p.38
- (35) Silone *Fontamara* revised edition p.53
- (36) Silone *Fontamara* p.32
- (37) Ibid p.41-42
- (38) Ibid p.109
- (39) Silone *La scuola dei dittatori* p.283
- (40) Silone *Fontamara* p.107

- (41) Silone *Pane e vino* p.135
- (42) Silone *Fontanara* p.108
- (43) Ibid p.108
- (44) Ibid p.133-4
- (45) Silone *Fontanara* revised edition p.240. His mother declares: 'Forse la salvezza di Berardo è stata di essere restituito al suo destino.'
- (46) Silone *Fontanara* p.48
- (47) According to Silone a regime of violence, like the Fascist regime, begets fear even amongst its own hierarchy, whereas community begets joy. Hence his protagonists decline to fight violence with violence, the underlying argument being that the means infallibly predetermine the end. (c.f. 'La scelta dei compagni' in *Uscita di sicurezza* p.147.: 'Quanti si avvedono che la tirannia dei mezzi sui fini è la morte naturale dei fini più nobili? E che la riduzione dell'uomo a strumento e materia prima, dà un carattere mistificatorio a qualsiasi pretesa di voler assicurare la felicità dell'uomo?' For Silone those who offer a valid resistance to the rule of violence are the 'pazzi'; of whom Berardo is indubitably the first. These madmen - the term is derived from *Il seme sotto la neve* - differ from the norm inasmuch as they are characterized by joyful self-abnegation, humility, compassion, generosity and a sense of community. These qualities constitute Silone's anti-Fascism, in which the element of faith and the obvious parallels with religious belief were at the time (1941) a most positive aspect; given that the Nazi-Fascist alliance looked almost invincible. For this faith, like religious faith, is perhaps more enduring than political dogma.
- (48) Silone *Fontanara* p.56
- (49) Similarly the community that develops in *Il seme sotto la neve* represents a positive alternative to the lack of friendship, which is the way the Fascist influence manifests itself in the middle-classes of Orta and Colle. Once again Silone implies that Fascism with its doctrine of institutionalized egotism, destroys the bond between man and his fellows. There is little overt reference to this condition of friendlessness in the pro-Fascist writers, although the preoccupation with adulterous passion and the achievements of the regime suggests the existence of a vacuum. Conversely, a vacuum clearly exists in the works of some of the younger anti-Fascist novelists including Buzzati, Bernari and Moravia, nor do they seem to have any positive inclination or idea as to how to fill this vacuum.
- (50) In *Pane e vino* Silone offers a different explanation of the oceanic assemblies; the peasants' desperate incantation of 'CE DU' is an attempted exorcism of fear.
- (51) Silone *Fontanara* p.42
- (52) Ibid p.60
- (53) Leo Ferrero *Diario di un privilegiato sotto il fascismo* p.101
- (54) Ibid p.178
- (55) Ibid p.90

- (56) Ibid p.94
- (57) Leo Ferrero *Angelica: Drame satirique en trois actes* p.66
- (58) Ferrero *Diario di un privilegiato sotto il fascismo* p.168
- (59) Ibid p.114
- (60) Ferrero *Angelica: Drame satirique en trois actes* p.81
- (61) Ibid p.29
- (62) Ibid p.61
- (63) Ibid p.138
- (64) Ibid p.66
- (65) Ibid p.141
- (66) Ibid p.128
- (67) Ibid p.124
- (68) Ibid p.128-29
- (69) Ibid p.129
- (70) Ibid p.118-19
- (71) Ibid p.120
- (72) Ibid p.120-21
- (73) Ferrero *Diario di un privilegiato sotto il fascismo* p.122-23
- (74) Ibid p.123
- (75) Ibid p.109-10
- (76) Ignazio Silone *Il seme sotto la neve* Simone explains to Faustina that 'madness' is ineradicable. p.439

'- pazzi ve ne saranno sempre..... I pazzi....sono come gli uccelli dell'aria e i gigli delle valli. Nessuno li alleva e li coltiva; eppure.... non si può eliminare la pazzia tra gli uomini, quest'è l'essenziale, e se è scacciata dalle strade si rifugia nei conventi, e se è scacciata dai conventi si rifugia sotto terra, e se è scacciata da sotto terra si rifugia nelle scuole o nelle caserme, o che so io: ma pazzi, credete a me, ve ne saranno sempre.'

## CHAPTER 5

*Towards a regeneration of collective identity : the Italian novel 1943-60*

"Professore" esclamò Nando a testa bassa, "voi amate l'Italia ?".....

"No" dissi adagio, "non amo l'Italia. Gli italiani."

(1)

This seemingly simple interchange between Nando, apparently a Communist and future Resistance worker and Corrado, the autobiographical first person narrator of 'La casa in collina' is perhaps the most apposite expression of an urgent problem following Mussolini's deposition and one that was rendered even more pressing after the Armistice of September 1943, and the creation of the Republic of Salò; that of redefining the collective identity of a nation from an anti-Fascist stance. As the above interchange indicates, Italy could no longer constitute the mainspring of collective identity; for most anti-Fascist writers, particularly those of Left-wing sympathies, the notion of the 'mother-country', or patria, had been so defiled and invalidated by Fascist propaganda that it could not longer be considered the focus of emotive and spiritual values, and collective identification. Accordingly, a transposition of values commonly occurred from the Fascist abstraction of Mother-country to a more or less recognizable, generally proletarian humanity.

Obviously the emotive rhetoric of the mother-country survived in other countries that participated in the Second World War (not least in England) where the mystical - and transcendently maternal - values ascribed to it were less emphasized than in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Its repudiation in Italy was motivated in part by its long, intimate and inglorious association with Fascism, whose failure was conclusively demonstrated by the tragic and humiliating consequences of its irresponsible intervention in the war. In part, however, the refutation

of the Mother-country relates to the tradition of a somewhat loosely defined humanistic anti-Fascism that first found expression in Vittorini's novel 'Conversazione in Sicilia'. Thus, as stated above, a transposition of values commonly occurred whereby the (Fascist) myth of the sacrosanctity of the mother-country was incarnated in the anti-Fascist myth of the 'pure heart of the people' and the supreme virtue of patriotic death was generally replaced in the post-war Communist inspired mythology, by the portrayal of men and women of the people contributing, by their altruistic deeds, to the creation of a better future, or life. (In other words, the fiction of this period depicts the attempt to substitute a positive vision of the vital forces of Italian life, for the negative ideology of Fascism.) Certainly, prior to the March on Rome, Fascism promised all Italians a radiant future, which was to prove momentarily attractive for some who belonged to the lowest reaches of the social hierarchy, like Luca Marano's friends in 'Le terre del Sacramento'. However, once the Fascists took power, the better future transformed itself into an increasingly glorious present; one that benefited the bourgeoisie to the detriment of the people.

The injustice wreaked on the people and the hardship following from the irresponsible - if not entirely arbitrary - economic policies of the Fascist regime, (as depicted in Levi's 'Cristo si è fermato a Eboli') were instrumental in provoking the populist reaction that began with 'Conversazione in Sicilia' and characterizes much of the literature of the post-war period. If Vittorini exerts considerable influence over the moral, emotional and political content of the post-war novel (as well as over literary techniques) it is nonetheless Pavese who, lucidly and disenchantedly, defines the rational motivation - and the limitations - of this stance; most notably in 'La casa in collina'. In his most politically 'committed' novel 'Il compagno', Communism is portrayed as



a relative virtue. Thus, Pablo does not seek to refute Carletto's charge that life in Soviet Russia is tantamount to imprisonment, but retorts:

"In prigione qualcuno ci vuole"....."Ma che comandi chi lavora è una gran cosa." (2)

Earlier he formulates his opposition to democracy through a colloquial reduction of the elements of Marxist analysis when he says:

'Che cos'è che volevano gli studenti e i signori ? Mettersi al posto dei fascisti. Lo facessero. Tanto noi, l'operaio, il facchino, ..... le famiglie che stavano in dieci in un buco, non contavano niente. C'era sempre degli altri sul camion.' (3)

Pavese, like Pablo, arrived at Communism through intellectualization, that is through the acceptance of its inherent logic in a given social, rather than historical, situation. Nevertheless, Communism remained extraneous to the individualistic myths that distinguish Pavese's work and therefore effected little fundamental change on his characterization of workers and peasants.

In contrast, for Vittorini, populism apparently preceded Communism as an emotive election and the latter was made to coincide with the former. In 'Il Politecnico' Vittorini declares:

"Io non mi sono iscritto al Partito Comunista per motivi ideologici. Quando mi sono iscritto non avevo ancora avuto l'opportunità di leggere una sola opera di Marx, di Lenin o di Stalin"....."Dunque io non aderii ad una filosofia iscrivendomi al nostro Partito. Aderii ad una lotta e a degli uomini"....."i migliori tra tutti coloro che avessi mai conosciuto, e migliori anche nella vita di ogni giorno, i più onesti, i più serii, i più sensibili, i più decisi e nello stesso tempo i più allegri, e i più vivi..... e insieme coraggiosi, e insieme non disperati, non avviliti, non aridi, non vuoti" (4)

Since the terms Communism, Marxism and Left-wing often have an emotive, sometimes a pejorative connotation, it should be noted that in this and

the remarks that follow, no attempt is made to evaluate ideologies and their importance objectively: these terms are used, either as the different novelists use them, or, on occasion, Left-wing is used to designate a particularly ill-defined Socialistic or Communistic conviction, like that of Cassola, or to describe the gamut of populist convictions. Otherwise, within the limits of this study, it is only necessary to evaluate their literary portrayal in terms of the authors' personal mythology, intellectual convictions and, rarely, the class provenance of these. Thus, the positive qualities attributed by Vittorini to Communist Party members are the obverse of the failings, or vices, commonly ascribed to the Fascists as well as the Fascist dominated, which constitute the initial negativity of Silvestro and of 'Coi e Senza Baffi' in 'Conversazione in Sicilia'. Vittorini, then, considers Communism the political formulation of populism; and both concepts are evidently based on Vittorini's faith in the 'pure heart' of the people.

In fact, the literary characterization of Communism derives from two complementary persuasions, the irrational - which is generally depicted in the novel - and the rational - which must most commonly be inferred. Briefly, the rational persuasion derives from the fundamental and self-evident premise that Communism offers the doctrine, reality and future, most pertinent and most beneficial to the people. Whereas the dominance of the bourgeoisie is assured in a democracy, in much the same way as under a Fascist regime; a fact, as stated above, only revealed to Pablo (in 'Il compagno') by his acquaintance with the Marxist method of analysing history. Then, the cynical disinterest of England and America for their Italian partisan allies, is shown in 'L'Agnese va a morire' where reference is made to General Alexander's advice to the partisans to return home (or at least limit their activities) for the winter of 1944; and this serves as an indictment of the essentially selfish conduct.

of the war by the Anglo-Americans - at least from an Italian stance. Viganò implies that the Anglo-Americans were, typically, unsympathetic and callous in their disregard for the survival of their Italian allies. The portrayal of the British as a nation of sportsmen (that is to say, who have a sportsman-like admiration for the few partisans who manage to survive a hail of bullets fired at them by enemy and 'allies' alike) is contrasted unfavourably with the swift advance of the Russians. Viganò's historical judgement implies a moral judgement. For Fenoglio, whose stance is anti-doctrinaire - although essentially reactionary - General Alexander's proclamation (mentioned in 'Il partigiano Johnny') serves as a further illustration of the partisans' heroism; this lies in their continued struggle against almost insuperable odds, notwithstanding their - often extreme - youth, physical frailty and fear. For Viganò, however, the betrayal of the Anglo-Americans is transformed from the observation of a verifiable fact into the beginnings of a Communist inspired mythology. Accordingly, the narrator describes the first months of 1945 thus:

'La guerra no: non si muoveva. Pareva che dormisse nelle linee alleate da cui partivano per abitudine radi e inutili sparid'artiglieria.... Radio Londra la solita voce preceduta dalle quattro battute spiritiche, parlava poco all'Italia e meno agli italiani..... C'era la Russia che veniva avanti davvero: quando si muovevano facevano quaranta o cinquanta chilometri al giorno, e se annunciavano il nome di un centro o di un fiume sorpassati dall'avanzata, era sempre il nome di un grande centro e di un grande fiume; altrimenti adoperavano le cifre: oggi ottanta villaggi conquistati. Migliaia di persone alla volta che raggiungevano la libertà.' (5)

However, the tendency towards mythologizing becomes apparent when the above statement is taken in conjunction with Agnese's realization that:

'I ricchi vogliono essere sempre piú ricchi e fare i poveri sempre piú poveri, e ignoranti, e umiliati. I ricchi guadagnano nella guerra, e i poveri ci lasciano la pelle.' (6)

The Russians, then, as is attested by their humanely swift advance, are the international champions of the cause of the people, or poor. (At worst the championship of Russia is personified in the figure of the benevolently paternalistic 'Uncle Joe', as in Sciascia's 'La morte di Stalin' ( in 'Gli zii di Sicilia'). In contrast, the hostility expressed against the British in particular, by Viganò, might be construed as a response, in part at least, to policies that exceed the specific subject-matter of the novel; presumably their overall policy of restoring a traditional democracy, which caused the British, during and after the war, to endeavour to weaken the forces of Communism. If the incorporation of responses to and hostilities aroused by subsequent events is relatively limited in 'L'Agnese va a morire', it is nevertheless a feature of the post-war novel and one that becomes increasingly prominent as the hopes and expectations engendered by the Resistance are nullified. Especially in the 1950's and into the 1960's, the illusory nature of the Communist inspired hope for regeneration is depicted as being inherent in the Resistance movement, almost from its inception; something which previously writers had apparently either refused or failed to see.

Further, novelists frequently distort the significance, or the perspective, of the war. There are two prevalent tendencies among Left-wing writers, either to depict it as a phenomenon that started in September 1943, or, not surprisingly, to equate it purely with the Italian Resistance movement; and given the peculiar nature and chronological data of the war in Italy, novelists often depict it in terms of the struggle of a specific region. (Admittedly not least because the portrayal of authentic individual experience was one of the tenets of Neorealism, of which more will be said.) Hence, Viganò's statement that it is the war of the rich is accurate, but only in part, since it leads to a certain oversimplification; it frequently permits a portrayal of

the war from 1943-45 either as a conflict of the forces of Good (the anti-Fascists) and Evil (the Nazi-Fascists), or more precisely, as above and in Levi's 'L'orologio', as a popular revolution. (Such a treatment generally fails to evaluate the full importance of the fact of widespread racial persecution, and occasionally - as is the case of 'Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno' of Nazi-Fascist atrocities. Morante articulates a statement of the universal tragedy of war in 'La storia' (1974), but in so doing precludes the possibility of regeneration, and the popular heritage of original innocence, incorruptible and adamantine, which is so characteristic of the Neorealists.) More commonly, however, the schematism of the post-war anti-Fascist novel concerned with regeneration precludes the acceptance or acknowledgement of deliberate and programmatic inhumanity on the part of the Nazi-Fascists. In 'Uomini e no' the dead hostages serve primarily as a mouthpiece for Vittorini's mythology pertaining to suffering, and in 'L'Agnese va a morire' a significance is attributed to Agnese's death, in accordance with Viganò's propagandist intent; as Falaschi observes:

'Poiché molti eroi muoiono è chiaro che la vittoria fisica e materiale in battaglia è considerata..... secondaria rispetto ad un'altra vittoria che non può essere che morale.' (7)

This kind of dénouement, in which moral victory cannot be obliterated by physical death (as in the depiction of the Resistance movement) or by an overwhelming, hostile reality (like the ending of 'Cronache di poveri amanti') represents something of a stereotype in the post-war novel. (Fenoglio alone portrays partisan death as an event of unquestionable finality, devoid of the immortality frequently implicitly conferred by 'History', under whose auspices the Left-wing anti-Fascists march; specifically the Communists and most manifestly Kim in 'Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno.') But the attractions - and expediency - of

the rhetoric of moral victory should not be underestimated; it is perhaps Malaparte in 'La pelle', who strives hardest to stress the element of corruption inevitably present in military - that is concrete - victory, (albeit with typically equivocal motivation) but it is the motivation for Enne 2's suicide (inasmuch as death deliberately sought after, but not directly self-inflicted, merits that appellation) which epitomizes the difficulty of reconciling moral and real victory. Vittorini's mythology of the suffering that reveals man's humanity could perhaps be justifiably complemented by Simone Weil's definition of justice as: "... questa fuggiasca dal campo dei vincitori." (8) Certainly the conviction that justice and morality lie with the losers (or vinti) is common to much of the Italian and European literature of the post-war period. But, given the real state of Italy, in and after 1945, and the need for regeneration, an evaluation of the negative aspects of victory would have proved totally inopportune. In contrast, Falaschi assesses the positive aspects inherent in the portrayal of material defeat thus:

'Come in molti racconti anche nel romanzo si ha un rovesciamento della verità storica, perché mentre la Liberazione segnò un'indiscutibile vittoria dei partigiani, la letteratura ne racconta invece le sconfitte, i sacrifici e la morte. Con questo lo scopo celebrativo viene raggiunto lo stesso, e anche meglio, che non attraverso il racconto diretto e preciso di tutti i fatti fino alla conclusione della guerra'. (9)

In fact this reversal of historical truth that Falaschi observes is only secondary to the essential paradox of the post-war Neorealist novel: that is the novelists' inability - presumably inadvertent - to come to terms with the better future they advocate. Certainly their belief in Communism was initially sincere, if subjective. Further, the sudden, widespread espousal of Communism after 1943 was objectively more than justified; since Communism alone furnished a

powerful alternative mass ideology to that of Fascism, and since it offered peasants and workers, especially, a motivation for fighting oppression that was rationally and emotionally valid; and moreover possessed of an appeal that the democratic parties lacked. However, several Neorealist novelists adopted Vittorini's fundamental premises (stated in 'Uomini e no') whereby Injustice and barbarity are perpetual; consequently the Evil represented by the Nazi-Fascist forces is merely the contemporary formulation of an eternal Evil, and the suffering of the oppressed - wherein lies their eternal Goodness - the contemporary formulation of an eternal suffering. Thus a historical reality is related to an absolute, or to another more or less analagous historical reality of one or several hundred years ago. Possibly, in an attempt to make sense of a period, the enormities of which defy reason, and in order to retain a certain optimism regarding regeneration, 'History' (a presumably Marxist derived concept) was introduced, not however to demonstrate how economics and social 'progress' had occurred over the previous century or centuries, nor to affirm the inevitability of a popular and just Revolution, definitively destroying the old order, but to reassure that fratricidal wars and the preponderance of Evil were not without precedent, and to offer a vague hope for an indeterminate future. 'History', then, permitted a certain optimism based on faith in human resilience, in the indomitable nature of the people - notwithstanding the injustice of centuries - that is typified by Pratolini's depiction of the 'Notte dell'Apocalisse' (10) as a latter-day resumption of the feud between Guelfs and Ghibellines. He comments:

'È l'antica fazione che ripete le sue stragi, col favore della luna..... Ma la città è resa esperta dalla sua storia, di cui ogni pietra, ogni campana, conservano il ricordo..... Nelle case del popolo si acconciano solai, si aprono cantine: si adatta, al riparo di un comignolo, un giaciglio di fortuna.' (11)

The consequence of this process of association with past events is to mythologize regenerative forces, and the popular Revolution - itself only inaugurated by the Resistance movement.

A similar process commonly colours the populism of various novelists, including Vittorini, Pratolini and the Moravia of 'La ciociara' and 'La romana'. Asor Rosa says:

*'È da notare, innanzi tutto, che il populismo della letteratura resistenziale appare mosso, più che da una frequentazione diretta degli strati popolari interessati al processo di rinnovamento, da un forte impulso moralistico e ideologico: l'intellettuale va verso il popolo, ma il più delle volte, prima ancora di raggiungerlo concretamente e seriamente lo trasforma in mito, in immagine rovesciata di sé.'* (12)

The transformation into myth and the characterization of the people, like other aspects of Neorealism, are somewhat stereotyped and derive mainly from Vittorini's premises. 'Uomini' or 'Men' are therefore synonymous with the people: and their virtues include primordial innocence somehow conserved in - and more importantly by - suffering, resilience, humanity, simplicity, spontaneity, fraternal feeling and altruism; all qualities that are comprised in Silvestro's evaluation of them as the 'cuore puro della Sicilia'. (13) They are perhaps the 'salt of the earth', a human rather than a political resource; or, as Asor Rosa argues, a national rather than a sectarian resource. He says:

*'.....Il moderatismo letterario del populismo è infatti prodotto anche da questo convincimento, che gli scrittori impegnati in pratica accettano anche quando esplicitamente lo rifiutano: l'impegno sociale è ad un tempo impegno nazionale; non c'è progresso dei ceti se non c'è progresso della nazione; il progresso dei ceti è progresso della nazione, e viceversa.'* (14)

The human - or national - resource that the people represent, seemingly resides in their healthy and not infrequently idealized instincts and



emotions. Contrary to what might reasonably be expected, the urban working-class figures only rarely in the anti-Fascist or Resistance novel; the post-war novel tends, rather, to celebrate the instinctive, emotional solidarity of politically ignorant peasants (from Jovine to Cassola) and of the lumpenproletariat (Parise and Pratolini). It is perhaps possible to infer one reason for the literary neglect of the working-class in the post-war novel from the second part of Vittorini's revised 'Le donne di Messina' (1964); and that is that the conditions of life of the urban worker, and his aspirations, constituted an objective reality that did not lend itself to mythologizing - and with which Vittorini did not empathize. The worker's participation in daily, urban life has led him to sacrifice his primordial innocence for material comfort; hence Vittorini's insistence on the city dwelling ex-partisans' preoccupation with 'Coca Cola', cold beer and juke-boxes. Economic regeneration has, in fact, excluded the possibility of spiritual regeneration. However, Italy's 'economic miracle', or the emergence of neo-capitalism is only a partial explanation. Even prior to the war, 'purity' and its related virtues are habitually depicted as divorced from, and possibly, by inference, alien to the values consistent with modern, industrial civilization. The mutually exclusive values of purity, and material comfort (in the post-war period) or moral compromise, prior to the war, are, essentially, expressions of the fundamental dichotomy of town and country. Therefore the novelist's solidarity with the people remains, in part, a reaction against the lack of collective moral responsibility characteristic of Fascism; a point that is perhaps significantly stressed in the post-war years by two relatively apolitical novelists, Pavese and Cassola. Cassola says:

'....con gl'intellettuali della mia generazione ho....  
molto in comune: la passione politica, l'antifascismo.  
È diventata una seconda natura per noi: non saremo mai

capaci di disinteressarci di politica, o di occuparcene in modo freddo, distaccato, tecnico.... Perché qualsiasi accusa potrà esserci mossa, ma non quella di essere stati degli indifferenti.' (15)

and Pavese says:

'....si può affermare che i migliori di noi, ombrosi e disperati come erano, si sono sovente sorpresi, negli anni andati, a figurarsi che soltanto una cosa avrebbe potuto salvarli: un tuffo nella folla, un febbre improvviso d'esperienze e d'interessi proletari e contadini, per cui la speciale e raffinata malattia che il fascismo ci iniettava si risolvesse finalmente nell'umile e pratica salute di tutti.' (16)

The above statements should be considered together, because in conjunction they reveal other essential characteristics of the post-war novel. Primarily, as Cassola implies, the novelist felt a certain obligation to adopt a political stance - an obligation, I would suggest, that is fundamentally internal; while it is admittedly necessitated by external reality, this politicization of the novelist is nevertheless most commonly a response to the dictates of the novelist's spontaneous, inherent morality. Asor Rosa observes:

'....lo spirito della Resistenza è, nella cultura, forte indignazione morale,' (17)

and this evaluation can be justifiably extended to much of the anti-Fascist production: the tone of moral indignation, and more generally the frequent reference to moral norms, constitute a return to an eternal - and Christian - system of values, and to the sanity of instinctive moral judgement deriving from primordial premises, for which the Fascist regime had substituted the readily manipulative 'bourgeois' morality of convenience. The Fascist malady apparently resided in the loss of fraternal feeling. Hence the need of the intellectual to merge with the crowd, that Pavese perceives. Obviously this identification conformed

to Communist canons of art, and also - as Asor Rosa affirms - correlated to the fortunes of the Italian Communist Party, which, during and after the war, for a few years advocated moderation (in the hope of electoral success) but was subsequently driven into the wilderness of political defeat; a wilderness comparable to the voluntary spiritual cloister of exalting a resilient people who, rather than forming the vanguard of history, are victimized by it. (18) Overall, it seems probable that rational political motivation remained secondary to the moral convictions of the novelist. Accordingly, the writer's desire to merge with the people relates to his need, as an individual, to express solidarity with them; as is stated in the previous chapter, with reference to Vittorini's protagonist Silvestro, prior to the war, the act of writing a populist novel was, by the writer's own assessment, adequate profession of solidarity. However a crucial inference of the later 'Uomini e no' (which will be discussed more fully) no less than of 'La casa in collina' is the sense of perplexity and dislocation experienced by the intellectual when faced with the reality of war. In such circumstances it was - manifestly - insufficient for the responsible novelist to profess intellectual or moral solidarity without attempting to confirm this by an active engagement. Only Levi, in 'L'Orologio' considered that he, as an intellectual, could make an important contribution to the cause and future enfranchisement of the peasants of the South, by keeping faith with them when all organized political forces had uniformly betrayed them. (19) Levi then adopts a superior, subjective and omniscient stance, whereas most populist - and therefore Neorealist - novelists elect a peasant or lumpenproletarian protagonist, or narrator, who typically retains certain autobiographical attributes - even when this is not immediately obvious. During this period the novelist repeatedly portrays himself as the man, or woman, of the people, the fellow amongst his

fellows, otherwise the thief among thieves, as Pratolini's narrator defines himself in 'Cronache di poveri amanti' (20) - not without a certain inverted pride - and often as the ingenué, like Calvino's hero Pin who cannot grasp the significance of the events he witnesses. One consequence of populism, that is logical yet paradoxical, is the novelist's sense of the superiority of the somewhat subjective, idealized 'people' he has created. The need to *become* 'people', to break with the middle-class ties of his intellectual standing, was succinctly explained by Pavese, who says of the relatively recent rapprochement of the intellectuals to the people:

".... in questo atteggiamento è latente un pericolo: quello di "andare verso il popolo". Specialmente in Italia. Verso il popolo ci vanno i fascisti. O i signori. E "andarci" vuol dire travestirlo, farne un oggetto dei nostri gusti e delle nostre degnazioni..... Non si va "verso il popolo". Si è popolo. Anche l'intellettuale, anche il "signore", che soffrono e vivono l'elementare travaglio del trapasso da una civiltà d'impedimento e di spreco a quella organizzata nella libertà della tecnica, *sono* popolo e preparano un governo di popolo. Che è ciò che vuole il comunismo. Democrazia significa questo governo." (21)

Fascist writers who accepted Mussolini's regime unquestioningly and Left-wing Fascists had both 'moved' towards the people albeit with contrasting motives and sincerity. Pavese, perhaps, defines the issues more sharply than do many others: only by joining the people, can a writer escape classification as a Fascist; the middle ground of the non-Fascist, valid before the war, in view of the unpredictably tragic consequences of Fascism has become the terrain of partial responsibility, of acquiescence to Fascism by non-hostility. The writer, however, justifies himself by being a man of the people: whence a minor stereotype of the proletarian novelist, or the classlessness of the intellectual.

(22) Whether or not novelists were actually striving towards the creation

of a proletarian government is perhaps less important in this context than Pavese's concluding statement that democracy means a Communist government, which could perhaps be reversed to reveal an underlying notion of Communism as the sole genuine democracy, or authentic liberalism. (23) The posthumous publication of Gramsci's 'Letteratura e vita nazionale' (1950) could only have accentuated the writer's need to become people. He defines the intellectual's class characteristics thus:

"..... in Italia gli intellettuali sono lontani dal popolo, cioè dalla "nazione", e sono invece legati a una tradizione di casta, che non è mai stata rotta da un forte movimento politico popolare o nazionale dal basso: la tradizione è "libresca" e astratta, e l'intellettuale tipico moderno si sente più legato ad Annibal Caro o a Ippolito Pindemonte che a un contadino pugliese o siciliano....." (24)

It might be necessary to substitute Hemingway and Saroyan for Pindemonte and Caro; nevertheless it will be shown that Gramsci's assessment of the intellectual was not entirely disproved in the post-war period.

Thus far an attempt has been made to define various common premises and aspects of the Left-wing novel concerned with regeneration. No reference has, as yet, been made to reactionary novelists (like Brancati, Alianello, Malaparte and within certain limits, Gadda) because their post-war work contains no fundamentally new criteria by which to judge reality, and, more significantly, expresses no vision of, or hope for, regeneration. Nevertheless the body of work produced by reactionary writers since the war is far from negligible, and the works of Guareschi are doubtless far better known internationally than those of Pavese, Vittorini and Gadda, outside the exiguous memberships of literary circles. Ironically, reactionary writers also tend to define themselves as moralists, and appeal to the 'moral' instincts of their readers. Reactionary

morality, however, consists almost equally of abhorrence for the recent Fascist past and for the spectre of a 'Red' future. The antidote to both the recent past and the projected future is inherent in the set of beliefs of the individual writer; defined and justified as morality. The inference of this is that morality is the sole valid alternative to political extremes - that this moral stance more or less coincides with a Christian Democratic position is not generally stated in the novel; but the party's name ably unites the different elements of reactionary belief. Politics, then, of the Left and Right are incontrovertibly corrupt (the Christian Democrats presumably represented a middle path through the morass, given the bias of reactionaries): Brancati and Malaparte, in contradistinction, affirm that they, as men of culture, are alone in representing the true spirit - or whatever - of the nation. (In the case of Brancati this is more evident in his post-war journalistic writings, collected in 'Il borghese e l'immensità'.) A further characteristic of reactionary novelists is their 'enlightened' pessimism towards the future, coloured by retrospective nostalgia for an organization of society now dead. Their pessimism is, moreover, favourably contrasted with the naïvety of the Left-wing vision of a millennial future, or with the sinister scheming of the Communists to establish a totalitarian regime, far more repressive and efficient than that of Fascism.

In fact, it is by juxtaposing the essential misanthropy of the reactionaries - only relieved by Catholic and élitist tenets - that the generosity of the Neorealists becomes fully apparent. Notwithstanding its limitations (which will be discussed later) the positive value of Neorealism is considerable - especially in its contemporary context. Primarily, prior to the war, it developed various mythologies (of which perhaps the most important were those of childhood and populism) and evolved a new literary language with European and

American affinities that refuted the parochialism of Fascism. On these grounds Alvaro, less implacable than Pavese, argues the fundamental importance of the Neorealists in preparing the way for an anti-Fascist regeneration; he says:

'Credo che aver lavorato come noi abbiamo fatto sia stato utile non soltanto per noi, ma anche per chi verrà dopo di noi..... Abbiamo creato un linguaggio semplice, moderno; abbiamo parlato, se non all'uomo nella società, all'uomo in se stesso; abbiamo ritrovato alcuni elementi tradizionali proprio sotto l'odio della piú domestica tradizione italiana; abbiamo assimilato molti elementi universali sotto la piú stretta bigotteria nazionalistà.'(25)

As Alvaro's declaration suggests the propositions of the Neorealists were only generically delineated and therefore open to quite varied treatment.

Manacorda explains the heterogeneity and the unity of Neorealism thus:

'Le frequenti divisioni sorte *a posteriori* fra neo-realisti... erano mossi nell'atto in cui si accingevano a *prendere parte alla vita italiana in veste di scrittori*. Ai fini della individuazione dell'essenza del neorealismo, gli atteggiamenti individuali, le fughe anche divergenti appaiono elementi accessori e turbativi pur se non privi di interesse, mentre necessariamente e sufficientemente qualificante deve considerarsi il punto da cui quelle mosse partirono, la molla che le fece scattare, lo "stato d'animo" come si disse, collettivo che ad esso è storicamente sotteso. L'unità di intenzione piú che l'unità di risultato è ciò che definisce il neorealismo, e questa intenzione fu..... dichiaratamente pratica ma da assolversi in sede estetica.'  
(26)

The common intention of the Neorealists was, then, to participate in Italian life, but, as Alvaro says, by speaking to man's inner self, and therefore conducting their discourse in terms of primordial goodness; whereas the tendency of reactionary writers was to address man in a particular bourgeois society, employing as 'moral' criteria, social values that are, in fact, externally imposed and often equivocal. The post-war production of reactionaries is differentiated from their Fascist

production, inasmuch as they previously claimed to uphold the existing order and to be the advocates of right-mindedness, whereas now they claim to be the conscience of a nation.

After the war, and with the elimination of Fascist censorship, it obviously became possible - and necessary - for the Neorealists to depict man in his social context. Nevertheless the portrayal of man in society remained influenced and largely limited by the continued preoccupation with inner values. Perhaps this preoccupation might be explained, in part, by Calvino's retrospective analysis of the writer's situation:

' Se dico che allora facevamo letteratura del nostro stato di povertà, non parlo tanto d'una programmaticità ideologica, quanto di qualcosa di più profondo che era in ciascuno di noi.' (27)

I would suggest the poverty Calvino mentions is not primarily literary or spiritual, but rather the destitution of precedents and certainties. The war and its consequences had stripped Italians of the conventional premises for unity: an undisputed national identity, a common enemy and therefore common allies; and consequently a breakdown of the system of absolute values had occurred. (However relative such 'absolute values' may have been prior to the war, there was no open confrontation of different systems of values, obviously because the Fascist regime would not tolerate opposition, but perhaps no less significantly because dissidents - initially - tended to think in terms of change within the system (fascismo di sinistra) and subsequently lacked any definite alternative direction - for reasons already discussed. Ultimately, without the exacerbation caused by a war that some writers not unreasonably termed 'fratricidal' or 'civil', the intensive erosion of generally accepted values could not have occurred. But equally, there was a positive side to this poverty: it was the essential precondition of spiritual



and national regeneration. Calvino defines the effects of the war on literature thus:

' L'esplosione letteraria in quegli anni in Italia fu, prima che un fatto d'arte, un fatto fisiologico, esistenziale, collettivo. Avevamo vissuto la guerra, e noi piú giovani - che avevamo fatto appena in tempo a fare il partigiano - non ce ne sentivamo schiacciati, vinti, "bruciati", ma vincitori, spinti dalla carica propulsiva della battaglia appena conclusa, depositari esclusivi d'una sua eredità. Non era facile ottimismo, però, o gratuita euforia; tutt'altro: quello di cui ci sentivamo depositari era un senso della vita come qualcosa che può ricominciare da zero, un rovello problematico generale, anche una nostra capacità di vivere lo strazio e lo sbaraglio; ma l'accento che vi mettevamo era quello d'una spavalda allegria.' (28)

Certainly, the Neorealist literature of the immediate post-war years corroborates the fact that artistic considerations were commonly, and in most respects, of reduced, if not altogether secondary, importance. Some writers perhaps exaggerated the degree of preponderance of extra-literary preoccupations over artistic considerations. Nevertheless the primary need was to articulate and communicate a shared and lived experience; hence the rapid proliferation of memoirs, diaries and chronicles - not to mention fictional accounts - recounting different aspects and experiences of the war, the Resistance movement and the Fascist regime. Vittorini defines the different levels of reality portrayed in literature thus:

'Vi sono diversi gradi di realtà a cui si riferisce scrivendo. Ve n'è uno massimo che porta gli scrittori a correggere o arricchire quello che si sa di fondamentale sull'uomo. Ve n'è uno minimo che porta soltanto ad afferrare i colori di un'epoca, di un anno, di una stagione. E ve n'è uno non massimo e non minimo che permette di cogliere tutto quanto dell'animo umano nasce e muore ad ogni variazione dei tempi. Rappresentare un tal grado di realtà significa fare la cronaca psicologica di un'epoca....' (29)

Notwithstanding both the obvious over-simplification of this categorization,

and the inevitable overlap of the different categories, we might generalize that chroniclers and diarists of both Left and Right-wing sympathies like Mario Rigoni Stern, Eugenio Corti and Berto in 'Guerra in camicia nera' (who might, without defamatory insinuation be termed 'lay' Neorealists, given that their works are accordant with the tenets of Neorealism) belong to this lowest level of reality, whereas the Neorealists proper, who consider themselves a 'school' and are professional *litterati* aspire to the highest level, and less politically committed and fraternally inspired writers, like Bassani and Cassola, constitute the intermediate level. Perhaps significantly, faith in regeneration occurs only at the 'lowest' and 'highest' levels of reality, although this faith is not the exclusive prerogative of the youngest generation of writers. Rather the Neorealists - of both the lowest and high levels - with the sole partial exception of Calvino - chose to believe that life could begin afresh, based on new premises, because, by reason of their optimism, or positive reaction at having removed the Fascists' constraints that devitalized life, they failed to accept the essential continuity of psychological and personal traits in others and in themselves. The rediscovery of innocence, purification through suffering, autonomy and also a kind of tacit refutation of the near inevitability of behaviour deriving from unconscious psychological conditioning were deliberate, not illusive, reactions against the deposed Fascist regime, and the spiritual malady it had fostered.

It was Vittorini in 'Uomini e no', who laid the foundations for the post-war act of faith through what Calvino calls:

'la nostra primordiale dialettica di morte e di felicità' (30)

although the novel aspired to present a dialectic not only of death and happiness, but also of man's relationship to himself and to others, to

his historical context, and to the - reinstated - absolute and eternal values of Good and Evil. It is perhaps a reflection on his peculiar circumstances, no less than his generosity, that the writer's aspirations, at least for a short time, corresponded more closely to his sense of social responsibility than to his individualistic literary ambition. (31) Primarily, by depicting his loosely autobiographical protagonist as a member of the Milanese, urban Resistance (G.A.P.) Vittorini manifests a progress from the 'astratti furori' of 'Conversazione in Sicilia' to a positive, autonomous resolve to involve himself in a historical situation, through an altruistic, emotional and political commitment to the P.C.I. Further, and Vittorini hereby establishes a precedent for active intellectual solidarity with the people, 'Uomini e no' depicts Enne 2, an intellectual (a fact more stressed in the first edition than in the second) participating in the workers' struggle. (The novel, as already stated, is unusual inasmuch as it describes a partisan force composed predominantly of urban workers.) Enne 2's reasons for allying himself with the workers form a - possibly involuntary - counterpoint with those of the workers; they are essentially complex and derive from negative premises. But those of the workers belong to the primordial dialectic about death and happiness; Selva, the idealized, positive 'Communist' figure of womanhood, catechizes Enne 2 and Berta thus, regarding the importance of happiness as the motive and goal of the Communist Resistance:

".... Noi lavoriamo perchè gli uomini siano felici. Che senso avrebbe il nostro lavoro se non servisse a rendere gli uomini felici ? È per questo che noi lavoriamo.....

"Che senso avrebbe il nostro lavoro se gli uomini non potessero essere felici ?.....

"Avrebbero un senso i nostri giornaletti clandestini ? Avrebbero un senso le nostre cospirazioni ?.....

"E i nostri che vengono fucilati ! Avrebbero un senso ? Non avrebbero un senso.....

"C'è qualcosa al mondo che avrebbe un senso ?  
Avrebbero un senso le bombe che noi fabbrichiamo ?....

"No. No. Bisogna che gli uomini possan esser felici. Ogni cosa ha un senso solo perchè gli uomini siano felici. Non è solo per questo che le cose hanno un senso ?" (32)

Happiness alone confers meaning on the conduct, life and faith of the partisans for a better future. In contrast Enne 2's inescapable unhappiness contributes to his voluntary death. Happiness also correlates to goodness and spontaneity, as is demonstrated by the characterization of Metastasio and Orazio, whose tacit and intuitive but constant interchange perhaps symbolizes the new intense language, suited to their relationship of absolute mutual trust, and to the 'altri doveri' to which they aspire - together with other Communists and the victims of the Nazis, the emblemized figures of suffering humanity. The old man - another of Vittorini's 'vecchi lombardi' - who speaks to Berta, informs her that the first duty towards the dead is not to mourn and therefore accept their death, but to learn from it. The conversation, typically, begins with reference to a given situation, and unfolds into absolute significance:

'Berta chiese al vecchio che cosa intendesse dire,  
e il vecchio disse che intendeva dire quello per cui  
accadeva ogni cosa, e per cui si moriva, disse, anche se  
non si combatteva.

"La liberazione ?" disse Berta.

"Certo" il vecchio rispose.... "Di ognuno di noi,"  
soggiunse.

"Come, di ognuno ?"

"Di ognuno, nella sua vita."

"E il nostro paese ? E il mondo ?"

"Si capisce," il vecchio rispose. "Che sia di ognuno, e  
sarà maggiore nel mondo." (33)

In this analysis of the significance of death, the position of 'Uomini e no' again constitutes a progression from the position of 'Conversazione in Sicilia' and one that is typical of Resistance literature; the dead

guide the living on the path to Liberation, in the historical, and the human and spiritual senses of the word.

Now, retrospectively analyzed, the old man's observations might seem neither original nor profound; nor, presumably, were they without precedent in the literature of other ages and other countries. What is important, however, is that Vittorini and other contemporary writers had to discover a meaning for death for themselves; since it was necessary to create some kind of meaning out of the gratuitous atrocities and absolute chaos of war. The primordial necessity was, perhaps, to re-establish some continuity with the values of peace, and with the dead, conferring on the latter a kind of minimal immortality. The starkness of death, although frequently depicted in the novel by innocent victims who resemble bundles of rags (a recurrent image) was nevertheless understandably alien to the emotional comprehension of the novelist, particularly the novelist nurturing faith in regeneration. In fact, it is Vittorini's insistence on re-establishing primordial premises that makes the novel's argument retrospectively seem dated, and on occasion even banal, when contemporarily it was doubtless revelatory. Such is the case also of the discoveries regarding Good and Evil. The category of Men, is extended from consisting solely of those on whom suffering is inflicted (as in 'Conversazione in Sicilia') to those who suffer and rise up against their oppressor: the narrator observes:

'Chi è caduto anche si alza. Offeso, oppresso, anche prende su le catene dai suoi piedi e si arma di esse: è perché vuol liberarsi, non per vendicarsi. Questo anche è l'uomo. Il Gap anche? Perdio se lo è! Il Gap anche, come qui da noi si chiama ora, e comunque altrove si è chiamato. Il Gap anche. Qualunque cosa lo è anche, che venga su dal mondo offeso e combatta per l'uomo. Anch'essa è l'uomo.' (34)

The problem of establishing the right of the oppressed to resort to

violence assumed different degrees of importance for different writers; for Viganò it was a priori more than justified, for Vittorini it was justifiable, with the implicit reservation that the conduct of the partisan should remain consonant with that of his daily life, and therefore distinguishable from that of his enemies, (35) and for Cassola in 'Fausto e Anna' violence was only possibly justifiable if it occurred according to a code of chivalry more suited to Ariosto's 'Orlando Furioso' than to the exigencies of guerilla warfare. Vittorini, however, also drastically redefines the nature of the oppressor. Whereas in 'Conversazione in Sicilia' he was classified as non-human, in 'Uomini e no' his humanity is recognized - although the conflicting insinuation of the novel's title seems to imply that a rational re-evaluation of the oppressor's nature failed to overcome Vittorini's emotional prejudice against his inhumanity. The inescapability of Vittorini's rational conclusion is obvious; once again retrospectively it is perhaps more obvious and more necessary than it then seemed. At any rate, Vittorini neglects, or sidesteps, the fundamental issue of responsibility, when he declares:

'E chi ha offeso che cos'è ?

Mai pensiamo che anche lui sia l'uomo. Che cosa può essere d'altro ? Davvero il lupo ?

Diciamo oggi: è il fascismo. Anzi il nazifascismo. Ma che cosa significa che sia il fascismo. Vorrei vederlo fuori dell'uomo, il fascismo. Che cosa sarebbe ? Che cosa farebbe ? Potrebbe fare quello che fa se non fosse nell'uomo di poterlo fare ? Vorrei vedere Hitler e i tedeschi suise quello che fanno non fosse nell'uomo di poterlo fare. Vorrei vederli a cercar di farlo. Togliere loro l'umana possibilità di farlo e poi dire loro: Avanti, fate. Che cosa farebbero ?' (36)

Notwithstanding its axiomatic nature, Vittorini's assertion that the Nazi-Fascists are human beings is noteworthy; the stereotypes of Fascist and

Nazi villains that developed in the post-war years - and which Vittorini's depiction of Cane Nero and capitano Clemm would, in fact, do little to dispel - were respectively of sadistic bullies (habitually sadistic in a non-sexual, or subliminally sexual, manner) and of monsters. No qualitative distinction is made in the novel between the terms 'German' and 'Nazi'.

The predominant stereotyped representations of Mussolini, the Fascists and the Nazis indisputably merit examination, although they tend to be the most unhappy and unconstructive aspects of the anti-Fascist novel. There was a tendency - most fully realized in Paolo Monelli's biography 'Mussolini piccolo borghese' - to depict Mussolini as little better than a figure of fun; not merely an idol with clay feet, but fashioned entirely of lowly clay. Such is the insinuation of Monelli's detailed account of Mussolini's social and personal ineptitude. Gadda, however, in 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana' dominates his masterly, frequently scatological, anti-Mussolinian invective and succeeds, where Monelli fails, in suggesting the underlying connections between autocratic government by a wily, syphilitic megalomaniac (or whatever) and the deplorable, even tragic, internal situation of Italy. Nor are Mussolini's once adulated physical attributes - deemed by Gadda to be extremely unprepossessing - exempted from his ferocious satire. But generally, novelists eschew analysis of Mussolini's psychological traits even more than they do those of the Nazi and Fascist villains. There are two main categories of morally vile Fascists: the less contemptible category of common soldiers, as depicted by Vittorini, who joined the Republican forces for the base inducements of food and money, and the less numerous category of irredeemable sadists. The implicit contrast between the altruism of the partisans, who constantly sacrifice their lives for an ideal, and the venality of the soldiers points to the animality of the

latter, and confirms Vittorini's eponymous argument; any person who voluntarily becomes a Fascist belongs to a lower form of life. Also, they are inevitably implicated in the atrocities of their superiors. Vittorini illustrates this by the depiction of the tranquil pastimes of the soldiers guarding a tribunal convened to decree the death of three hundred innocent hostages, and concludes:

'....eppure la cosa che accadeva di sopra accadeva per via di loro, e mai avrebbe potuto accadere se tutti loro non fossero stati lì a mangiar cioccolato e giocare con un cane.' (37)

Equally heinous are the conclusion of the episode of Giulaj's martyrdom (which the soldiers 'explain' in terms of the value of a trained Alsatian dog) and the anthropophagic meal other anonymous soldiers enjoy, while standing guard over the dead victims of Nazi reprisals.

Alternatively, Fascists are frequently classified as aggressive psychopaths; people like Carlino (in 'Cronache di poveri amanti') who derive an almost sexual satisfaction from their violent and brutal deeds. Nevertheless the cowardly and subservient, or masochistic, complement of their sadistic, despotic brutality is usually noted, and they are accordingly treated with the contempt typically shown to inferiors. Two exemplifications of this contempt are the slap Cesira gives an armed Fascist for touching her daughter (in 'La ciociara') and the humiliations visited solely on the dignity of the stripped and kicked carabinieri by rebels in 'Primavera di bellezza'. Such treatment of the Nazis is inconceivable; they remain adversaries whose respect is assured by the fear so ably generated by their methodical exploitation of terror. They are variously seen as meticulously efficient fighting machines or avengers - of their own dead - inhuman robots (whence Vigand's insistence on the unnatural colour of their skin) as being as unpredictable and



dangerous as wild animals, and, a stereotype Moravia depicts in 'La ciociara' of an urbane, almost likeable German officer whose illustrious culture is matched by an inhumanity so deep-rooted that it appears independent of the usual concomitants, fear and anger. Such refined inhumanity - the same kind, obviously, that caused Wagner's music to be played in concentration camps - allows the intellectualization of the aesthetic pleasures of genocide. Possibly these pleasures also relate to the fulfilment of vaguely necrophilistic tendencies. Moravia, like other novelists, differentiates the Fascists from the Nazis by the lesser degree of inhumanity of the former category. He further 'explains' in terms of gross and overt 'psycho-sexual' disorders, the pathological behaviour of Fascist functionaries, like Marcello in 'Il conformista'. The absurdity of inferring generalizations from premises of presumably limited applicability, is patent. Nevertheless, emotive rhetoric of this type is common, and by reason of its capacity to shock - doubtless enhanced by the Fascist insistence on virility - it is also memorable. It is, moreover, rarely offset by relatively sympathetic accounts of the motivating inadequacy - of usual rather than abnormal proportions - that led more or less unexceptional youths (like Pratolini's Osvaldo) as well as other age groups to Fascism; and more rarely still by a disenchanted neutral statement of the fact that the apparent immutability of the Fascist regime, particularly during its international successes of the 1930's, eliminated the feasibility of any real resistance to it; so that Italians within Fascist Italy, who were neither pathologically disturbed nor sexually abnormal, nevertheless lived and instinctively moved within the constraints of Fascism, and were therefore, ostensibly, Fascists - like Tobino's students in 'Bandiera nera'. Such was the polarization of the term 'Fascist'.

Justifications for the former 'hard-line' conception of the

Fascist as sadist abound; and include the obvious; that some Fascists were, indubitably, sadists, the necessary denunciation of an illegitimate regime, the exercise of a newly restored freedom of speech to this end, and the urgency of definitively exploding the myth of the 'surgical' violence of the squadristi and the 'armed vanguard' of Fascism in general, as the altruistic behaviour of latter day founding fathers who, with 'Blood and Toil' built a Better World. This last is one implication of the ritual canonization of Fascist martyrs, mentioned by Gadda in 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana'. Finally, amongst the hard-liners' justifications, the mundane but necessary a priori refutation of the notion that life was better under the Fascists - although this may well briefly have been the case, in terms of a low level of creature comforts, prior to Italy's economic recovery. (39) Ultimately, there are two reconcilable hypotheses deducible from the above; firstly that anti-Fascist novelists were writing predominantly for a sympathetic audience, and secondly, notwithstanding this, the real need to discredit the nascent neo-Fascist movement, whose precipitate emergence Cassola notes in 'La ragazza di Bube'.

More an exigency than a justification, was the establishment of the two poles of guilt and moral impeccability. Whether in spite of, or because of the rapid return to government of a compromised élite and, with it, to a middle class dominated status quo whose Fascist elements were, with time, increasingly questionably 'purged' or whether in accordance with primarily literary considerations, most Neorealist novelists chose to depict the forces of regeneration as uncontaminated by past contact with the Fascist regime. In literature, at least, it was necessary and desirable to postulate the absolute disjunction of regenerative values and virtues, from Fascist viciousness. Hence the frequent insistence on more or less manichaen principles, which

occasionally engender difficulties regarding the rehabilitation of ex-Fascists into post-war society. (Two differing instances of difficulties experienced by progressive and reactionary novelists are respectively mirrored in the treatment of Ventura in the first edition of 'Le donne di Messina' and the treatment of Berto's guilt in his early works.)

For Viganò and Rigoni Stern no such difficulties exist: although they describe very different experiences, both share an imperturbable optimism. Viganò's optimism derives from a profound faith in the future prevalence of Communism, whereas that of Rigoni Stern is more generic, more fraternal in a tacitly Christian sense. Manacorda evaluates 'L'Agnese va a morire' thus:

'Il merito della Viganò - unico forse in tutto il genere - fu quello di riuscire a conservare a un testo così scopertamente di parte la convinzione della verità assoluta, che rimane accettabile proprio perché non viene chiassosamente o ufficialmente bandita, ma semplicemente detta. Il libro segna però un punto d'arrivo nella letteratura che tocchi i temi della Resistenza, che d'ora in avanti sarà meno assertoria e più problematica, sfumerà le caratteristiche dell'eroismo e i contorni della verità, preferendo piuttosto peccare nella direzione dell'equivoco ideologico che in quella dell'ingenuità presentativa.'

(40)

Certainly the portrayal of ideally heroic protagonists requires ingenuousness and risks overt, or excessive, emotionalism, but where restrained, as by taciturn or undemonstrative characterization, it elicits the reader's sympathies more successfully than do later, ambivalent and self-doubting protagonists like Cassola's Fausto. Viganò's heroine Agnese is a prototypal simple, undemonstrative, old peasant woman, whose involvement with the Communists is caused by a series of - for her - random circumstances; the Germans intervene in and destroy her old life by deporting her invalid husband (who dies in a cattle wagon) and killing her cat. Thereby, Agnese experiences the first

law of war - and one which greatly affects Corrado in 'La casa in collina' - that she, and countless others, are implicated in a war, that patently precludes the principle of the immunity of civilian non-participants, treating all nationals uniformly as enemies, and according them the summary treatment, or worse, previously reserved for spies. War has deliberately been waged against Agnese by the Nazis and their Fascist collaborators. Thus, tried beyond endurance, she avenges herself and her dead, by battering a Nazi to death. An idealized, emblematic woman and peasant, (depicted, moreover, in obviously emblematic circumstances) after avenging herself she joins a partisan formation, and becomes a kind of heroic mother of the revolution, who, actually childless, is consistently and humbly willing to sacrifice her life for her 'boys'. Clearly Agnese is the complete antithesis of the Fascist myth of the nuclear mother. As already stated, in her second, partisan, life, Agnese acquires a rudimentary understanding of Communism (as the force that will rectify the reigning injustice whereby the rich get richer, while the poor die in wars) but even previously, in accordance with preceding remarks, she was instinctively an anti-Fascist. Manifestly, her heart is, and always was, 'in the right place' - a cliché whose use is vindicated by the insinuation of unnaturalness or misplacement surrounding the sentiments of Nazi collaborators. At the point when the partisans have been betrayed by collaborators, and are about to be massacred for their cause, the collaborators' misplaced sentiments are shown to be consistent with petty bourgeois self-interest, no less than with a peculiar brand of courage, defined thus:

'.....a poca distanza, anche qui sulla linea del fronte, c'erano ancora i civili, gli sfollati, la gente del posto che si rifiutava di andar via per non abbandonare le case, i campi, i pollai, gli orti, e teneva duro sotto i bombardamenti: "il coraggio dell'avarizia" come diceva l'Agnese.

Ma c'era anche un coraggio della vigliaccheria, c'era qualcuno di quei civili che si prendeva il gusto di uscire in una mattina di gennaio.... per andare a dire al comandante tedesco che aveva visto i partigiani, e quanti erano, e dove andavano. Questo "civile", uomo o donna o ragazzo, di solito sveniva di paura ad ogni rombo di aereo, o fischio di granata, ma in quei casi non indietreggiava davanti a niente, percorreva strade scoperte, esposto ad ogni sorta di disgrazie, correva anche sotto una pioggia di proiettili. Per fare ammazzare, lui italiano, dei partigiani italiani, adoperava un coraggio da medaglio d'oro.'(41)

Viganò is unusual in denouncing collaborators (as distinct from Fascists) and especially in the implacability of her denunciation, where other novelists attempt to prove the real or potential goodness of the Italian people. Thus Enne 2 hopefully says of the tobacconist who informs on him:

"Forse è invece un buon uomo." (42)

(In fact he is depicted as vain, irresponsible and ultimately venal; desiring the reward for Enne 2's capture to appease his conscience). Perhaps Viganò, in terms of temperament or political belief, is more of a hard-liner than Vittorini - who, like Enne 2, tries, on occasion, to believe in man's perfectibility - or perhaps, given considerable regional variations, her experience of the Resistance (in the Valli di Comacchio) was more disheartening than elsewhere. At any rate, having been rejected by his girl-friend and her 'law-abiding' family, people who in the prevailing circumstances facilitate Nazi-Fascist domination, if not by collaboration at least by shunning the partisans, "La Disperata" reflects thus:

"Non capiscono niente, e noi combattiamo anche per loro, e ci rimettiamo la pelle"....chiuse un momento gli occhi, cercò di immaginarsi come poteva essere l'Agnese da giovane.' (43)

Viganò's polemic intent is self-evident. Whereas others sin or fail to conform to unstated but universal standards of moral behaviour

through 'cautiousness', greed or fear (a motivation whose effects are perhaps rigorously interpreted by Viganò, but, with the exception of Pavese's 'La casa in collina', otherwise less commonly mentioned than might reasonably be expected), Agnese, like Maciste (in 'Cronache di poveri amanti') commits the sin of generosity (44) - a cardinal virtue by another name - of doing more, and at greater personal risk, than her middle-class intellectual leaders could ask. The Comandante, a town-dweller and solicitor, terms Agnese's misguided generosity 'marvellous', while Agnese expresses her humble admiration for bourgeois intellectual comrades thus; through a comprehensive enumeration of their merits:

'Dicevano che così non poteva andare, che bisognava cambiare il mondo, che è ora di farla finita con la guerra, che tutti devono avere il pane, e non solo il pane, ma anche il resto, e il modo di divertirsi, di essere contenti, di levarsi qualche voglia. I fascisti non volevano, e loro ci si buttavano contro malgrado la prigione e la morte. I fascisti avevano fatto venire in Italia i tedeschi, avevano scelto per amici i più cattivi del mondo, e loro si buttavano anche contro i tedeschi. Ed era tutta gente come Magòn, come Walter, come Tarzan, come il Comandante, gente istruita, che capisce e vuol bene a tutti, non chiede niente per sé e lavora per gli altri quando ne potrebbe fare a meno e va verso la morte mentre potrebbe avere molto denaro e vivere in pace fino alla vecchiaia.' (45)

This notion of the irreproachability of the middle-class militant who became a Communist counter to, rather than in accordance with, his best self- and class interests, is employed by Adriana (in 'La romana') in somewhat different circumstances, to illustrate the integrity of Mino - to the comrades he gratuitously betrayed to Astarita. Adriana remains essentially consistent with her petty bourgeois aspirations in treating Mino's Communism as a gesture of considerable - and possibly condescending - generosity. Given Viganò's Communist faith, the notion of middle-class generosity, rather than classless altruism, which elicits gratitude from the peasant partisans, seems initially less than consistent. Asor Rosa

argues:

'A voler essere rigorosi fino in fondo, si dovrebbe anche dire che la Viganò è talmente obiettiva da assumere nella propria narrazione un punto di vista tipico della mentalità contadina, che è sempre portata a riconoscere la direzione della lotta ad un ceto o ad un gruppo di individui posti al di fuori della sua cerchia sociologica.... la figura del comandante è quella di un intellettuale venuto dall'esterno e incaricato dal partito di organizzare e *guidare* la lotta..... Del resto, anche in questo *L'Agnese va a morire* si riconosce vicina a molte altre opere della Resistenza italiana, in cui la figura del *leader* è nove volte su dieci quella dell'intellettuale - secondo un processo di consapevole-inconsapevole *transfert* autobiografico ed ideologico, che finisce per modellare la storia sugli schemi delle speranze e dei programmi di ristretti gruppi di rappresentanti della cultura.' (46)

Beyond the manifest truth of Asor Rosa's assertion, the novelist's assessment of himself, during the post-war period, is interesting; the reactionary is secure in the - moral - superiority that his culture confers on him, whereas the Left-wing novelist feels uneasy, even defensive about himself as an intellectual and bourgeois. Typical in this respect is Calvino's retrospective evaluation of his identification with Pin, protagonist of 'Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno!'. Calvino says:

'L'inferiorità di Pin come bambino di fronte all'incomprensibile mondo dei grandi corrisponde a quello che nella stessa situazione provavo io, come borghese. E la spregiudicatezza di Pin, per via della tanto vantata sua provenienza dal mondo della malavita, che lo fa sentire complice e quasi superiore verso ogni "fuori-legge", corrisponde al modo "intellettuale" d'essere all'altezza della situazione, di non meravigliarsi mai, di difendersi dalle emozioni.....' (47)

Consequently, it is tempting to treat Rigoni Stern as a sort of proletarian exception who proves the intellectual rules, a man of the people who testifies to the existence of the 'Man' the Neorealists had sought to invent in, and through, the novel; who was, moreover, too deeply

immersed in reality to desire to define his relationship to it. 'Il sergente nella neve' (1953) offers a - possibly selective - account of the disastrous and tragic retreat from Russia, that purports to be, and doubtless is, generally factual. The interest of this account lies in the figure of Rigoni Stern, the eponymous sergeant, a modest man, humble, human, courageous and optimistic, whose profoundly fraternal spirit is temporarily extinguished by the cruel loss, during the retreat, of his beloved 'compaesani'. In fact his more or less prophetic experience of regeneration occurs in the calamitous battle in which most of his 'compaesani' die (the universality of this vision, as contrasted with his previous more individualistic incarnation of fraternal conduct typifies the movement within Neorealism whereby optimism and absolute ideals are rekindled out of the ashes of disaster). Tired and hungry Rigoni Stern enters a Russian isba in search of food and encounters Russian soldiers who show no hostility towards him, while their women-folk calmly serve him and give him food for his companions also. He comments:

'Così è successo questo fatto. Ora non lo trovo affatto strano, a pensarvi, ma naturale di quella naturalezza che una volta dev'esserci stata tra gli uomini..... Era una cosa molto semplice. Anche i russi erano come me. In quell'isba si era creata tra me e i soldati russi, e le donne e i bambini un'armonia che non era un armistizio. Era qualcosa di molto più del rispetto che gli animali della foresta hanno l'uno per l'altro. Una volta tanto le circostanze avevano portato gli uomini a saper restare uomini..... Se questo è successo una volta potrà tornare a succedere.... Potrà succedere, volgio dire, a innumerevoli altri uomini e diventare un costume, un modo di vita.' (48)

Notwithstanding his lack of literary pretensions and precedents Rigoni Stern's vocabulary clearly coincides with that of the Neorealists. He envisages regeneration as a universal return to a primordial and utopian code of behaviour based on the full recognition of man's humanity -



similar to the kind of dialogue described by Buber in 'Between Man and Man'. Probably, however, Rigoni Stern serves the cause of regeneration in another, more concrete, way, by vindicating the courage, loyalty and fighting ability of the Italian soldier whose conduct in battle between 1940 and 1943 was frequently deemed ignominious by enemies and allies alike, without consideration for inept leadership. (The prestige of the partisan is deservedly undisputed.) Nor is Corti, an Italian officer, less severe in his condemnation of the Italian soldier's conduct. He prefaces the diary of his experiences in Russia (*I più non ritornano*) thus:

'....più d'una volta, mentre scrivevo, fui sul punto di troncare: avevo vergogna di quanto avrei fatto conoscere sul conto di noi italiani come soldati.....' (49)

Nevertheless Corti concedes two mitigating factors; that the conduct of the English was often no better and that the heroism of other troops - the Alpini - was inconceivable. Further he expresses a faith in the Italian character that coincides with the underlying assumption of Rigoni Stern's later work; he says:

'-Mentre esaminavamo le nostre manchevolezze d'ordine militare e non militare, non potevano non venirci incontro anche le nostre doti..... e prima e più caratteristica ci appariva ora il nostro senso d'equilibrio, dirò meglio: la prevalenza in noi del senso dell'armonia delle cose.

Era in ultima analisi per questa prevalenza che, malgrado gli stimoli della situazione (e le conseguenti pressioni del raziocinio o del sentimento, che portavano i tedeschi e i russi a così mostruosi eccessi), noi non perdevamo la nostra umanità.' (50)

Finally, amongst his reasons for writing he includes the need to discredit what he considers the unwarrantedly good opinion of the Russians in post-war Italy. He says:

'-E c'era... gente che, perdurando lo sfinito silenzio di noi reduci, si adoprava... a presentare i bolscevichi quali maestri di civiltà, a farli giungere fin qui.' (51)

According to his own testimony, Corti experienced the barbarity of the Russians whereas Rigoni Stern experienced a prefigurement of universal brotherhood. Corti is a devout Catholic, Rigoni Stern makes no declaration of political faith - except for one overtly anti-Fascist comment, proffered by a bereaved father - and depicts himself solely as a simple soldier. Certainly the two are temperamentally very different (Corti emerges as a somewhat lugubrious figure); nevertheless that Rigoni Stern's utopian vision of regeneration comprises his Russian enemies, as they were in 1943, suggests a pro-Communist stance. On the other hand, Calvino's concept of regeneration examined in the questionably incongruous 9th chapter of 'Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno' owes less to a utopian vision than to contemporary psychiatry, and is therefore - at least theoretically - feasible. Fittingly enough, it is Kim, the political commissary and literary counterpart of Calvino's partisan friend, the future psychiatrist, who explains the mechanics of political motivation. The peasants, workers, and escaped prisoners of war, are groups that have different but concrete reasons for fighting the Nazi-Fascist forces. The lumpenproletariat, to which Dritto's detachment belongs, however, lacks positive motivation. The originality of Kim's, and Calvino's, argument, in contemporary literature, lies in the recognition of the positive purpose to which negative (and ultimately classless) feelings, like hatred, anger and wretchedness can be turned. Kim explains:

'Quel peso di male che grava sugli uomini del Dritto, quel peso che grava su tutti noi, su me, su te, quel furore antico che è in tutti noi, e che si sfoga in spari, in nemici uccisi, è lo stesso che fa sparare i fascisti, che li porta a uccidere

con la stessa speranza di purificazione, di riscatto.... Questo è il significato della lotta, il significato vero, totale, al di là dei veri significati ufficiali. Una spinta di riscatto umano, elementare, anonimo, da tutte le nostre umiliazioni: per l'operaio dal suo sfruttamento, per il contadino dalla sua ignoranza, per il piccolo borghese dalle sue inibizioni, per il paria dalla sua corruzione. Io credo che il nostro lavoro politico sia questo, utilizzare anche la nostra miseria umana, utilizzarla contro se stessa, per la nostra redenzione, così come i fascisti utilizzano la miseria per perpetuare la miseria, e l'uomo contro l'uomo.' (52)

Manifestly, Kim eschews the manichaen schematism that generally pervades the works of the Neorealists; instead of arguing from abstract principles which are projected onto a, more or less, perfectly individualized and credible humanity, Kim postulates the positive activation of powerful - if generally negative - forces within the personality of the individual, and therefore, by logical extension, within the group or nation - in as much as both units are composed of individuals. Such negative forces are almost inevitably depicted as alien, even antithetical, to the character of the idealized proletarian hero - whence another original aspect of Calvino's argument: the irrelation of man's potential goodness to his social class. Admittedly, given the predominance of Fascism's collective ideology over two decades, and the comparative debility of a middle or upper middle-class literary tradition (no less than the petty bourgeois or working-class origins of many Neorealist novelists) it is not inconceivable that notions relating to individual identity were less firmly established in Italian literature, than in that of other Western European countries. (53) Nevertheless Barberi Squarotti differentiates 'Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno' from other Neorealist novels thus:

'C'erano, certo, anche i motivi ricavati dalla maniera neorealista, come il dialogo, del tutto irreale e di rimozione, dei due comandanti partigiani sul significato della lotta: ma l'intero libro costituiva una violenta negazione della riduzione neorealista della realtà, uno sforzo già molto maturo

per raggiungere quella gnoseologia di una  
 quantità folta di luoghi storici, umani, sociali,  
 su cui i teorici del neorealismo avevano posto  
 l'indicazione dell'*hic sunt leones.*' (54)

Now, as stated above, the Neorealist reduction - or perhaps selective interpretation - of reality served a positive purpose inasmuch as it established the foundation of spiritual regeneration, through the reaffirmation of primordial goodness. The significance of 'Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno', a significance entrusted almost exclusively to the 9th chapter (and at whatever cost to the novel's stylistic unity and credibility) lies in the transcendence or repudiation of the somewhat simplistic, manichaean premises of the Neorealists. Primarily Calvino repudiates the myth of '.... una Resistenza agiografica ed edulcorata' (55) as he aptly terms it - although less definitively than Fenoglio in 'I ventitré giorni della città di Alba' especially - by attacking the Resistance from the rear, as it were, whereas Fenoglio confronts his subject directly, sometimes celebrating or sanctifying the heroic element of human frailty, but never the elevated, or elevating, moral purpose that more or less covertly impels the Neorealists' heroes. According to his prefatory remarks, Calvino - again like Fenoglio - nonetheless considers the partisans humanly superior to their respectable and right-minded 'armchair' detractors. He retrospectively evaluates the provocation he offered thus:

'D'accordo, farò come se aveste ragione voi, non rappresenterò i migliori partigiani, ma i peggiori possibili, metterò al centro del mio romanzo un reparto tutto composto di tipi un po' storti. Ebbene: cosa cambia? Anche in chi si è gettato nella lotta senza un chiaro perché, ha agito un'elementare spinta di riscatto umano, una spinta che li ha resi centomila volte migliori di voi, che li ha fatti diventare forze storiche attive quali voi non potrete mai sognarvi di essere !' (56)

Nor is Calvino's conception of the partisans' 'elementare spinta di

riscatto umano' inconsistent with Kim's awareness of their negative feelings. For Calvino diverges from the Neorealists in asserting the coexistence of good and bad feelings within the individual. Thus, with the exception of the Ariostesque Lupo Rosso, who in the context of Pin's imperfect world represents a kind of latter-day perfect chevalier, Dritto's partisans, like the society of Pin's 'carruggio', exist in a preconscious state, in which political allegiances are lightly made and easily and frequently reversed. Miscèl il Francese becomes a Fascist and Gian l'Autista a partisan, Pelle after much vacillation abandons the partisans definitively to join the Fascists and Pin too is momentarily attracted by the 'glamour' surrounding the militia. These eleventh hour adherents to the inducements of Fascism (which differ for each one, as do the concrete motivations for the more enlightened partisans) are not noticeably more unsavoury than their partisan counterparts of Dritto's band; possibly they are marginally more unsavoury, but certainly not enough so to detract from Calvino's thesis that the allegiances of the lumpenproletariat are determined by seeming trivialities; as Kim says:

'.... basta un nulla, un passo falso, un impennamento dell'anima e ci si trova dall'altra parte, come Pelle, dall'brigata nera, a sparare con lo stesso furore, con lo stesso odio, contro gli uni o contro gli altri, fa lo stesso.' (57)

He further argues, and the novel illustrates, the failure of ideals and ideology vis-à-vis the spiritual, rather than the purely class defined, lumpenproletariat; he says to Ferriera:

'- non puoi parlare di ideali: patria, libertà, comunismo. Non ne vogliono sentir parlare di ideali, gli ideali son buchi tutti ad averli, anche dall'altra parte ne hanno di ideali.... Non hanno bisogno di ideali, di miti, di evviva da gridare.' (58)

Obviously, Calvino's own Communist faith is an integral part of the novel's

inspiration, but this no less than other secondary inconsistencies and questions that beg the asking, are all fortuitously resolved by History. History, the ultimate impersonal, and therefore undisputed, arbiter of man's actions - not unlike God in other countries and other times - is on the side of the partisans and Communists. Kim declares both Fascists and partisans are motivated by the same anger and continues:

'Ma allora c'è la storia. C'è che noi, nella storia, siamo dalla parte del riscatto, loro dall'altra. Da noi, niente va perduto, nessun gesto, nessun sparo, pur uguale al loro, m'intendi? uguale al loro, va perduto, tutto servirà se non a liberare noi a liberare i nostri figli, a costruire un'umanità senza più rabbia, serena, in cui si possa non essere cattivi. L'altra è la parte dei gesti perduti, degli inutili furori, perduti e inutili anche se vincessero, perché non fanno storia, non servono a liberare ma a ripetere e perpetuare quel furore e quell'odio, finché dopo altri venti o cento o mille anni si tornerebbe così, noi e loro, a combattere con lo stesso odio anonimo negli occhi e pur sempre, forse senza saperlo, noi per redimercene, loro per restarne schiavi.' (59)

Kim's declaration epitomizes the resolute, if restrained, optimism, that transcends all reverses and pervades the novel. Falaschi however suggests certain dangers inherent in this interpretation of History, which appears in 'Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno' and other post-war novels; he argues:

'A questo punto Calvino deve introdurre la storia, il progresso che dà una ragione al gesto dei partigiani e vanifica l'azione dei fascisti; ma il rischio di questa soluzione è molto grosso, poiché i partigiani possono anche ricostituirsi, in futuro, come potenza naturale, trasformarsi essi stessi nelle maglie della storia e incarnare, magari, il progresso come forza inarrestabile; chi vi sta dentro acriticamente, a livello istintivo, è lui stesso una forza della natura, chi tenta di capire può trovarsi al di fuori della storia e risentirla come diversa, una realtà incomprensibile. Ciò che si muove automaticamente e che non dipende più dagli uomini è già ambiguo, una forza della natura..... Originariamente positiva, poi negativa e impenetrabile, la storia può non essere più dialettica, ma lineare e unidirezionale.' (60)

Arguably, the stereotyped heroic ending of moral victory coupled with

physical destruction, generally eliminates such a transformation of History. But, to revert to the analysis of Kim's credo; Kim manifestly envisages Liberation as a psychological Liberation from rage and badness. Kim explains badness in terms of a childhood experience; he was deliberately 'bad' and suffered immensely, but desired pity and comforting. On the basis of this experience Kim makes the generalization :

'Non c'è nulla di piú doloroso al mondo di essere cattivi.' (61)

While not disputing the accuracy of this point, it is nevertheless indicative of an implicit limitation of the novel: Kim's psychiatric theory is valid insofar as it avoids the abnormal. Notwithstanding the difficulties of defining 'normal' and 'abnormal', it might loosely be argued that the perpetration of atrocities on human beings (or indeed animals) is abnormal and implies different psychological mechanisms to those consistent with a normal degree of potential badness. 'Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno' eschews the depiction of atrocity; battles, betrayals and assassinations occur 'off-stage' as it were and beatings in jails are neither unprecedented nor unfamiliar to Pin: hence man's liberation from badness is feasible.

In 'Cronache di poveri amanti' (1947 but set in the years 1925-27) Pratolini's depiction of Osvaldo's badness although no less feasible is nonetheless implacably damnatory. Perhaps the mechanisms governing Osvaldo's acceptance of his badness are more usually applied to Nazi than to Fascist behaviour, for obvious reasons. At any rate, Pratolini lucidly defines the process whereby Evil is metamorphosed into Good through total conformity with the conduct of the masses. After participating in the squadristi's 'reprisals' on Maciste, Osvaldo acquires a tranquillity he previously lacked, which the narrator explains thus:

'.... al rimorso gli uomini hanno trovato, come antidoto, l'Ideale.... pervenuto al limite dell'ascoltazione di se stesso, e dovendo ammettere di avere tutto sbagliato nella propria vita, un uomo vede aperte due strade davanti a sé: o suicidarsi o... "cambiar pelle"..... Il numero degli intelletti medi che un giorno si accorgono di essere giunti al loro fallimento morale è, (invece), sterminato. E, i suicidi, al confronto, uno zero. Si apre allora ai nostri occhi una terza strada, che è l'unica sulla quale sappiamo di poterci avventurare poiché è quella che ci ha condotti dove siamo.... Vi sono, naturalmente, anche su questa strada ostacoli e barriere, ma ci apriremo il varco assieme agli altri e getteremo le macerie da una parte: le macerie che quando procedevamo da soli, ai margini della strada, ci ostruivamo il cammino, con i loro dubbi e rimorsi ! Così facendo, un uomo tradisce, sì, se stesso, ma una volta per sempre. Dopo di che avrà finito di fingersi..... Non si ricorderà più quello che egli era. E non perché non vorrà ricordarsi, ma perché davvero *non si ricorderà*. Avrà, a suo modo, cambiato pelle, e creduto di conservare intatto l'Ideale.' (62)

Pratolini's description of the mechanisms governing conformity was subsequently and less credibly reiterated by Moravia in 'Il Conformista', where Marcello's awareness of the psycho-sexual norms he contravenes is constantly stressed. Marcello, unlike Osvaldo, cannot identify with the masses and be judged with them by the prevalent criteria, because he suffers the estrangement from society that typifies Moravia's bourgeois heroes. Hence whereas Moravia constantly probes Marcello's abnormal psychology from without, Pratolini's use of 'noi' in the above quotation is indicative of an unusual degree of insight into, indeed almost identification with, his Fascist personage. In the post-war Neorealist novel, little effort is generally made to penetrate the mind and motivation of the militant Fascist. But earlier Pratolini is not far from a kind of pitying comprehension for the plausible frustrations Osvaldo experiences: in the age of 'L'Uomo della Provvidenza', of the institutionalization of opportunism, Osvaldo is the boy who invariably 'misses the boat'. The other self-professed Fascist of via del Corno, the squadrista Carlino, arrived at Fascism by a different path; a violent,



but not altogether bad, boy, he participated in the Fiume expedition and while in Fiume his father was, accidentally, killed by a Socialist. His father also was a Socialist but this is unimportant to Carlino. Pratolini comments:

'Il mondo procede per affinità elettive, sia nel Bene che nel Male. Carlino è "fascista tra i fascisti", come dice la canzone, e come i personaggi di Goethe sono l'uno nel cuore dell'altro. Il Bene e il Male si confondono nelle passioni; Carlino si è dato anima e corpo alla sua passione. Il senso dell'avventura, della violenza, del sangue lo invoglia più di una bella donna - e quell'essere guardato con timore, con reverenza, "come un domatore nel serraglio", sono le sue parole, lo eccita e lo compiace. Nello stesso tempo egli è certo di operare per il bene della Patria.' (6 )

Carlino's conscience, Pratolini remarks, is at the disposal of the Mother-country, hence, although accountable for three lives he sleeps soundly.

(64)

There is also another kind of Fascism that is only briefly delineated in 'Cronache di poveri amanti'; egoistical bourgeois Fascism. Carlino's Fascist faith is passionately held and therefore is a Vice that Pratolini suggests shares something of the emotional vindication of its corresponding Virtue; Communist faith. (65) No such partial exemption exists however for the Fascism of via della Robbia, which is distinguished by the void of a personal engagement. Its inhabitants form a deliberate and reprehensible counterpoint with the proletarian solidarity of via del Corno; the narrator declares:

'I borghesi che vi abitano non sono gente curiosa come i nostri cornacchiai, non soffrono né slanci né impazienze. Alla testimonianza orale e auricolare preferiscono il resoconto dei giornali: i si dice dell'indomani. Essi risentono inconsciamente le fatiche dei loro avi che fecero la storia: hanno affidato ad altri la difesa delle posizioni conquistate. Le loro stanze suggeriscono l'ordine, l'igiene, le buone maniere, il timor di Dio, il rispetto della Legge. E l'egoismo, la pavidità, la schiavitù mentale che tutto ciò costa, al

giorno d'oggi. È una condizione che via del Corno rifiuta, ma nella quale via della Robbia si riconosce e vi trova il suo equilibrio, la sua privata felicità.' (66)

The engrossment of the inhabitants of via della Robbia in their own private happiness is epitomized - and condemned - by the fact of their positive disinterest in a murder that occurs on their door-steps, so to speak. It is furthermore indicative of Pratolini's populism that the Socialist M.P. whose life Maciste saves, lives in via della Robbia and accordingly belongs essentially on the same side of the class and feeling barrier as its other inhabitants, even to the point of apparent paradox. His 'professional' Socialism is belied by personal feelings closely related to Fascism, as is attested by his condescending behaviour towards Maciste, the proletarian hero.

Mussolini also is briefly but ironically depicted in the novel as the arch-hypocrite who fulminates and rewards, engineers Fascism's specious triumphs and the institutionalization of injustice, all to frivolous international applause. But Pratolini's interests and sympathies lie essentially with the via del Corno which he stresses, represents a perfect microcosm of man's concerns:

'... tutto quello che stringe d'assedio l'anima della gente, e la persegue, pare fatto apposta, stringe d'assedio via del Corno da secoli e secoli. Basterà, per crederlo, che se ne faccia l'elenco. Entro uno spazio, che nelle opposte direzioni non supera mai i duecento metri, pure escludendo il Palazzo della Signoria, noi troviamo; la sede del Fascio, il Tribunale, il Bargello, un Commissariato di P.S. e quattro chiese sei volte secolari.' (67)

and of man's political situation:

'... nell'interpretazione dei cornacchiai Fascismo è Carlino, Antifascismo è Maciste.' (68)

Accordingly the 'cornacchiai' are granted their own dictator, in the form

of the 'Signora', who is comparable to Mussolini on a reduced - but by no means modest - scale. Like Mussolini, she is totally devoid of objectivity and regards herself as a Superucto. Further like Marinetti's Marfarka, her desire to instil life into base material causes her to 'create' Liliana. She is a remarkably unwomanly woman, who fights a lone sex war against men, using the weapons of Lesbianism and implacable spite. As the embodiment of 'power' her psycho-sexual formation is typically unnatural. Memmo argues that the Signora represents Natural Evil, and Carlino, who towards the end of the novel becomes her executor, her natural abettor; Historical Evil. (69) Consequently, perhaps, Carlino's sexuality is differently distorted. According to another prevalent, and not unfounded notion, in him sexual desire has been perverted into blood-lust or violence.

The contrasting spontaneity and purity, both spiritual and sexual, of Pratolini's proletariat is more or less predictable: purity of heart like that shared by Ugo and Gesuina or Mario and Milena inevitably finds its political expression in - necessarily clandestine - Communism. Pratolini states that he often says 'Heart' where he means 'Conscience', but like Vittorini he depicts Communism as the force of happiness, and more, as the bastion of the heart. The love between Ugo and Gesuina, two 'reclaimed' souls, illustrates Pratolini's conviction. He says:

'Si erano conquistati, lei e lui, giovani e intatti. E siccome il loro amore era un amore semplice, naturale, anche fisicamente si amavano con uguale intensita e calore. Ed era per una meditata difesa di se stessi che partecipavano alla lotta politica dalla barricata nella quale identificavano se stessi e il loro amore.' (70)

As Pratolini remarks Maciste has not read Marx's 'Das Kapital' nor is he intellectually equal to doing so; his Communist loyalties spring spontaneously from the conscience which is the heart. The author however

succeeds in underpinning 'Cronache di poveri amanti' with various, presumably Marxist inspired, didacticisms, which, like the other truths he discovers, he anxiously stresses lest the reader miss them. Thus we learn that habitual petty criminals belong to the lumpenproletariat and are almost as detrimental to working-class interests as are capitalists, and that Bianca is a petty bourgeois at heart, who should not be antagonized or despised. Pratolini admonishes:

'Non formano forse i piccoli borghesi la maggioranza della società? Mario non è ancora un buon compagno se ignora che l'esito di tutte le battaglie dipende dal comportamento della piccola borghesia. Si potrà essa alleare ai proletari se costoro la disprezzano?..... È bastato l'incontro con Eugenio per rivelare in Bianca quella autenticità che le è connaturale, e che tuttavia era sempre rimasta latente nel suo spirito.' (71)

In fact the encounter between Eugenio and Bianca appears contrived. Possibly Pratolini's purpose was to suggest that as well as it being politically incorrect to antagonize the infinite numbers of Biancas, it is also an error in human terms, since materialistic aspirations are natural and irreprehensible. Nor are the - necessarily - pro-Fascist implications of Eugenio's a-political stance explained in a denunciatory fashion; for the year is 1926, and in Italy 'normality' has been officially restored. Hence all ostensibly conform - as the narrator says:

'Si conformano, è naturale. Occorre pur vivere.' (72)

Nevertheless he is adamant that the cornacchiai are not

" schiacciati sotto il peso della dittatura" (73)

and the novel therefore ends on a note of optimism; Musetta and Renzo are a new anti-Fascist generation in fieri. Longobardi evaluates the historical significance of 'Cronache di poveri amanti' thus:

'.... le *Cronache* sono l'opera essenziale di

quegli anni, se scoprono, nelle loro figure che apparvero realistiche e sono fatte di negazione della realtà e di speranza e di volontà di un'altra realtà, la carenza storica, aperta sotto i valori di un umanesimo cristiano e sociale accesi in quegli anni.' (74)

he continues:

'La nobiltà maggiore del Pratolini delle *Cronache* è nella strenuità con la quale ignora ciò che sa: ma la *Cronaca familiare* paga per tutti, e fa vacillare tutta la costruzione, la "ricerca" pratoliniana.' (75)

Like Pratolini's 'Cronache di poveri amanti', Jovine's 'Le terre del Sacramento' concludes with the restrained expression of faith in the deferred, but eventual, victory of the people; although Pratolini's optimism derives from his conviction that primordial virtues are reincarnated in each generation of adolescents, whereas Jovine's certainty resides in the peasants' capacity for endurance, in accordance with the history and harsher conditions of Southern Italy. Jovine's novel is no less consistent with the literary tradition of the South, than Pratolini's is with that of Florence, but Jovine describes a real or at least potential situation and Pratolini an idealization. The qualities of the Southern Italian are perhaps best defined by Silone, and although they refer specifically to the Abruzzese, they are applicable also to Jovine's Molisani. Silone says of the Abruzzese:

'Tra questi non sono mai mancati individui bizzarri portati all'utopia religiosa o politica, e altri (come ovunque, la maggioranza) del tutto ordinari semplici chiusi e anche rozzi e gretti; ma, all'occorrenza, gli uni e gli altri, capaci di eccezionali prove di generosità e coraggio.' (76)

Luca Marano, the peasant protagonist of 'Le terre del Sacramento' and descendant of Pietro of 'Signora Ava' perhaps falls between the two categories; an ex-seminarist, turned law student and 'piccolo intellettuale' (a juxtaposition the English cannot match) at his death he combines

something of the martyred saint with something of the populist hero.

The allegorical dimension of the novel, unlike 'Cronache di poveri amanti', is unobtrusive, unstressed. After the attempted distraint of Enrico Canavalle's possessions, Filoteo Natalizio, Luca's uncle proffers the following homespun reflections:

'-La cambiale è la prova di un vizio, di una sregolatezza. La scadenza è il memento, il ricordo. La cambiale è uno strumento di moralità... Ci sono le cambiali individuali e le cambiali della storia. Anche quelle scadono.' (77)

It is no accident, then, that debts and promissory notes of one kind or another constitute the pivot of the novel. The calculating Laura marries her dissolute and debt-ridden cousin Enrico Canavalle, last scion of a landowning family, and in order to make her own fortune she persuades the peasants to work the terre del Sacramento (which is excommunicated ground) by promising them an emphyteusis; the cultivated land is then mortgaged to the Credito Meridionale. Laura then defaults in moral and real terms vis-à-vis the peasants, for she defrauds them of the land they reclaimed and of the proper recompense for their labour. The novel's allegorical element resides largely in the chronological coincidence of internal and external events; thus Luca's realization of Laura's dupery occurs simultaneously with the March on Rome; and his murder by the Fascists who have returned in triumph from the March is the tragic, but, within the context of the novel, predictable outcome of the peasants' untimely rebellion against what they unanimously feel to be an intolerable injustice. Luca's death was foreseeable from the moment, just prior to the March on Rome, when he clashed in Naples, with a middle-class Fascist 'paesano'. Following the advice of a friend, Luca temporarily stays indoors and for the first time objectively evaluates his situation qua 'piccolo intellettuale' thus:

'Si veniva rifacendo la sua storia interna, a brano a brano, senza lume d'indulgenza per sé e per i suoi simili. Luca Marano, figlio di Giuseppe, non era più una vittima solitaria. Il suo destino, la sua tristezza di ventenne miserabile era simile a quella..... delle migliaia di studenti che piovevano a Napoli tra ottobre e novembre per esporre ai professori le nozioni lette nei manuali di Diritto Civile durante le desolate stagioni trascorse in villaggi come Morutri... Giovani come lui, che si lasciavano intossicare l'anima senza speranza. Domani avrebbero vissuto sfruttando, derubando subdolamente i contadini dei loro villaggi che erano legati alla loro stessa sorte, dalla stessa ingiustizia. Luca capiva ormai i legami della sua tristezza con quella degli altri.' (78)

It is Luca's intuition of class consciousness that guides the peasants; if, at the end of the novel he becomes as Asor Rosa terms him

'un eroe contadino, un personaggio di saga' (79)

it is largely because he conforms to the kind of leadership and stature that the peasants implicitly exact of him. Luca, however, is a victim of the inescapable paradox of the peasants' situation. His articulation of class solidarity is only effected by unendurable injustice and the inopportune desire to claim redress where none is possible. Conceivably, Jovine's insinuation is that all peasant revolts are motivated by desperation, and therefore predestined to fail. At any rate, the novel implies that this latest injustice coincides with the Fascist seizure of power, but that similar injustices have occurred since (and doubtless before) the Unification of Italy, with similarly tragic consequences. Thus, ominously, we learn that in 1898 the peasants stormed and burned a granary, and a hundred of the menfolk were imprisoned for seven years. (80)

Nevertheless, the import of Jovine's novel is primarily concrete rather than emblematic, depicting the way in which poverty subjugated Southern Italy. Jovine, whose origins were similar to those of Luca, accordingly acknowledges the transient attractions Fascism might initially hold for the socially redundant 'piccolo intellettuale'.

Luca's friend Elpidio explains Fascism almost as the ideology of frustration:

'-Sai quello che c'è di bello - fece Elpidio - non fanno tante storie. Dicono che in questo porco paese non funziona nulla, che i giovani hanno il diritto di farla finita con queste carogne incartapecorite che si fregano tutto.' (81)

But, Giulio d'Angelo, Luca's friend, political mentor and the most enlightened anti-Fascist character in the novel denounces the effect of Fascism manifested by their peer group:

'- Picchiano sui loro padri per rispettare la canna di bambú.' (82)

Giulio, who is more principled than Luca's other friends, acknowledges the need for, but impossibility of, emigration and settles his family's debts by marrying a rich and aged spinster: (thereby sacrificing youth to integrity). The novel confirms Giulio's assertion; the Fascists are the self-appointed, but implacable enemies of the peasants, who swiftly and violently route the local Socialists. They appear suddenly and are almost immediately equated by the peasants with the forces of law. The infiltration of Fascist propaganda is so widespread that Enrico, the local Socialist candidate, abruptly finds his old friend Barberi has changed his allegiances - although in fairness to Jovine's vision of personal relationships, friends like Barberi and Gesualdo ultimately keep faith with their friends rather than with an ideology. As is to be expected, Jovine's Fascists are more or less prototypal, and include the sons of the affluent bourgeoisie of a somewhat vindictive temperament; a local orphan who killed a boy ten years previously and who, via reform school, has become a prominent Fascist (a case, we must infer, of his antecedents standing him in good stead); and the members of the local 'Circolo delle professioni' some of whom are patently demented. Jovine



further stresses the stagnation and stifling apathy of the bourgeoisie in Calena. In contrast the peasants' lot is predictably hard and Jovine accordingly accepts, without condemnation, the short-sighted logic of the 'scab' mentality that predominated at the beginning of the novel. Laura's friends complete Jovine's gallery of Southern characters. Their social preciousness is matched or complemented by the ruthlessness and limitless greed shown towards the peasants, and it is presumably in this spirit that Santasilia's wife sexually accosts Luca.

Jovine's concept of regeneration although similar in outline to that of the Neorealists is, however, more overtly Christian and characteristically Southern inasmuch as it is hostile to the Church qua institution. Don Giacomo whose existence testifies to the possibility of an alternative, anti-doctrinaire faith, explains Christianity to Luca through the following interpretation of Christ's death:

'- Il suo messaggio di giustizia.... non risiede nella sua predicazione e nella resurrezione, ma nella sua morte. La morte di Gesù è il riconoscimento della legge che regge la società degli uomini.... Eppure, sono venti secoli che in nome di Cristo si fa di tutto per ritardare l'avvento della giustizia sulla terra. Si impedisce che la forza interna della società abbia il suo sviluppo. Si mettono i poveri contro i poveri, gli sciagurati contro gli sciagurati. Si adopera il terrore lontano dell'inferno e si fa l'inferno sulla terra.' (83)

Earlier it is stated that the Fascists are resolved to avenge their dead of 2,000 years earlier; and this, in conjunction with the circumstances of Luca's death, suggests that the novel describes a Christ-like acknowledgement of, or sacrifice to, the laws that repress the natural development of man's society. Don Giacomo's vision of regeneration states what other writers, like Vittorini, tend to intimate from a lay viewpoint, and that is that purity must be acquired. But where Vittorini and others imply that Communism is the means, Jovine advocates religious faith.

Don Giacomo says:

'- ... la semplicità, la purezza non si trovano all'alba della vita; nell'impeto feroce dell'istinto c'è mosto torbido, caro Luca. La purezza, la semplicità vengono poi. Il vino schietto lo portano la ragione e gli anni. Vedi, il demonio è caos, è confusione. Dio è ordine, Luca. Il caos è in noi e nelle cose che ci stanno intorno che non comprendiamo e generano il terrore e la superstizione. Il Signore è chiarezza, pacifico ordine; il vero Dio spunta lentamente nella mente degli uomini.' (84)

Ultimately, in 'Le terre del Sacramento', Jovine only reconciles the two aspects of regeneration - the emancipation of the peasants, and the spiritual purification of the individual - in the figure of Luca; but even then this reconciliation is not entirely unproblematical.

Levi's treatment of the Southern peasant is very different, as might well be expected of a Northern bourgeois intellectual and heir to the distinguished cultural tradition of Turin. Asor Rosa evaluates the significance and originality of 'Cristo si è fermato a Eboli' thus:

'Resta il fatto, che sia questi che quegli altri elementi - la visione irrazionale del mondo e la prospettiva democratico-contadina - son da Levi rielaborati con una forza rappresentativa e una serietà culturale, che mancano, proprio nell'ambito dell'atteggiamento populistico, alla maggior parte degli scrittori progressisti contemporanei. Io vorrei notare innanzi tutto questo: di tutte le opere, che in quegli anni in un modo o nell'altro si accostano al popolo e ne condividono ideali e speranze, il *Cristo* è quella che più di ogni altra si fonda su di uno spiccato interesse sociologico.' (85)

Now, Vittorini defines the stance he most admires in himself - and presumably in other novelists - as:

'... il gusto di guardare, il gusto di osservare, la facoltà di giudicare, come, in altri termini, essere dentro la vita e allo stesso tempo affacciati sulla vita:' (86)

In the most literal sense this is true of Levi in 'Cristo si è fermato a

Eboli' (possibly rather more so than it is of Vittorini who appears almost deferential towards his proletarian humanity); Levi is both immersed in and yet also over and above the world he depicts. Obviously the degree of detachment this stance affords him in part permits the sociological approach he adopts towards the extreme backwardness and poverty of the peasants. Asor Rosa assesses Levi's much commented upon superiority to his creation thus:

'... proprio attraverso la *maturità borghese* egli riesce a realizzare una adesione meno futile e transeunte nei confronti delle "ragioni contadine"... Ad un certo punto, la sua stessa tendenza naturale ad un ampio e cordiale senso umanitario, in cui si può ravvisare una forma di decadente superomismo, serve ad *aprirlo* al contatto con la realtà esterna, col mondo degli umili.' (87)

To Asor Rosa's concept of Levi's class maturity and its literary manifestations it is perhaps necessary to add that Levi's works attest to a sense of personal worth and identity, that is so secure as to be quite unusual in contemporary literature. (88) Accordingly, as already stated, Levi considers he has a certain usefulness or contribution to make vis-à-vis the Southern peasants, primarily because he *is* Carlo Levi, whereas Neorealist novelists tend to doubt the adequacy of their social engagement and their antecedents. In both 'Cristo si è fermato a Eboli' and 'L'orologio' Levi's anti-Fascism is depicted as evolving from the more or less allegorized experiences of his internment. The splendid, new and useless urinal in Gagliano manifestly emblemizes the empty edifice of Fascist achievements, and don Luigino, the emasculate school-teacher and local podestà are exemplars of a breed under whose despotism the already low standard of education has dropped still further, presumably as a direct consequence of the universal Fascist predilection for vacuous speechifying. Levi defines the originality inherent in the identification of the 'Luigini' - a term coined in 'L'orologio' - with the Fascist state thus:

'la cultura dei maestri di scuola, l'idealismo da università popolare che muoveva lo zelo isterico dei giovanotti, e faceva loro immaginare che lo stato, nella sua indiscutibile eticità, fosse una persona, fatta all'incirca come loro, con una sua morale personale, simile alla loro, da imporre a tutti gli uomini, con le loro stesse piccole ambizioni, e i loro piccoli sadismi e virtuosismi, ma, nello stesso tempo, imperscrutabile ai profani, sacro ed enorme. In questa identificazione con l'idolo essi provavano la stessa beatitudine fisica che nel fare all'amore.' (89)

Clearly, Levi does not feel the need to differentiate between the Fascist state and the figure of Mussolini; for him the two are perfectly equivalent. It is however important to note that the breed of Luigini identify with Fascism because it affords them their most perfect political expression and instrument. Towards the end of 'Cristo si è fermato a Eboli' Levi conceptualizes his findings regarding the petty bourgeoisie of Southern Italy thus:

'Il vero nemico, quello che impedisce ogni libertà e ogni possibilità di esistenza civile ai contadini, è la piccola borghesia dei paesi. È una classe degenerata, fisicamente e moralmente: incapace di adempiere la sua funzione, e che solo vive di piccole rapine e della tradizione imbastardita di un diritto feudale. Finché questa classe non sarà soppressa e sostituita non si potrà pensare di risolvere il problema meridionale. Questo problema..... preesisteva al fascismo; ma il fascismo, pur non parlandone più, e negandolo, l'ha portato alla massima acutezza, perché con lui lo statalismo piccolo-borghese è arrivato alla più completa affermazione.' (90)

Levi's argument is very simple: the society of Southern Italy is divided into two classes; the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants. The petty bourgeoisie or Luigini oppress and live off the peasants in the most literal sense. But Levi does not consider that the situation could be changed simply by overthrowing the Fascist regime and establishing a democratic, or Left-wing government, since centralized government issuing from Rome, capital of the Luigini is, regardless of its denomination, Luigino by definition. Levi declares:

'Noi non possiamo oggi prevedere quali forme

politiche si preparino per il futuro: ma ... è probabile che le nuove istituzioni che seguiranno al fascismo ... ricreeranno uno Stato altrettanto, e forse piú, lontano dalla vita, idolatrico e astratto, perpetueranno e peggioreranno, sotto nuovi nomi e nuove bandiere, l'eterno fascismo italiano. Senza una rivoluzione contadina, non avremo mai una vera rivoluzione italiana, e viceversa. Le due cose si identificano. Il problema meridionale non si risolve dentro lo Stato attuale, né dentro quelli che, senza contraddirlo radicalmente, lo seguiranno.' (91)

This declaration establishes two of Levi's fundamental tenets that the Luigini as a class were, and always will be, Fascists in the sense of permanent and relentless oppressors of the poor, and that, given the a priori impossibility of any government constituted along traditional lines to radically alter the status quo of Southern Italy, small autonomous communes of some kind constitute the sole valid means of redressing the injustices eternally perpetrated against the peasants. More or less implicit in Levi's statement of the need for a social revolution is an acknowledgement of the spiritual richness or sanity of the peasants' civilisation. Levi does not specify on what principles his autonomous communes should be based, but like Silone in 'Una manciata di more' and Vittorini in 'Le donne di Messina' he was clearly attracted by a concept of society inspired by a utopian reaction against the existing order, of which Asor Rosa says:

'Non rendersi conto su questo piano che l'unico modo di risolvere il problema contadino era esattamente quello di frantumare e di distruggere tale ordine nello sviluppo capitalistico del paese, consentì a Levi una onesta ed appassionata mitizzazione di questa realtà primitiva..... nei seguaci di Levi e nel Levi stesso degli anni successivi, quella che era stata l'individuazione efficace, sebbene parziale, di un mondo popolare, sarà ripresa in funzione d'una strategia generale del movimento di classe estremamente arretrata ed equivoca; ed equivoca ed arretrata, proprio perché legata alla difesa d'un principio di autonomia del problema contadino, che nascondeva in sé la subordinazione della lotta di classe ad un processo di semplice assestamento e di *normale* trasformazione

delle strutture politiche ed economiche dello Stato borghese.' (92)

Certainly in 'L'orologio' on which Manacorda comments:

'La grande vena saggistica di Levi continuò, si gonfiò addirittura.' (93)

Levi attempts to expand the two categories of 'Contadini' and Luigini to cover the whole of Italian society, and to define recent events. The Resistance movement, Levi states, was the only popular - or Contadino - revolution Italy has known, and Parri, the President of the Republic, is a Contadino compelled by circumstances to disguise himself as a Luigino. In 'L'orologio' through the mouthpiece of Andrea, Levi attempts to claim the appropriateness of his theory of Southern Italy, for the country as a whole; by his systematic schematism of all social roles. Thus the workers, but also factory owners and landowners, are Contadini if they serve a creative function; since creativity is the determinant of Contadino status. Accordingly various groups, whose qualifications might not at first seem evident, are included in the ranks of the Contadini; Andrea says:

'Sono Contadini tutti quelli che fanno le cose, che le creano, che le amano, che se ne contentano. Sono Contadini anche gli artigiani, i medici, i matematici, i pittori, le donne, quelle vere non quelle finte. Infine, se permettete, siamo Contadini noi: non intendo noi tre, ma quelli che si usano chiamare, con una parola odiosa, gli "intellettuali"... "gli intellettuali progressivi."' (94)

To revert to a comment Levi makes in 'Cristo si è fermato a Eboli' regarding the need for a peasant revolution, if such a revolution were to occur, given the particular nature of the peasants (discussed with reference to 'L'Agnese va a morire') its leadership would, in all probability, consist of these 'honorary' Contadini. The Luigini, by contrast, are social parasites; Andrea again gives a fairly exhaustive list of the Luigini

elements of society, some of which like the petty bourgeoisie, bureaucrats and industrialists are unmistakable - while others, like left-wing politicians and students are perhaps less immediately identifiable. Andrea adds:

"E... per completare il quadro, i letterati, gli eterni letterati dell'eterna Arcadia, anche se, per fortuna, non sanno né leggere né scrivere."  
(95)

(presumably it is this peculiar assessment of social unproductiveness that motivates Levi's hostility towards Croce, whom he defines as:

'egli che con così soave canto sapeva sedurre i giovani che si avventuravano sul mare della dialettica, che affondava nei vortici delle distinzioni i vascelli coperti di vele degli pseudoconcetti, ' (96) ).

At any rate, in the post-war period Levi considers that Italy lacks the bureaucracy she merits, for the state functionaries remain Luigini who passively but nonetheless effectively combat and undermine Parri's government, while the astute and experienced right-wing politicians - and Luigini - plot their return to power. By and subsequent to their successful reinstatement of themselves as the ruling faction, the Luigini will totally undermine the importance of the popular revolution. With the benefit of hindsight (97), Levi forecasts the upshot of the Resistance Movement:

'sarebbe stato respinto tra i ricordi storici, rinnegato come attiva realtà, relegato tutt'al più nel profondo della coscienza individuale, come una esperienza morale senza frutti visibili, piena soltanto delle promesse di un lontano futuro.' (98)

Such indeed would appear to be the case. Nevertheless, Levi recognises in himself the swift relegation to redundancy of ideals no longer necessitated by common rigours. He illustrates the inevitability of the

erosion of idealism through the modest example of his reluctance to subject himself to bad food and an unpleasant environment, in Rome. He comments:

'La città non si prestava alle cucine popolari, che sono gradevoli soltanto quando la privazione è generale, e un certo eroismo è nell'aria. A Torino ci si andava ancora con piacere.... Nessuno badava a quello che metteva in bocca: era il piacere eccitante del sacrificio collettivo, di un ordine austero.' (99)

The above illustration is perhaps less banal than it might seem: certainly the return of social normality is a fact whose importance is generally underestimated, or minimized, by novelists, for whatever reason. Further, it indicates a certain inherent scepticism on Levi's part regarding the efficacy of idealism, but without invalidating his central thesis of solidarity with the Contadini. Levi's populism is manifestly anti-political; although he professes to admire the sincerity and acumen of Marxists and left-wing intellectuals generally. He nevertheless opposes what he considers their exclusively theoretical approach to human problems. (Such partisan sympathies as Levi has, seem to lie with the short-lived 'Partito d'Azione'.) But as in 'Cristo si è fermato a Eboli' he refutes any hypothetical solution which fails to recognize that the terms of the problem of the government of Italy are primarily human, and not abstract or political. Thus, wittingly or unwittingly, Levi can permit himself the small - theoretical - infidelity to his Contadini of lunching pleasantly, without contravening his convictions, for his feelings of solidarity are neither doctrinaire in the usual sense of the word, nor a conscious fulfilment of moral duty, that is to say a way of measuring up to his personal moral yardstick. Levi's populism is apparently spontaneous, innate and, in a curious fashion, unidealistic, inasmuch as there is no evidence, either in 'Cristo si è fermato a Eboli' or 'L'orologio', to



suggest that Levi's election of solidarity was consciously made or required intellectual examination. Rather, Levi's account of a childhood experience with his uncle perhaps hints at the genesis of his artistic and personal convictions; once, anticipating anger, he encountered affection and learned the following lesson:

'Seppi, nello stesso giorno, che cos'era la pittura; e che cosa era la bontà, e che, per l'una e per l'altra le cose inaccessibili sorridono.... e certo, in quell'attimo.... passai in un istante da un'epoca a un'altra, imparai a adoprare le mani e a riconoscere una libertà fatta di amore, per cui non esiste il peccato, e a non considerare lontane e separate quelle due cose, arte e coscienza morale, ma amiche e congiunte, e nate insieme, sulle rovine della terrificante trascendenza.' (100)

Levi's solidarity with the peasants possibly constitutes a natural extension of his positive feelings towards himself, or possibly it is determined by an affinity of feeling; whereas the Luigini are characterized by an attitude of unrelieved hatred, the peasants, like Levi, are depicted as capable of loyalty and compassion. Accordingly, Levi's total identification with the peasants - or rather as in 'L'orologio' of the Contadini with himself - is unsurprising. It is perhaps problematic in terms of the social theories he constructs around it, but not in terms of personal sympathies. Perhaps then, as a consequence of living usefully among the peasants, no less than of having a secure sense of identity, Levi offers one of the most uncomplicated professions of populism of contemporary bourgeois novelists - a category to which Levi admittedly only partly belongs.

In contrast Moravia's tardy contribution to Neorealism and populist literature 'La ciociara'(1957) attests to some of the limitations common to the portrayals of the proletarian hero or heroine; and some that are peculiar to Moravia. Cesira qualifies as a Neorealist persona largely

by reason of a typical inadequacy in the face of reality; an inadequacy that to some degree reflects on her creator. Longobardi observes:

' Tuttavia la connotazione essenziale di Cesira, dalla quale tutte le altre possono derivare, è il non sapere, l'essere continuamente inferiore agli eventi che le si scatenano intorno o addosso; inferiorità perfettamente realistica e congruente, e tuttavia è proprio essa che suggella nella persona della umile ciociara la confessione borghese.' (101)

Other characteristically Neorealist elements present in 'La ciociara' include a kind of innate anti-Fascism Cesira eventually uncovers in herself, an evangel of Christian Socialism preached by the eventually martyred Michele, and a vision of regeneration. All of these however assume a typically Moravian colouring. Thus Cesira lives for nearly twenty years in Rome, as a shopkeeper, and is so totally enslaved by the self-interest habitually associated with her petty bourgeois occupation, as to be one of the countless small but essential pillars supporting the edifice of Fascism; more or less routed by the war, she returns to the countryside, unearths her peasant roots and realizes, listening to the Americans' cannon fire:

' quest'esplosione mi dava una gioia profonda e io capivo che questa gioia non era buona perché era la gioia dell'odio ma non potevo farci niente, si vede che io avevo odiato tutto il tempo fascisti e nazisti, senza saperlo, e adesso che il canone sparava su di loro, io ero contenta.' (102)

(Clearly other, less complimentary interpretations could be projected onto Cesira's tardy self-awareness.) The rural Cesira, like the proletarian Adriana in the novel 'La romana', develops sophisticated perceptions that permit her to analyse the nature of the Nazis and of war. Regarding this latter subject 'La ciociara' has the obvious advantage over other Neorealist novels previously discussed, of an objectivity

greatly enhanced by chronological distance and, presumably, by the abundance of relevant literature published in the interim. Cesira then, is able to evaluate the phenomenon and consequences of war far better than her literary precursors. The concept of regeneration she experiences and expresses is however utterly prosaic, almost an eschewance of the challenge posed by regeneration and to which Vittorini, Pratolini, Calvino and even Levi responded with a utopian faith. Cesira ultimately comes to understand the relevance to her own life of Michele's parable of the raising of Lazarus and therefore concludes her story:

'.... adesso .... capivo che Michele aveva avuto ragione; e che per qualche tempo eravamo state morte anche noi due, Rosetta ed io, morte alla pietà che si deve agli altri e a se stessi. Ma il dolore ci aveva salvate all'ultimo momento; e così, in certo modo, il passo di Lazzaro era buono anche per noi, poiché, grazie al dolore, eravamo, alla fine, uscite dalla guerra che ci chiudeva nella sua tomba di indifferenza e di malvagità ed avevamo ripreso a camminare nella nostra vita, la quale era forse una povera cosa piena di oscurità e di errori, ma purtuttavia la sola che dovessimo vivere, come senza dubbio Michele ci avrebbe detto se fosse stato con noi.' (103)

Cesira believes that she has been restored to life through sorrow. Earlier in the novel she, like Jovine, expresses faith in the notion that purity can only be learned; but the life Cesira will return to is her former existence as a shopkeeper, and we might therefore reasonably assume that she will revert also to her petty bourgeois mentality. Cesira, at the end of the novel, appears in characteristically Moravian fashion, to have travelled a more or less full circle, like Adriana in 'La romana' and Carla in 'Gli indifferenti'; the limitation of Moravia's vision is always a place just short of the circle's starting point. Longobardi explains:

'Il racconto che Cesira fa dei suoi mali passati vale a trovarle dimora in quel cerchio interno dove

già abitano, e altri stanno per arrivare, i monologanti romani; e cioè vale a scaricare il cerchio esterno - in cui il primo è compreso, il cerchio della nuova realtà della vecchia borghesia - da tutti gli antichi mali e impurità ... Violenza subita e conversione restano chiuse nel cerchio piccolo, mentre nel grande si trovano i convertiti dimentichi ormai di conversione e i violentati ignari di stupri subiti: ormai tutti rinnovati e irriconoscibili, lavati, come Rosetta, d'acqua e di lagrime, pronti a ricominciare da zero, ora perfettamente asciutti.' (104)

(Rosetta's rape apparently symbolizes the rape of Italy.)

Now, in 'La romana' Adriana is restored to her petty bourgeois aspirations at the end of the novel more overtly than is Cesira, but from a discussion she holds earlier with Mino regarding these aspirations and a certain signora Lobianco, we learn that social class is the factor that confers, or immunizes from, reprehensibility. Signora Lobianco is reprehensible because she (like Mariagrazia's family in 'Gli indifferenti') belongs to the bourgeoisie, whereas Adriana and Cesira are exculpated by their proletarian origins. (105) (Cesira however by more rigorous Neo-realist standards, like those of Viganò, would have been duly condemned as a betrayer of her class interest, and not permitted the exonerating dichotomy between her town and country selves that Moravia accords her.) Cesira and especially Adriana, manifestly, have their failings; but Moravia seems to be at pains to insist that these are healthy failings that constitute an integral part of a robust proletarian psyche. In contrast Mino, the bourgeois intellectual and Communist figure of 'La romana' is hopelessly weak and indecisive; possibly rendered effete in and by the attempt to reject and combat his own class. This much we might deduce from a counterpoint between the feeble youths like Mino and Michele of 'Gli indifferenti' who try to alienate themselves to some degree from their class, and such consummately vital bourgeois figures as Leo and Giulia, Marcello's wife in 'Il conformista'. Moravia seemingly reserves

his merciless moral condemnation solely for the bourgeoisie - his own class. Mino's denunciation of his comrades to Astarita is especially despicable, a point on which novelist and character concur, because it was freely, almost gladly, proffered and was moreover unnecessary. Mino explains that he turned informer spontaneously because he found Astarita almost likeable; he rectifies:

".... non lui personalmente... ma la sua funzione... eh già... quando si rinunzia o non si sa essere quel che si dovrebbe essere, viene fuori però quel che si è .... non sono forse io figlio di un ricco proprietario ?..... E quell'uomo, nelle sue funzioni, non difendeva forse i miei interessi ? ..... Ci siamo riconosciuti della stessa razza... solidali nella stessa cause.... cosa credi ? Che provassi simpatia per lui, personalmente ? No, no.... provavo simpatia per la sua funzione... ho sentito che ero io che lo pagavo, io che lui difendeva, io che stavo dietro di lui come padrone pur standogli davanti come accusato."  
(106)

Ultimately then Mino's behaviour and sympathies are dictated by his class interest while his Communist beliefs are shown to be mere ephemerae. Significantly, at this point, Mino's speech is didactic and his conduct we infer, intended to emblemize that of countless bourgeois intellectuals - whose conduct, Moravia implies, is irremediably predetermined by their class origins. The inescapability of this predetermination, expressed by Mino's statement that he is what he is and cannot change himself, is perhaps a heritage of the disenchantment of the Fascist period. Whether determinism preceded a refutation of the efficacy and validity of idealism or vice versa, Moravia is clearly unable to participate in the whole-hearted espousal of idealism that characterized the post-war period. Thus Cesira obtusely argues that since Michele's anti-Fascism lacks a personal motivation it must have developed as a reaction against his parents. Later, she disenchantedly comments that man's goodness, or badness, is an essentially passive reflection of his environment:

'E io tante volte ho pensato che un uomo va trattato come un uomo e non come una bestia e trattare un uomo come un uomo vuol dire farlo star pulito, in una casa pulita, mostrare simpatia e considerazione per lui e soprattutto dargli delle speranze per l'avvenire. Se questo non si fa, l'uomo, che è capace di tutto, non ci mette niente a diventare una bestia e allora si comporta come una bestia ed è inutile chiedergli di comportarsi come un uomo dal momento che si è voluto che fosse bestia e non uomo.' (107)

Vittorini, although lacking neither idealism nor faith, nevertheless, like Moravia, fails to adapt his personal ideology to post-war and post-Fascist Italy. Not that this is in any way surprising, given that a novelist's formation tends to depend upon internal as much as external factors; and temperament cannot be changed at will to comply with altered circumstances - especially radically altered circumstances. Certainly in 'Uomini e no', Vittorini is at least partially aware of his failure to change himself fundamentally to match the times: in his concluding note he states:

'La mia appartenenza al Partito Comunista indica dunque quello che io voglio essere, mentre il mio libro può indicare soltanto quello che in effetti io sono.... E il lettore giudichi tenendo conto che solo ogni merito, per questo libro, è di me come comunista. Il resto viene dalle mie debolezze d'uomo. Né in proposito posso promettere nulla, come scrittore. "Imparerò meglio" è tutto quello che posso aggiungere, come il mio operaio dell'epilogo.' (108)

In fact Vittorini was not to 'learn better', not least because he failed to relinquish his belief in the autonomy of culture (109), one of the fundamental cultural issues of the immediate post-war years, and one much debated between Vittorini and the P.C.I. However, whether or not the novel's merits derive from Vittorini's Communist allegiance, and notwithstanding the sincerity of his political allegiance, the election of Enne 2 as his protagonist was motivated by personal, and presumably therefore also literary, considerations. The narrator admits that with

Gracco he could have had a dialogue of 'strange questions and answers' like those in 'Conversazione in Sicilia' but explains:

'... io non so nulla di una sua storia d'uomo. E quell'altro (Enne 2) ha in sè una storia che è come una mia storia; mi morde, l'ho in me da dieci anni, da dieci anni voglio scriverne, voglio uscirne... Il Gracco non ha, che lo sappia, niente con una donna... Appartiene alla storia. Cosa io darei di me scrivendo di lui?' (110)

The narrator declares that he, like Enne 2, has shared a 'thing', or unfulfilled relationship with a woman for years. We also learn that like Vittorini, Enne 2 had some kind of literary or journalistic occupation, before he became an active member of the G.A.P. The narrator states:

'Enne 2 è un intellettuale. Egli avrebbe potuto lottare senza disperazione se avesse continuato a lottare da intellettuale. Perché ha voluto cambiare d'arma? Perché ha lasciato la penna e presa in mano la pistola?' (111)

The reason why Enne 2 has changed his weapon is a matter for conjecture; possibly out of the need for a more active commitment to and expression of human solidarity, and possibly because of the 'spectre' of his relationship with Berta. Whatever his reasons, the fact remains that Enne 2, unlike the proletarian Orazio and Metastasio, can formulate no 'humble answer' or 'motivi minimi' for being a gappista. Rather, the figure of Enne 2 attests to the fact that Vittorini's protagonist remains an intellectual unable to integrate himself into the people. Asor Rosa makes the following pertinent observation:

'Del resto, se manifestassimo il nostro pensiero fino in fondo, dovremmo dire che Enne 2 si comporta, dal punto di vista etico-spirituale, come un tipico fascista di sinistra passato alla Resistenza; e questo non solo per i forti elementi autobiografici, che è possibile riscontrarvi, ma anche perché di questo rapporto tra social-fascismo e progressismo sono in lui propri gli impulsi irrazionali all'azione, la

disperata volontà di "guarire" attraverso un legame, quale che sia, con il mondo, il desiderio d'affermare nel campogiusto, con gli uomini giusti, alte ed *immutabili* idealità.' (112)

The desire to be healed through a relationship with others and through a common cause, links Enne 2 to Silvestro, and to Ventura of 'Le donne di Messina', thereby confirming Asor Rosa's observation. (The failure to attain an immanent sense of personal worth, most evident in the case of Ventura, who is totally dependent in this respect on Siracusa and the other members of the village, indicates the degree to which Fascism had destroyed the individual's awareness of his own identity.) Enne 2's spiritual complications - or lack of simplicity - and a residual emotional Fascism, are further confirmed by his consistent rejection of the simple Lorena, and compounded by his love for Berta, who rejects the way to Liberation revealed to her by the Old Man, and that the consummation of her love for Enne 2 might offer her. For, as the narrator explains, she acts thus out of a sense of duty towards her husband, that is in fact a kind of subservience to the Fascism of interpersonal relations:

'Da lei o da Enne 2 io potrei aprirmi la strada verso un altro dramma, e forse scoprire come vi sia nei più delicati rapporti tra gli uomini una pratica continua di fascismo dove chi impone crede soltanto di voler bene e chi subisce pensa di fare appena il minimo, subendo, per non offendere. Potrei forse mostrare come sia in questo la più sottile, ma anche la più crudele, tra le tirannie, e la più inestricabile tra le schiavitù; le quali entrambe, fino a che si ammettono, porteranno ad ammettere ogni altra tirannia e ogni altra schiavitù degli uomini singoli, delle classi e dei popoli tra loro.' (113)

This extended definition of Fascism, suppressed in the second edition of 'Uomini e no', recurs in 'Le donne di Messina' where Siracusa considers Ventura's conduct thus:

'Perché aveva questo maladetto orgoglio di non voler cedere quando era in debito di spiegarsi ?



Perché questo fascismo, questo gusto da tiranno solitario, che poteva ad un tratto riprenderlo, di non voler dare soddisfazione a chi doveva darlo ?' (114)

In fact the village described in 'Le donne di Messina' embodies Vittorini's vision of 'Robinsonianism' (and functions on truly democratic - that is to say anti-Fascist - principles, which Ventura contravenes as above, through a misguided pride or secrecy or any other manifestation of anti-democratic emotion). Now, while this extended interpretation of Fascism is not without foundation, since public attitudes needs must have their private counterparts, it nevertheless comports various pitfalls, not least the current reduction - already foreshadowed - of the epithet 'Fascist' to a term of abuse, utterly devoid of meaning. However, this process of expanding definitions to the ultimate detriment of their primary and immediate significance is characteristic of the two novels under discussion; Barberi Squarotti comments regarding 'Uomini e no':

'Poi la determinazione ideologica già piú non regge: romanzo dedicato alla Resistenza, ai problemi dell'*engagement* politico dell'intellettuale, alla sua posizione di fronte al comunismo, la lotta vi appare come un combattimento metafisico, il nemico - non per nulla ha l'emblematico nome di Cane Nero - è un'entità astratta, allo stesso modo che astratti sono coloro che combattono per la libertà e per il comunismo. La mitizzazione dei personaggi e dei fatti giunge in *Uomini e no* al grado estremo, coinvolgendo in sé anche l'ideologia dell'offesa del mondo: un dato assoluto, metastorico, un'immagine demoniaca, appunto, non una nozione di eventi appena accaduti.' (115)

Other Neorealist novelists also were not exempt from the tendency to explain Fascism in manichaean and absolute terms; influenced as they were by Vittorini. Under the Fascist regime, as stated above, a battle was waged between the forces of Evil and Good, whose weapons were respectively oppression and endurance, with the latter envisaged as a kind of tacit resistance. Obviously this celebration of endurance - and

to a lesser degree of innate and relatively passive refractoriness - proved a valid way for the dissident to maintain faith in himself and his cause or mythology; without exposing himself unnecessarily to direct conflict with the regime. But, with the advent of Liberation, endurance was abruptly divested of the virtues previously ascribed to it; especially its most important quality; the implicit, but unquestioned, assurance it offered of ultimate victory. In 'Uomini e no' these considerations constitute the implicit obverse to the narrator's reflections on the conditions conducive to resistance. Significantly, these reflections occur after mention has been made of the imminence of an Allied landing - and therefore also of real Liberation - and after Enne 2's decision to desist from the gappista's struggle to survive.

The narrator says:

'Questo forse era il punto. Che si potesse resistere come se si dovesse resistere sempre, e non dovesse esservi mai altro che resistere. Sempre che uomini potessero perdersi, e sempre vederne perdersi, sempre non poter salvare, non poter aiutare, non potere che lottare o volersi perdere. E perchè lottare ? Per resistere. Come se mai la perdizione ch'era sugli uomini potesse finire, e mai potesse venire una liberazione. Allora resistere poteva essere semplice. Resistere ? Era per resistere. Era molto semplice.' (116)

For the autobiographically inspired Enne 2, resistance is rendered problematic, even futile by the prospect of Liberation, no less than by Berta's latest betrayal - which represents the inescapability of his subjection to a Fascistic emotional despotism. By extension then, Vittorini's mythology of an oppressed humanity, examined through the medium of an intellectual narrator, is rendered redundant and outdated by the overthrow of the oppressor. (An acknowledgement of the greater flexibility towards external - and personal - circumstances, inherent in the unquestioning attitude of the common people, is implicit in the

dutiful tolerance, that is adaptability, of Lorena.) In 'Le donne di Messina' Vittorini expresses a theory of regeneration that attempts to transcend the eponymous positions of 'Uomini e no'; he argues that any man may redeem himself by sincerely repudiating his past, and two ex-Fascists Spina and Fischio, do achieve regeneration through their innate morality which - particularly in the case of Fischio - governs their participation in the village community, and their personal judgement. It is perhaps significant that Vittorini does not allude to their Fascist past, or possible crimes, but merely insinuates that they were naïvely misguided in their past political sympathies. Ventura (Faccia cattiva) is differentiated by the greater reprehensibility of his Nazi past, and by the crimes against humanity ascribed to him. Thus, while regeneration is a theoretical possibility for him also, it is, in fact, discounted a priori, by the ineradicable stigma of his past; as Siracusa says:

'Era come se dovesse raccogliere da fuori di sé il sentimento di se stesso. Come se non avesse una sua coscienza, o avesse nella coscienza qualche proiettile di guerra che gliela fermava.' (117)

The provenance of this simile and its implications would appear to derive from Hemingway's 'Fiesta'. Despite Vittorini's evident sympathy for his character, he will not allow Ventura to rehabilitate himself (118), on account of the gravity of his crimes; for which his war wound renders him incapable of atoning, at least until he kills Siracusa. 'Le donne di Messina' further marks the failure of Vittorini's myth of travelling as a means of gaining insight into the self and others, through the illusory communication zio Agrippa attains with Carlo, which, albeit indirectly, inculpates the former in his daughter's murder. In the second edition, as a consequence of the already mentioned refutation of 'Robinsonianism', Vittorini more or less acknowledges the incongruousness of his entire mythology in the post-war period, by conceding the point, that the humility

and resilience that constituted the moral superiority of the oppressed, are virtues that have been totally eclipsed by the 'consumer society'.

Vittorini's mythology, then, developed not least as a means of compensating for the emotional privations - in the sphere of interpersonal relations - fostered by the unreality of the Fascist regime. Paradoxically, the shortcomings of this mythology are demonstrated by confrontation with the more or less inevitable prosaism of post-war reality. But, notwithstanding the validity of preceding remarks, Vittorini's mythology is founded on the premise of the regeneration of the individual and society through human solidarity, whereas that of Pavese relates to his fundamental inability to communicate, or feel a sense of community with other human beings. Whether Pavese's mythology preceded his spiritual isolation or vice versa is unimportant for the purposes of this study. (Although it might seem logical that the former came into being as a means of coming to terms with, or defining, his experience of isolation.) It was, at any rate, Pavese's failure to penetrate the 'otherness' of his fellow beings, that caused the curious, but characteristic movement in Pavese's novels and novellas, whereby the protagonist attempts to develop into the alter ego of models like Amelio in 'Il compagno' and Giannino in 'Il carcere', both of whom have certain similarities with Pavese's protagonists, but who also possess admirable qualities - chiefly a strength of character - that Pablo and Stefano lack. Nor is the relationship that Corrado develops with Dino (in 'La casa in collina') devoid of this tendency towards identification and self-denigration. Dino is almost the incarnation of a childhood that Corrado seeks to rediscover. Prior to meeting Dino, Corrado says:

'Si direbbe che sotto ai rancori e alle incertezze, sotto alla voglia di star solo, mi scoprivo ragazzo per avere un compagno, un collega, un figliolo.' (119)

but he subsequently realizes that even as a child he was inferior in courage to Dino, who is possibly, even probably, his illegitimate son. In fact, it is through this theme of courage, or the lack of it, that the progression in Pavese's work from 'Il carcere' (1938-9) to 'La casa in collina' (1947-8) can be gauged. In 'Il carcere' Stefano is forced by external circumstances into the realization of his own cowardice; thus tersely described:

'Come in tutte le cose orribili che gli accadevano, c'era da ridere. E Stefano con buon umore aveva chiamato vigliaccheria la sua gelosa solitudine. Poi s'era disperato.' (120)

In 'La casa in collina' it is Cate - acknowledged by Corrado as his superior in every respect - who denounces his cowardice in the following interchange:

"Tu hai paura, Corrado."

"Sarà la guerra, saranno le bombe."

"No, sei tu" disse Cate. "Tu vivi così." (121)

Stefano preserves the isolation he guards so jealously by repudiating Elvira and avoiding Concia, but more important, by his refusal to enter into contact with another political internee; by rejecting the other's appeal for solidarity. In so doing, he acts badly, admittedly, but his is still, apparently, a more or less legitimate response to a personal option; that is inasmuch as it is ever permissible to reject human solidarity. In the changed historical climate of 'La casa in collina', however, Corrado's active and consistent denial of solidarity with, and participation in the engagement of Cate and her friends is, as he comes to realize, an absolutely untenable position, no longer justifiable in terms of individual election. Indeed the juxtaposition of 'Il carcere' and 'La casa in collina' would seem to suggest that the individual option never really existed, or at least that there is a manifest continuity

between the a-political stance of Stefano and the generic figure of Corrado, of whom, according to contemporary criteria it might be said:

'che fece per viltà il gran rifiuto.' (122)

Certainly, Corrado's testimony constitutes the most remarkably frank avowal of the abdication of moral responsibility to emerge in the post-war Italian novel - although it is by no means illustrative of the most abject cowardice brought into being by the war (and touched upon almost uniquely by Viganò) nor of the distasteful celebration of - alleged - national and personal degradation, whose high priest was Malaparte. Rather, Corrado's confession, for such it is, manifests a certain courage, all too uncommon in the contemporary novel and for which he gives himself no credit; Corrado confronts his shortcomings, even his vileness, without subterfuge, or hypocrisy. The above reference to Dante is, perhaps, justified by the fact that 'La casa in collina' attests to a more overtly Christian preoccupation than Pavese's other works; a theme suggested by the Christian reminiscence of the title 'Prima che il gallo canti', by which Pavese's two confessions of cowardice, are collectively designated. While acknowledging the Christian resonance of this title Venturi argues that 'Prima che il gallo canti' is, in fact, a cross-reference to the poem 'Disciplina' (1934), in which mattutinal twilight is regarded as a time of spiritual enlightenment. The poem begins:

'I lavori cominciano all'alba. Ma noi cominciamo  
un po' prima dell'alba a incontrare noi stessi  
nella gente che va per la strada.' (123)

Certainly, it is as a result of the above mentioned process of meeting himself in and through others, that Pavese's protagonist achieves self-knowledge. Further, it is apparently his awareness of the need for the counterpart of self-knowledge, that is to say greater intellectual enlightenment extending from himself to his environment, that causes

Pavese to incorporate such heterogeneous elements as Christianity and Marxism into his fiction - which is generally underpinned by a pagan, classical mythology. Whether, or not, 'Il compagno' constitutes, as Venturi says:

'.... il tributo che Pavese paga alla sua ideologia ed al nuovo impegno che l'iscrizione al partito comunista e l'attività di letterato militante esigeva.' (124)

Pablo's Marxism, and the attraction Christianity holds for Corrado, should perhaps be considered as being complementary rather than mutually incompatible: since they signify Pavese's tentatives to render comprehensible the inconceivableness of war, through the two most predominant ideologies of modern times. Thus Gino Scarpa states what was perhaps - if only transiently - Pavese's intimate conviction regarding Marxism, in the immediate post-war period. Scarpa says:

"Tutti siamo borghesi quando abbiamo paura. E chiuder gli occhi e non vedere il temporale, è soltanto paura, paura borghese. Che cos'è, se non questo il marxismo: veder le cose come sono e provvedere ?" (125)

This concept of the polarity of enlightenment and the obfuscation of fear, according to social class, is further illustrated by the contrasting positions of Cate and her friends, and Corrado, in 'La casa in collina' and this cross-reference, in conjunction with Scarpa's above cited pronouncement suggest the prochronism of 'Il compagno'. Although, ostensibly set in 1936, the rivalry between the anti-Fascist factions, and the urgent need to route bourgeois fear and establish the ascendancy of Marxist enlightenment, are more indicative of the mood of the war and of the immediate post-war period, as Pavese experienced and responded to it. Presumably, Pavese attained some degree of class consciousness through Marxism; his pre-war political internee and protagonist Stefano, shows

none, and in marked contrast to the Levi of 'Cristo si è fermato a Eboli' mixes with the local 'Luigini' - who are naturally not thus designated. (126) But, however much illumination Marxism may have afforded Pavese, regarding the living - and disregarding the manifest improbability of such a solitary nature as Pavese's being able to identify with a collective ideology for any length of time - it would appear that Corrado's preoccupation with Christianity, in 'La casa in collina', reflects the attempt of a single individual to render intelligible the arbitrariness and incomprehensibility of war, and further, to keep faith with the war dead, of which more will be said.

Thus it is possible to gauge the progress that occurs in Pavese's post-war novels in terms of his greater self-knowledge, and of his greater enlightenment and compassion towards his human environment. Pavese's protagonist's increasing self-knowledge permits a correspondingly greater acceptance of the burden of self - which it is man's destiny to carry. Pablo, probably Pavese's most positive protagonist, articulates the equivalence of self and destiny in the curious assertion that human life is governed by arbitrary and extraneous circumstances, but:

"Non è questo che conta. Le cose succedono.  
Basta volere veramente quel che fai." (127)

Pablo manages, with relative ease, to want what he has been predestined to do; either because of his Communist sympathies, or because he is in Rome, where, as Gino Scarpa says, everything ends happily - since the harsh realities of politics are nullified in and by Rome. For Corrado, however, it is more difficult; before he can come to terms with his conduct and his fundamental character, he must witness the destruction of his illusions, and suffer potent humiliations; which help him to recognize the goodness in others. In the process he acquires an extreme intellectual lucidity that is relatively uncommon in the post-war novel,



and moreover absolutely antithetical to the woolly philanthropy that characterizes Vittorini's protagonists and minor characters alike (sparing only his villains or non-men).

A valid evaluation of the importance of 'La casa in collina' in the context of contemporary literature, inevitably requires a counterpoint with Vittorini's post-war production; for Pavese is essentially analytical and autobiographical in a concrete sense, whereas Vittorini elects to confine himself to millennial optimism and to the depiction of a mythical humanity, possessing various human mannerisms, but no definite individual contours. Whereas Pavese offers a brief but concrete and intimate account of Corrado's past, the reality of Enne 2's childhood is of such limited importance to Vittorini that he can 'rewrite' it at will. For Vittorini, it is the universal, the emblematic or the mythical that has predominance over objective truth; whereas Pavese, through Corrado, attempts to move from subjective to objective reality, or rather to synthesize the two. In 'Uomini e no' the curiously ethereal 'thing' between Enne 2 and Berta feeds, as it were, on its own insubstantiality; certainly it lacks any identifiably human content. In fact, the interweaving of an allegedly autobiographical romance with an account of the protagonist's Resistance activities is problematic and somewhat unusual, both in terms of contemporary literature (128) and in terms of Vittorini's own mature work; in which sexual love rarely figures conspicuously, given its habitual incompatibility with universal love: (a difficulty Vittorini mentions with reference to the relationship between Ventura and Siracusa, in 'Le donne di Messina').

Ultimately, notwithstanding the considerable temperamental differences and inclinations of the two writers, it is apparently Pavese rather than Vittorini, who expresses the zeitgeist of the latter war years: Pavese, whose protagonist makes the following comment with reference to

his generation:

'Non era stagione d'amori, per noi non era mai stata. Tutti gli anni trascorsi ci portavano qui, a questa stretta. Senza saperlo, a modo nostro Gallo, Fonso, Cate, tutti, eravamo vissuti nell'attesa di quest'ora, preparandoci a questo destino.' (129)

That destiny is, of course, the Second World war, and a retrospective glance at the anti-Fascist novel prior to the war (and the post-war Resistance novel) would tend to confirm Pavese's observations. Thus despite the ineffably personal quality, and the intimate places the reader may not penetrate, it is Pavese who depicts the generic (rather than emblematic) intellectual of his time and age. Corrado assures us that on his arrival in Torino:

'Non avevo nessun avvenire se non quello generico di un giovane campagnolo che ha studiata e che vive in città, si guarda intorno, e ogni mattina è un'avventura, e una promessa.' (130)

This future, retrospectively analysed in the light of the war, proved to be a long illusion of which the war (after September 1943) stripped him - as it stripped countless others - leaving him, by his own admission, abject, humble, afraid and manifestly unequal to the task of trying to determine his share in the collective moral responsibility for the dead, and for the war; in order that he might do his part to absolve this moral responsibility. Through the dead, Corrado realizes that he too is implicated in the war: he says:

'Guardare certi morti è umiliante. Non sono più faccenda altrui; ... Ci si sente umiliati perché si capisce ... che al posto del morto potremmo essere noi: non ci sarebbe differenza, e se viviamo lo dobbiamo al cadavere imbrattato. Per questo ogni guerra è una guerra civile: ogni caduto somiglia a chi resta, e gliene chiede ragione' (131)

and adds, consistently, presumably, with the mood of 1944 (the point at

which the novel ends):

'Io non credo che possa finire. Ora che ho visto cos'è la guerra, cos'è guerra civile, so che tutti, se un giorno finisse, dovrebbero chiedersi: "E dei caduti che facciamo? perché sono morti?". Io non saprei cosa rispondere. Non adesso, almeno. Né mi pare che gli altri lo sappiano. Forse lo sanno unicamente i morti, e soltanto per loro la guerra è finita davvero.' (132)

In fact, in harmony with the spirit of jubilation (however short-lived) that followed the Liberation most Communist inspired novelists tended, for obvious reasons, to concern themselves primarily with a living - and potentially revolutionary - proletariat, and with depicting the Italian people's moral victory over their enemies. Thus, in 'Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno' Kim assigns the vindication of the dead to History. Hence, 'La casa in collina' can be seen as a work that attempts to redress the literary balance; as Venturi says:

'Tra la massa di testimonianze, cronache, trasfigurazioni elegiache che l'epopea del moto resistenziale ha prodotto, *La casa in collina* si stacca nettamente per la capacità di mettere in luce non solo la grandezza del movimento, ma anche i turbamenti, le angosce, il fallimento di un uomo di fronte ad un compito che non sa né può affrontare, se non stando a guardare.' (133)

Pavese, then, does not disparage the Resistance movement; (like Calvino he marvels at its heroes and exploits, and their similarity with the exploits described in boys' adventure stories). He does however express a feeling of responsibility or duty towards the dead; a sense of the moral obligation incumbent on the living to atone for and commemorate the dead. But, in marked opposition to most of the novelists under discussion, Pavese overtly acknowledges his protagonist's inadequacy to understand the inconceivable enormities he has witnessed, without in any way seeking to diminish them, or to formulate them according to a preconceived system

or mythology. Rather, at the end of 'La casa in collina' Pavese abandons his mythology (and the peculiar value generally accorded to the death of the individual within it) in order to convey without distortion the objective truth of war and destruction; insofar, that is, as Corrado, a cowardly, short-sighted - and in all probability fairly representative - creature, is capable of perceiving this truth. Corrado's preoccupation at the end of the novel with the dead could in fact be termed Christian, but only inasmuch as it reflects a position articulated by a member of the Church, padre Felice, an enlightened and undogmatic priest. The following interchange ensues between Corrado and padre Felice, after the latter asks in a purely rhetorical fashion who is to blame for war orphans like Dino:

"Ne abbiamo colpa tutti quanti" dissi,  
 "abbiamo tutti detto evviva."  
 ... "Comunque sia andata", disse (padre Felice),  
 "tocca a noialtri rimediare. Non è il solo." (134)

The theme of guilt and responsibility for the ascendancy of Fascism, and for the Second World War, is evidently of considerable importance in 'La casa in collina' and is approached in a number of different ways, although chiefly through the figure of Corrado; who emerges almost as a composite of several generic figures. In the above quotation, and elsewhere, particularly at the end of the novel, Corrado states, and his biography attests to, the universality of guilt - and its corollary, the need for some kind of universal atonement for the war, as a catastrophe that man needlessly allowed to happen; if only by passive acquiescence. Corrado says:

'.... la guerra ce la siamo covata nel cuore  
 noialtri - noi non piú giovani, noi che abbiamo  
 detto 'Venga dunque se deve venire'' (135)

Given the impenetrability of others for Pavese, he concerns himself mainly with the responsibility of various generic - but clearly identifiable-autobiographical figures; thus in the above quotation guilt is assigned to those approaching middle age (Corrado is apparently forty years old, a few years older than Pavese); elsewhere to the intellectual who, when confronted by moral and historical imperatives, fails to measure up to them, and even consciously seeks to evade them. However, before discussing Corrado's composite guilt, it is perhaps worth noting that the guilt of various other groups and institutions is briefly crystallized. Prototypical Fascist propaganda is resumed thus:

'Il giornale diceva che la guerra era dura,  
ma era una cosa tutta nostra, fatta di fede  
e di passione, l'estrema ricchezza che avessimo  
ancora.' (136)

(Later Corrado comments that the empty phrases of Fascist propaganda have ceased to be comic and assumed a terrible significance.) The futility of a papal intervention and the gross overestimation of his temporal powers are ridiculed through the figure of Elvira, who recounts:

'Lei ... aveva sentito a Santa Margherita che  
la guerra non poteva durare piú molto, perché  
il papa aveva fatto un discorso consigliando che  
tutti vivessero in pace. Bastava volerlo col  
cuore e la pace era fatta. Non piú bombe né incendi  
né sangue. Non piú vendette né speranza di diluvio.'  
(137)

Equally incisively denounced are the business men whose powers of observation do not extend beyond the simple fact that war is good for business; and the wealthy bourgeoisie, represented by Egle - who claim their pre-eminence in suffering by reason of the damage sustained by their possessions. Further, with reference to the wealthy family of his ex-fiancée, Corrado states:

'È gente che gode diverso da noi. Sono meglio i fascisti. Del resto, i fascisti li hanno messo su loro.'" (138)

In fact, the above quotation is a rare, possibly unique, instance when Corrado puts himself on the same side of the class barrier as Cate. For the rest he is a bourgeois intellectual whose failure to involve himself in any anti-Fascist activity is closely related to his class identity. Thus, antithetically he says to Cate, regarding the workers' involvement in the Resistance movement:

"... c'è un destino di classe. Vi ci porta la vita che fate. Non per niente l'avvenire è nelle fabbriche. Mi piacete per questo...." (139)

Possibly this declaration is slightly condescending, but more probably, given Pavese's habitual sincerity - and a similar declaration of admiration for the proletariat proffered by Scarpa in 'Il compagno' - it merely expresses his respect for an attitude his different class destiny (as immutable as his personal destiny) prevents him from emulating. But, as already stated, Corrado is forty, a somewhat advanced age for a partisan (140); accordingly were he to adopt less rigorous criteria than his own, he could conceivably justify his present position of non-involvement in terms of his age and especially his youthful anti-Fascist sympathies. For, Corrado, like many intellectuals, developed clandestine populist, or Communistic, sympathies under the Fascist regime. (Given the gradual transformation of dissent from fascismo di sinistra through populism to Communism, it would be incorrect to attempt to define Corrado's political persuasions, more precisely than he does himself). Corrado tells us that he once shared with his friend Gallo:

'...(un).... gusto violento e beffardo.... per la dura umanità delle barriere,' (141)

After the coup d'état deposing Mussolini (25th July 1943) Corrado is momentarily disenchanted with this rugged humanity, but he quickly realizes that man is better than he is generally believed to be, and that he, Corrado, is inferior to his own self-appraisal. He states that during his youth:

'Si viveva, o così si credeva, con gli altri  
e per gli altri.' (142)

(a statement manifestly formulated in such a way as to insinuate that Corrado's illusion was a common one). For with the advent of the war proper - that is to say the war which affected the civilian population of Northern Italy, especially from 1943 on - Corrado was obliged, or the intellectual honesty of the rural Corrado (arguably rendered more incisive by his return to his spiritual and terrestrial roots) caused him to recognize that previously his way of life was neither altruistic nor motivated by a desire for community. Cate is the figure from Corrado's youth who gives the lie to this illusion. After a painful relationship with Anna Maria Gallo, Corrado withdrew from the threat women constituted for him, into his own rancour; and reduced his circle of acquaintance, until eventually he realized his sole companion was his dog Balbo. To Cate's comment that his social isolation is a consequence of the war he retorts:

"C'è sempre stata questa guerra"... "Tutti un bel giorno siamo soli." (143)

The generic individual, like Corrado, ultimately, having recognized the discrepancy between his conduct and his idealism, recognizes also the superficiality of the latter (in complete contrast to his deep-rooted and immutable nature) and finds himself alone. Possibly the realization of total solitude relates to Corrado's age, and the inevitable exarcescence of

youthful idealism, which - Pavese more or less implies - served to obscure the intellectual's awareness of his own identity for a limited period of time. But, in any case, Corrado believes that the war reduces most of the population to a similar level of unconcern.

Corrado further considers that the Germans are not solely to blame for the atrocities that occur in occupied Europe. He argues, with specific reference to Serbia:

"Non è colpa dei tedeschi.... I tedeschi hanno soltanto sfasciato la baracca, tolto il credito ai padroni di prima. Questa guerra è piú grossa di quello che sembra. Adesso è andata che la gente ha veduto scappare quelli che prima comandavano, e non la tiene piú nessuno. Ma fate attenzione, non ce l'ha coi tedeschi, non soltanto con loro: ce l'ha coi padroni di prima. Non è una guerra di soldati, che domani può anche finire; è la guerra dei poveri, la guerra dei disperati contro la fame, la miseria, la prigionia, lo schifo." (144)

He adds that the real war, the war of desperation is just beginning in Italy. Although such an argument may not be entirely persuasive - since Pavese seemingly underestimates the measure of the Nazis' responsibility for the atrocities that occur, it nevertheless has the merit of attempting comprehensiveness and acknowledging that, in various places, a civil war between local politically opposed factions was being waged simultaneously with the war against the Germans. Ultimately, it remains uncertain whether Pavese was aware of the full extent of Nazi inhumanity, or whether he was merely overstating his Christian belief (which is antithetical to Vittorini's politically inspired belief (145)) that guilt and the need for atonement are not determined by political convictions, and that any and every act of savagery is to be condemned. Piovene's attitude in 'Pietà contro pietà' is very different; whereas both Vittorini and Pavese, despite their dissimilarities, feel solidarity with what is essentially a collective humanity (notwithstanding any class or political limitations imposed on



their definition of this) and further strive towards a morality that is relevant to their chosen humanity, Piovene, like other right-wing novelists, apparently considers that his protagonist has the right to decide what is best for, and what should be visited on, the Italian people. Possibly this attitude is an unconscious reflection of long years of conditioning by Fascist propaganda; certainly it is curiously and gratuitously punitive. In 'Pietà contro pietà' Piovene offers a somewhat bizarre, subjective interpretation of the force motivating the ferocity of war. Luca, the protagonist, calls this force 'Pietà' and explains:

"Il mondo è pieno di pietà... Per questo è un mondo di assassini." (146)

Luca believes that in any war both sides are motivated by Pietà - hence the title of the novel. However, given the difficulty of ascertaining how this Pity and Piety which pervade the novel, can be held responsible for civil and international wars - or even of adequately elucidating the concept of Pietà in terms of the powers ascribed to it by Piovene, it would seem justifiable to quote Catalano's definition:

'.... la Pietà è divenuta forza storica che agisce sulle masse e le incita alla guerra, con un significato analogo a quello che possono avere i conflitti di classe e i fattori economici nelle opere di ispirazione sociale. La Pietà inquina la vita degli individui e si dilata e si generalizza fino a coincidere con l'immagine d'un certo demonismo sovrastante la storia, ora oltraggioso ora vendicativo, di cui gli uomini non sono che l'inerte espressione.' (147)

Catalano does not consider that Piovene's intention may have been to provoke and scandalize his audience, as several of the novel's distasteful anecdotes would seem to suggest - particularly the one recounting the story of Anna's 'suture'. Certainly, 'Lettere di una novizia' manifests

a tendency present also in 'Pietà contro pietà' to undermine conventional bourgeois morality, by showing the corruptive force of its application. Given Piovene's neat and possibly honest assessment of his psychological make-up:

'I miei due componimenti sono un irrazionalismo di fondo, difficilmente interpretabile e misterioso anche a me stesso, e il culto della lucidità razionale che gli sta sempre addosso e ne sorveglia i movimenti.' (148)

he may or may not have been conscious of this tendency. However, as we shall see, this tendency relates to the misanthropy of 'Pietà contro pietà'. (This misanthropy, shared to a certain, limited degree by Brancati, is a relatively rarely expressed sentiment in the contemporary novel, and further differentiates Piovene from other novelists.)

Catalano, having gallantly defined Piovene's concept of 'Pietà', acknowledges that:

'... nella eccessiva attitudine del moralista a sottolineare e isolare un sentimento ampiamente degenerativo, quale la pietà, che viene considerato condizione primaria d'un modo d'essere dell'individuo e di tutta una fenomenologia storica, si rivela, più che mai, la prevalenza dell'interesse soggettivistico di Piovene e con esso i suoi limiti di narratore.' (149)

In fact, the interest of this novel lies in its attempt to project Piovene's subjective preoccupations onto the objective reality of war-ravaged Italy, or, in other words, in the novel's failure to transcend purely personal preoccupations at a time of unprecedented national crisis and collective concern. The allegedly ubiquitous, eponymous Pietà, which Luca so roundly denounces, is the same Pity and Piety inculcated into Giulio (a potential murderer) by an upper middle-class - and apparently devoutly Catholic - upbringing. This he shares with Luca, and seemingly with the author also. As in 'Lettere di una novizia' a Christian virtue is subverted, through

the intervention of Catholic dogma, into a destructive and corruptive force.

The novel begins with the heavy bombing of an unnamed city, by an unspecified enemy, and with the expression of Luca's misanthropic and unpatriotic despair at seeing a good number of buildings still standing:

'... anche perchè la distruzione sembrava inutile, così incompleta e piena di finte speranze.' (150)

Luca's despair is clearly unpatriotic even in terms of an honourable anti-Fascist definition of the term 'patriotism'. Whereas other writers seek to envisage and portray regeneration, Luca is obsessed by the need for destruction (an obsession unredeemed by the time when the novel was written - between the winters of 1943 and 1944). Luca states that 'Pietà' starts with a person's first breath - or in his own case before - and in order to eradicate it, everything must be razed. He says:

"bisogna distruggere tutto, fin dall'inizio, noi e la gente che si è mescolata con noi, perchè noi siamo quella gente, e la pietà per essa è pietà per noi." (151)

A suggestive counterpoint could be made with Corrado, who says:

'... si direbbe che la guerra io l'attendessi da tempo e ci contassi, una guerra così insolita e vasta, che, con poca fatica, si poteva accucciarsi e lasciarla infuriare, sul cielo delle città, rincasando in collina.' (152)

Corrado is implacable in his self-reproach for having desired, in peace time, a war that would sanction his isolation; whereas Luca, remorselessly, desires total devastation. Luca's rationalization of his furious, annihilative vindictiveness is that without total destruction, no fundamental change can be effected. Catalano, improbably, argues that this apocalyptic mood is indicative of Piovene's Marxism (153) - which

has, however, been more or less stifled by his unrepudiated bourgeois conditioning. In contrast with Catalano's assertion, and insofar as any schematism is permissible, it is possible to say that in the post-war period Marxism and left-wing ideology generally, manifested itself in the novel through populism and a high regard for the life of the Italian people; whether or not the writer is still a 'prisoner' of his middle-class background. The populism of 'La romana' and 'La ciociara' being two cases in point. Antithetically guilt, humiliation, pessimism, and - a frequently latent - anger, correlate, as we shall see, to the stance of right-wing novelists. As for Piovene, his position is a-political; his peculiarly inopportune preoccupation with an equivocal interpretation of Catholic precepts precludes a political engagement. It is possible that Piovene's acclimatization (whether unconscious or deliberate) to the Fascist regime, left him incapable of developing beyond personal concerns towards a sense of social, if not overtly political, responsibility. Unlike Corrado, Luca was not even aware of the moral responsibility towards his fellows that was incumbent upon him.

It emerges from 'Pietà contro pietà' that Luca had a retiring (seemingly cuckolded) father, a dominant mother, and an awe-inspiring Catholic preceptor; further having despised his father for his modesty, during his adolescence, Luca now wishes to emulate him. Luca's background and childhood, then, exhibit the characteristics usually associated with an authoritarian upbringing; including conventionality, the repressive denial of Luca's identity, the inculcation of irrational anxiety (which manifests itself in Luca's adult life as an impotent rage) and a lack of love. Significantly the adult Luca is still so dominated by the omnipotent figures of his childhood, that they remain the (internalized) arbiters of his thoughts and reflections. Luca realizes:

'Ritirarsi in se stesso significava solamente assistere all'umiliazione di ogni suo minimo pensiero di fronte al tribunale di quei personaggi. I suoi pensieri si esaurivano in essi, per ottenere o l'approvazione o il perdono, stima, pietà, tolleranza, rispetto; per combatterli, per irritarli, per dichiarare obbedienza o rivolta, ma sempre nella loro legge. Non trovava un pensiero da rivendicare per suo. Se quei personaggi si fossero annullati d'un tratto, sarebbe stato anch'egli ridotto a nulla. Egli era l'unico fra tanti che non contasse proprio nulla, l'unico privo di realtà.' (154)

Small wonder then, that he would like to see his social environment and the whole of Italy utterly destroyed; given his acknowledgement of the impossibility of ever escaping from his internalized dictators into freedom, this is the sole conceivable form his impotent rage can take. (The best he could hope to achieve would be to substitute the arbitration of his mother's camp, for that of his father.) Anna, alone, with her proletarian origins intuits the potentiality of developing into independence, through collective anti-Fascist action; and the novel ends with a brief, confused account of partisan reprisals against the local authorities. Now whereas the sections of the novel dealing with objective reality are perfunctorily, often carelessly constructed (as is attested by the vacillation between a first and third person protagonist in the first chapter); the distasteful stories of Anna, Rigo and Giulio, which are almost like intercalated short stories obviously carry more conviction and seem closer to the novelist's intimate preoccupations. Overall, we might speculate that Luca was disoriented by the overthrow of the Fascist regime. Luca - and perhaps Piovene also, like other products of an authoritarian environment, felt the need to live within a well defined, clearly structured environment, such as Fascism afforded. Consequently, the deposition of the regime provoked Luca to a profound irrational and somewhat sadistic anger that might otherwise have remained subterranean.

Further, if it is indeed true that Piovene chose to scandalize that environment, he did so as a means of testing his bond with it, and in a way that exempted him from examining the nature of that bond, rather than as a manifestation of personal and social rebellion. All in all, 'Pietà contro pietà' is an interesting study of the negativity inspired by the authoritarian agents of Family, Church and Fascism.

In evaluating Cassola's first novel 'Fausto e Anna' (1952) two major considerations should be taken into account; firstly that like Piovene's 'Pietà contro pietà' it is autobiographically inspired (155) and secondly, the peculiar importance ascribed by Cassola to a political engagement (156). Cassola is quite adamant in asserting that he shares with his generation a passion for politics. But the nature of his assertion is such that we might infer that his prime concern was a point of honour: to repudiate a possible charge of indifference. On a subjective moral level, that is, in accordance with Cassola's own criteria, I would argue that he is quite successful: given that any expression of solidarity or even empathy, is enough to refute the allegation of indifference. And Cassola consistently declares a certain solidarity - albeit far more selective than that of the Neorealists - with certain humble souls who acquiesce to their harsh destiny. It is the qualities of endurance, strength in humility and spiritual purity, rather than the simple fact of class, that favourably dispose Cassola towards his protagonists, like Anna in 'Fausto e Anna' and Mara in 'La ragazza di Bube'. The lowly class origins of Cassola's characters serve, above all, to enhance these qualities. Prior to the war, any statement of empathy with the peasants constituted an engagement; and it seems likely that Cassola continued, after the war, to evaluate his own position, largely by pre-war criteria, for whatever reason. Objectively, however, he might reasonably be accused of indifference: a charge whose Moravian - and

indirectly Fascist - connotations must be self-evident. Fausto in 'Fausto e Anna' is, in some respects, if not altogether indifferent, at least incapable of a profound political commitment. Hence he might be deemed a worthy companion of Moravia's Mino. 'Fausto e Anna' and 'La ragazza di Bube' are both ostensibly novels expressing a more or less political stance: the first favours the position of the Partito d'Azione (which, Fausto says, has undertaken to revivify Socialism (157)) and the second an anti-Communist, anti-Socialist populism. Macchioni Jodi uncharitably comments upon the paradox of Cassola's attitude; with reference to the dénouement of 'La ragazza di Bube' and what he considers the unduly obvious projection of the author's own sentiments onto Mara, he argues:

'è soltanto sua la fede rassegnata nel proprio destino, l'invito alla passiva accettazione del dolore come esperienza necessaria per riscattare i mali del mondo con cui si conclude il romanzo. Li potremmo capire se provenissero da uno scrittore che si professa cattolico, non da uno che si dichiara socialista. L'acquiescenza proposta da un laico puzza maledettamente di conservazione.' (158)

Certainly Cassola's political position is inconsistent; possibly this is the consequence of a certain naïvety; but whether or not Cassola would designate himself a Catholic writer, Fausto's devout Catholicism is a far from negligible consideration. In the first edition of 'Fausto e Anna' (1952) Fausto undergoes a conversion to Catholicism, which is suppressed in the second (1958) in order to enhance the novel's economy. Nevertheless, Fausto's Catholic outlook remains unchanged, and constitutes the sine qua non of his denunciation of the Communist partisans. Through living with the Communist partisans, Fausto learns:

"Che comunista è sinonimo di assassino." (159)

Subsequently he expounds this thesis thus:

" ... essi sono veramente i senza-Dio.....  
 Per questo non sanno far altro che uccidere.  
 Uccidere è una cosa dà niente .... quando  
 si crede di metter fine a solo un po' di materia.  
 È quando si sa che dentro a questo po' di  
 materia vive un'anima immortale che si comprende  
 in tutto il suo significato l'ammonimento: Non  
 uccidere ! Non uccidere: chi si prende l'arbitrio  
 di spengere la vita altrui, spenge insieme anche  
 la propria, macchia indelebilmente la propria  
 anima..." (160)

Fausto's outburst is provoked by the murder of a hostage who was executed without warning, and therefore denied those few precious seconds in which he might have confessed his soul to Christ. Cassola acknowledges the rationality of the partisans' execution of various hostages, in an exchange between the 'honourable English soldier' and the practical partisan leader Giulio (161) - who duly comments that guerilla warfare cannot conform to the same principles as conventional warfare, for eminently logical reasons. Fausto, however, cannot sacrifice his moral code to reason, and nor apparently can Cassola. Although the statement of the partisans' reasons for killing prisoners indubitably constitutes a concession to fairmindedness, the fact remains that four separate instances of callous executions occur in the novel - and this inevitably tends to suggest a deliberate desire to traduce the Communist partisans' conduct; more usually depicted as irreproachable.

Obviously such incidents offer 'objective' confirmation of Fausto's belief in the synonymity of Communists and assassins; and Communists and Nazis. After witnessing the summary trial of another hostage (an inveterate Fascist and a thoroughly unsavoury character) Fausto reflects:

"Chiunque sia quest'uomo, qualunque cosa  
 abbia fatto, noi non abbiamo il diritto di  
 giudicarlo." (162)

This, then, is Fausto's fundamental conviction as a Catholic. One curious



consequence of Fausto's Christian negation of man's right to pass sentence on, or take the life of, his fellows (and presumably of his antipathy for Communist partisans) is an incongruous and anachronistic attitude towards warfare, which is illustrated by his account of a:

'Buona guerra, cioè fatta con lealtà e con senso dell'onore.' (163)

Fausto overlooks the distinctions between soldier and partisan, and between chivalrous and modern warfare and explains with misplaced idealism:

"Il soldato.... dev'essere un uomo d'onore, un *gentleman*: un gentiluomo. Se non è un gentiluomo, allora è un assassino. Di qui non si scappa. Per esempio, ieri, a Travale, noi abbiamo ucciso un tedesco. Aveva sparato su di noi, poi noi abbiamo sparato su di lui e lo abbiamo ucciso. È rimasto ucciso lui, ma poteva capitare benissimo a chiunque di noi. Ma quello stesso tedesco, se lo avessimo fatto prigioniero, non avremmo avuto il diritto di torcergli un cappello. Perché così è la guerra, va fatta ad armi pari, e uccidere un uomo che non si può difendere non è più guerra, è un crimine, un'infamia..." (164)

It is perhaps significant that the partisans of 'Fausto e Anna' seem to have a fairly secure existence; unlike Fenoglio's partisans they are neither hunted nor hungry; moreover, they have little cause to dread the Nazis. (Such mopping up operations - *rastrellamenti* - as do occur are accorded little importance and fail to disturb the paradoxically secure tenor of life of Fausto's particular band.) If, when the conditions are propitious, Fausto can countenance the murder of a Nazi, he nonetheless continues to reproach himself for participating in an ambush on a German lorry; which, by different standards, would have been considered a highly successful manoeuvre, since a large number of Germans were killed for small partisan losses. Fausto, incredibly, regrets the exiguity of the partisans' losses on this occasion, but subsequently, just prior to the Liberation (and the deprecatory omission whereby the Anglo-Americans are

considered Italy's Liberators should be noted) daily partisan losses make him proud to call himself a partisan. (165) At best, it might be argued that Cassola shows a certain courage in stating an unmistakably unpopular position. The inescapable inference of Fausto's position is an inability (comparable to that of Piovene's Luca) to surmount personal moral and religious considerations. The inference of the second part of 'Fausto e Anna' is that Fausto cannot care for, and cannot identify or empathize with the predicament of his fellow partisans - and of his fellow nationals, for ultimately he feels himself to be accountable only to his Maker.

Inevitably, we must ask why Fausto elected to become a partisan, given his antipathy for the Communists (together with its counterpart, a certain - latent - sympathy for the Germans and Fascists) and his early resolve not to take human life. The 'reason' he discovers is perhaps even less idealistic than a possible explanation Moravia's Mino might have offered for his political engagement; Fausto reflects:

'Non credeva che il comunismo potesse rendere migliore il mondo, ... "Perché lo faccio, allora ? Perché ? ... Io vado dunque tra i partigiani perché ho paura del loro disprezzo ? Ci vado perché è questo che essi si aspettano da me ?" E concluse che era così, che questa era la ragione e soltanto questa. "Ci vado unicamente perché non voglio deluderli."' (166)

Now, in the first part of the novel (which recounts Fausto's adolescence and his love for Anna) Fausto is depicted as something of a 'teenage rebel'; but his puerile rebellion does not presuppose an anti-Fascist stance. He emerges as a relatively rare figure in contemporary Italian literature; a puny, faint-hearted youth who adopted an anti-bourgeois, 'anti-establishment' stance to compensate for his physical weakness. His literary and intellectual aspirations also are a consequence of the complex generated by his physical inferiority, and the need to assert

his superiority over his more 'manly' peer group. This, possibly is a courageous statement on Cassola's part, which detracts from the - implicit - superiority habitually ascribed to the intellectual, by virtue of his intelligence. Cassola's corollary is, however, logically enough, that Fausto admires virile, bourgeois (and Fascist) men, like Anna's husband Miro. Fausto concludes:

"È così, le persone normali che vivono conformemente all'ambiente in cui sono nate e vissute, sono migliori e più felici. Io che mi sono ribellato al mio ambiente, sono peggiore e sono anche infelice. Che cosa rimproveravo a mio padre? Di essere fascista. Ma l'ambiente ha fatto di lui un fascista. È stata la mentalità della borghesia che nel dopoguerra ha reagito col fascismo alla minaccia rossa. Dunque mio padre ha agito bene o, quanto meno, non gliene può essere fatta una colpa. E che cosa rimprovero ora a Baba e a Piero? Di essere comunisti. Ebbene, hanno ragione di esserlo. Il comunismo si respira, là nel Borgo, insieme con la polvere d'alabastro. Essi sono in regola; fanno tutto quello che devono fare, sono tutto quello che devono essere. Io solo non sono in regola." (167)

As 'La ragazza di Bube' attests Cassola could not, ultimately, reconcile himself to Fausto's resolutely good opinion of the Communists. Bube, like Fausto (his middle-class cousin) is shown to be socially dislocated; although Bube differs from Fausto inasmuch as he is exploited and, perhaps a little cynically, betrayed by the P.C.I. Bube, like Fausto, cannot comprehend that he is socially responsible for his actions, and arguably his constant recourse to violence, is the obverse, and complement of Fausto's abhorrence. Neither can, intellectually or instinctively, grasp the plain fact that war and peace require different behavioural norms. In view of Cassola's characters' bewilderment, before the incomprehensible and inimicable 'Justice' that governs society, the desire for some kind of spiritual hermitage, and the appointment of an innocent, like Mara, as the embodiment of compassionate human Justice, become logical.

It is only fair to say that an evaluation of Cassola's novels which fails to consider the sensitive portrayal of Cassola's female characters - particularly Mara - and his moving celebration of the pathetic must, inevitably, be unduly harsh. However, the merits, and the flaws of 'La ragazza di Bube' and 'Fausto e Anna' are more than vindicated by comparison with Guareschi's don Camillo books. Now, despite a somewhat different geographical location, Guareschi's little village in the Po valley bears some superficial resemblance to Mara's village. Both seem to be populated exclusively by working-people, whose peasant status is not stressed (with the probable inference that the peasant's class is of interest only to left-wing writers) and both apparently are in the hands of the less than trustworthy local Communists - whom don Camillo, with Fascist reverberations, consistently refers to as 'the Reds'. Guareschi, more than Cassola, implies that the obedience of the village Communists to Party directives is to be treated with a certain degree of suspicion - and also contempt - since it is indicative of a mental apathy that is, at best, almost comical in its boring predictability and, at worst, detrimental to the happiness and fulfilment of the individual qua individual. (Guareschi insinuates that Communist loyalties often needlessly obstruct the cause of 'young love').

In contrast with the amorphous Red masses, and their limited mental horizons, don Camillo is depicted as a generous, spontaneous and independent individual, of considerable resourcefulness, who recognizes the necessity of 'beating the Reds at their own game' - usually a very petty, and unscrupulous game - and he habitually disobeys or 'twists' the precepts of Christianity in order to do so. In the last instance don Camillo's victory is assured by the intervention of his friend and ally, Christ, don Camillo's own personal Christ, who stands on the Church altar, and with whom the priest shares a profound 'understanding'. Between them,

they seem to embody the dictum that to err is human and to forgive divine. Both are reassuringly benign, worldly and humanly compromising beings, with, we might add, large 'clay feet'. Their virtues then are humanly flawed. Nor, unlike the protagonists of the majority of contemporary novels, do they concern themselves with the large moral issues that might antagonize the 'average' reader, or cause him to feel defensive about his social conduct. Rather, the average reader (for whom the Neorealists were, arguably, not writing) can empathize with don Camillo's very human failings; a touch of pride and of anger, and an eminently normal desire to retaliate, in a gentle, self-controlled fashion, when provoked beyond reason by the Reds - as he so frequently is. The reader can further take comfort in Christ's over-indulgent forgiveness towards an old friend. Christ seems sure of His ultimate victory, but don Camillo feels it incumbent on him to fight the Reds on any and every issue. In so doing, the priest not infrequently 'converts' them, since Reds are, at bottom, as God-fearing as the rest of the population: it is merely Communist dogma that forces them away from the Church.

Without wishing to be unduly deprecating, it should be said that the shortcomings of Guareschi's books constitute their principle merits. Guareschi offers a bourgeois, Catholic and anti-Communist audience what it wants to read, written moreover in a way that is easy to read. Guareschi's books are anecdotal, simply - often simplistically - written, and so banal in the treatment of their subject matter as to be comprehensible to the widest possible audience of all ages; further most episodes afford the reader a little 'pay-off', or gentle joke either at the expense of human frailty or of Red frailty. Political issues have been reduced to the constant rivalry between don Camillo and Peppone, the dullard village mayor, who is publicly supported by a band of near simpletons, but unable to command the respect and political loyalty of

his wife. No social problems exist in Guareschi's hermetically sealed little world - a fact that is, presumably, indirectly accounted for by the absence of a local bourgeoisie. There are, moreover, no collective moral obligations; only what Guareschi terms:

'the 'complex of bourgeois respectability', whose influence is felt in every class, including the proletariat.' (168)

Christ, who frequently has 'the last word', strikes another blow for this same bourgeois respectability by explaining to don Camillo that He does not recognize the existence of a collective humanity. In a significant interchange with the priest He says:

"People?" what does that mean? "People" as a whole are never going to get into Heaven. God judges people individually and not in the mass. There are no "group" sins, but only personal ones, and there is no collective soul. Every man's birth and death is a personal affair, and God gives each one of us separate consideration. It's all wrong for a man to let his personal conscience be swallowed up by collective responsibility".

Don Camillo lowered his head. "But, Lord, public opinion has some value....."

"I know that, don Camillo. Public opinion nailed Me to the Cross" (169)

This, then, is Guareschi's ostensible ideology, or conviction, expressed by don Camillo's own Maker. Christ's declarations also illustrate another of Guareschi's talents; that of maintaining a façade of Christian moderation and tolerance, while depicting the Communists and unbelievers in a most unfavourable light.

The eponymous priest of Parise's novel 'Il prete bello' (1954) shares little common ground with Guareschi's don Camillo. Don Gastone's predilection for the secular rather than the ecclesiastical world is as much a consequence of a Fascist education, as it is of natural inclination. Educated in the atmosphere of the March on Rome, don Gastone

grew up convinced that his first loyalty was to the Fascist regime, and further imbibed a certain (Fascistic) contempt for the sedentary, old, and more or less senile, Church hierarchs. The emblematic significance of 'Il prete bello' is alluded to by the gamin narrator Sergio, who observes:

'Il gradino sociale non è una frase qualunque;  
in Italia tutto ha la sua rispondenza nella realtà:  
uno scalino di legno è uno scalino sociale.' (170)

For the spinsters of Sergio's courtyard, don Gastone represents their own Mussolini; someone, that is, on whom they can focus their sexual fantasies and frustrated appetites - which manifest themselves in the form of hero-worship and subservience. However, it is Parise's intention to demonstrate that don Gastone is, in fact, a victim of the universal sexual obsession that the author considers characterized, and was fostered by, the Fascist regime. The repressed lust of the spinsters, and the - often vicarious - sexual prowess of Fascist stalwarts, are complemented by a fundamental indifference towards the suffering of the underprivileged. These characteristics are more or less embodied in the person of the cav. Esposito, a Neapolitan and ex-prison warder who owns the only private toilet in the courtyard (which he shares with his Fascist friends, but not with his needy neighbours) and who mouths such Fascist sentiments as:

"Un cappellano militare deve essere prima di tutto un uomo !" (171)

His half-baked theory is elaborated upon thus:

'Un fascista che non fosse stato al tempo stesso grande amatore, gallo di tutte le galline, insistente e attaccaticcio come un coniglio e possente tuttavia come uno stallone, per lui era un fascista di scarto, un lustrascarpe da gruppo rionale, anzi non poteva neppure chiamarsi fascista. Mussolini aveva due c... così, d'oro,

e Starace anche, per non parlare di Muti che faceva all'amore in un aeroplano appositamente costruito.' (172)

Such, Parise, suggests, is the opium of the masses. But the novel spans the year 1935-6 and the comic circumstances surrounding don Gastone's sexual initiation are, ultimately, of only secondary importance. For Mussolini is about to embark on his conquest of Empire, (the venture which, it was extravagantly claimed, would benefit the poor) while treating his subjects in Sergio's courtyard with the same, ostensibly benevolent, indifference as a rich man does a beggar. The pathetic and unnecessary deaths of the Ragioniere and Cena indicate the hollowness of the regime's social policies. They also serve to illustrate the narrator's conviction that only the lumpenproletariat are truly human; but that Fascist society fails to recognize their humanity, and instead effects their destruction. The basis for the moral superiority of beggars and recidivists is inherent in Sergio's comments regarding an unfair division of 'swag'. Sergio says:

'Cominciavo a capire che in qualunque parte si andasse, qualunque mestiere si facesse, dovunque c'era il sopruso, la frode, la legge del più forte. E questo non perchè il nostro ambiente fosse un ambiente di ladri o di gente affamata, semmai proprio per questo, perchè la fame la conoscevano tutti, il sopruso non avrebbe dovuto esistere.' (173)

Sergio's insinuation is, obviously, that virtue is only to be hoped for in the oppressed, and only because they are excluded from the social hierarchy. Parise's treatment of his subject matter seems to typify what Asor Rosa considers the worst consequences of Gramsci's thought - or 'gramscianismo' - on the novel. Notwithstanding the fact that Parise's people are city dwellers, their characterization is accordant with a stereotype Asor Rosa defines thus:



'Si lamentano la miseria, l'arretratezza, la sofferenza materiale, di cui il popolo soffre; ma assai spesso la rappresentazione della miseria, dell'arretratezza, della sofferenza materiale, si rivela solo un modo indiretto per esaltare le capacità popolari di resistenza e di ripresa di fronte al cumulo delle circostanze avverse: e ad un certo punto il rapporto tra il dolore e la speranza, tra la sofferenza e la solidarietà, diviene così stretto ed inscindibile, da suggerire nel lettore l'impressione che mondi così fatti siano tutto sommato positivi.' (174)

Two works that are extraneous to the categories into which most of the post-war fictional production falls are Buzzati's 'Il grande ritratto' (1960) and Bilenchi's 'Una città' (1958). The beginning of Buzzati's rather slight novel, reveals something of the allusive, mysterious quality of 'Il deserto dei tartari'. Subsequently, however, the novel develops a theme reminiscent of Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein', and the endeavour to create human life, although Buzzati's Laura, a modernized monster, owes more to the genre of science fiction, than to that of horror; and her characterization as a stereotyped representative of 'frivolous womanhood' conforms to the prejudices commonly associated with Buzzati's sex. The 'moral' of 'Il grande ritratto' is that man cannot create anything less profane than himself. The seeming pessimism of this conclusion is perhaps balanced by the miracle of human life, to which the creation of this huge and complex monster indirectly attests. Buzzati's preoccupation with man's alienation from the society of his fellows and with the fantastic both find their reflection in 'Il grande ritratto'; although alienation figures only indirectly in the depiction of a dehumanized bureaucracy. But whereas, under the Fascist regime, Buzzati's personal vision assumed a typical, and emblematical dimension, it bears little relevance to the predominant themes of the post-war novels; even taking into account the relatively late date of its publication. Bilenchi's exiguous production between 1943 and 1960 (which consisted of

the revision of his pre-war short stories and 'Una città') is attributed, by Bo, to the incompatibility of his political engagement with his personal, fictional preoccupations. Bo argues that:

'... alla base della rinuncia ci deve esser qualcosa d'altro, la preoccupazione di ordine politico, la paura di non saper fare coincidere il mondo della fantasia con il suggerimento della politica.' (175)

Bilenchi himself, ascribes his silence to a number of factors (176) - including the loss of his manuscripts and books in the war and the mental exhaustion resulting from frenzied journalistic activity. Whatever the reason, in the final sketch of 'Unacittà', entitled 'Volterra', the juxtaposition of Nuremburg and Volterra seems to suggest that the sketch is a parable of the war and of the inviolability of this natural fortress - which presumably symbolizes the Italian spirit. The sketch concludes with the author's hopes of rediscovering his past:

'Per anni non rividi più Volterra, e fu come se l'avessi dimenticata. Eppure nascostamente sapevo che, quando avessi potuto tornare a leggere le epigrafi dei palazzi, i nomi delle piazze e delle strade di Volterra, con lo stupore di ritrovare intatto e vivo un mondo che credevo obliato e sepolto nel passato, sarebbe incominciata una nuova età della mia vita.' (177)

This apparently also constitutes a personal statement of cautious optimism on Bilenchi's part, which refers possibly to the values he previously believed in, and possibly to whatever difficulties he may have experienced that were currently preventing him from writing. It should, however, be noted that the depiction of the countryside in 'Una città' reveals a new stylistic maturity.

While Berto cannot - and does not - attempt to evade the issues of involvement in contemporary reality (in which, with the exception of 'Il brigante' his fiction is generally rooted) it might nevertheless be

permissible to argue that he ultimately evades a direct confrontation of the problem of responsibility. Certainly, Berto is unusual and even courageous in acknowledging his feelings of guilt and responsibility for Italy's participation in the Second World War: although his somewhat self-conscious avowals often seem almost as contentious towards his literary detractors, as they do sincere. In 'L'inconsapevole approccio' Berto admits to:

'il senso di colpa che come uomo egli genericamente sente per la crudeltà della guerra, e il senso di colpa che come italiano e fascista sente per aver contribuito allo scatenarsi della guerra.' (178)

and he explains his more, or less, Neorealistic depiction of the urban and rural poor in a way that does not accord with the presentient optimism of the Neorealists proper; he states:

'Alla sua colpa di uomo Berto aggiungeva la sua colpa di italiano, anzi di "italiano che aveva portato la camicia nera" ..e così il Nostro sente la necessità di crearsi una supplementare innocenza. Ci arriva, o tenta di arrivarci, scegliendo i protagonisti delle sue storie, ossia i rappresentanti del suo popolo, tra gli incolpevoli: bambini, vecchi, malati, poveri contadini che vivono sulla terra senza nulla chiedersi. Non solo, ma Berto provoca nei suoi personaggi, sempre attribuendone la colpa al "male universale", un ottenebramento della facoltà di guidicare e di intendere, e in definitiva di comunicare, cosicché i poveri diavoli sono ridotti ad essere ancor più poveri diavoli.' (179)

It is the 'supplementary innocence' for which Berto yearns, (as much as the disheartening experience of an American prisoner of war camp) that accounts for his pessimistic vision of the situation in Northern Italy in 1944, in 'Il cielo è rosso', and the almost total failure to envisage regeneration or a positive collective identity. However the phrase, 'a supplementary innocence' (if indeed such a thing can be said to exist) reveals one of the essential paradoxes of Berto's fictional and non-

fictional works; the misguided assumption that responsibility can be effaced, or compensated for, by an assertion of innocence, which may, or may not, somehow be unnaturally augmented - that is unless, as I would argue, Berto shares with his characters some kind of localized, obfuscation of his critical faculties or reason. (An obfuscation caused precisely by his feelings of guilt.) Enormous as such a statement may be there is nevertheless some justification for it, not least in the above quotations, where the sincerity of Berto's explanation serves to invalidate as much as to endorse the veracity of his confession: for notwithstanding his fundamental sincerity (which is quite possibly distorted by guilt) it would appear that Berto's knowledge of self and of his thought processes is incomplete. In his prefatory remarks to 'Guerra in camicia nera' Berto, in characteristic fashion, explains his motive for writing:

'questo libro lo pubblico non per quelli che sono stati camicie nere, ma per gli altri, magari per quelli che furono loro avversari e nemici, perchè vorrei che riconoscessero nei miei soldati una sostanza umana comune a tutti gli soldati e a tutti gli eserciti. Per far sì che la guerra sia veramente perdonata.' (180)

Despite the objective necessity, which Berto recognizes, of acknowledging the Fascists' humanity, we intuit the fact that Berto, whether consciously or unconsciously, is attempting thereby to establish an innocence, which will meet with pardon - while the concept of atonement, if only through a reappraisal of his individual and collective past is signally lacking. (It is however only fair to admit that an analysis of Berto's guilt fails to take into account the literary merit of his work, or the feat of imagination 'Il cielo è rosso' represents.) In 'Guerra in camicia nera' Berto is chronicling his sentiments at a given time, but reference to the earlier novel 'Il cielo è rosso' and the later 'L'inconsapevole

approccio' (1965) suggest that a certain impediment to reappraisal remained in his thinking, notwithstanding the maturity as a writer that Berto developed over nearly two decades. In 'Il cielo è rosso', the retired schoolmaster, a Fascist and qualunquista, accords some blame for past misdeeds to the Fascists - although less than to the Americans - and as a kind of innocence states his inability to comprehend the present situation. He comments with reference to the American occupation of Italy (perhaps as a consequence of his imprisonment Berto speaks specifically of an American occupation) and what he considers the inevitability of a stronger country invading a weaker:

'... non serve a niente un soldato che regala  
caramelle o un maggiore che cerca di governare  
una città con umanità e giustizia.' (181)

However, remarkably similar images occur in 'Guerra in camicia nera' when Berto buys sweets for the children of Gabès, and when he tries to ingratiate himself with a French child in order to allay his sense of guilt. In both these instances, and overall, Berto seems to be ignorant of, or determined to, ignore the seriousness of the political, social and moral issues, governing the hostile responses towards him of French nationals; in other words Berto seeks to evade (and even entertains hopes that it might be possible to do so) a direct confrontation of his responsibility as a Fascist.

Whether or not Berto is politically naïve is a matter for conjecture; he makes one justifiable point in favour of his and Italy's participation in the war, and that is that as the Allies of Nazi Germany the Fascists are fighting for their own Empire, rather than defending Allied imperialism abroad, (182) as the Allies might, unreasonably, wish them to. Otherwise, according to his own account, Berto volunteered to fight in Africa for a number of reasons; because he believed in a vaguely populist

Fascism and the Second Revolution (even to the point of being prepared to defend what he considered orthodox Fascism against its betrayers, and against Mussolini himself); because he was ambitious and only saw his way to fulfilling his literary and social ambitions through Fascism; and, as emerges fairly late in 'Guerra in camicia nera' because of an unhappy romance and a certain boredom. Berto's disenchantment with Fascism proceeds apace with a concern for his own survival. It is not, apparently, ideologically or idealistically motivated. Possibly, as Berto says, in assuming the guilt of others as well as his own, he is arrogant in the same way as his middle-class character Daniele, whose suicide in 'Il cielo è rosso' is meant to be vaguely and imperfectly reminiscent of Christ's crucifixion. Possibly for Daniele - an autobiographical figure - no less than for Berto, this arrogance, if such it is, is a consequence of a painfully acute self-consciousness and an inability to come to terms with a bourgeois upbringing that afforded him no fundamental sense of identity. At any rate, one inadvertent but consistent note of Berto's early work, which presumably relates to his development under the Fascist regime, and is almost complementary to this arrogance, is a certain passivity or acceptance of the existing order; simply because, by its existence, it precludes all other possibilities. Thus, in 'L'inconsapevole approccio', Berto explains his stance regarding the Racial Laws, by the curious logic that since they have been promulgated, it is necessary to practise them, in order to avoid irritation that might otherwise be caused to a certain sector of the population:

'per poi lasciarla libera di nuocere.' (183)

Equally, this passivity pervades Berto's fiction, and also contributes to the creation of his 'male universale'. In 'Il cielo è

rosso', Berto concludes the description of the American air-raid that destroys half a city and its entire social structure, thus:

'Gli uomini si sentono soddisfatti... Per un certo tempo il nemico non potrà più servirsi della stazione, dei binari, forse del ponte, se è stato colpito. E se per fare ciò essi hanno prodotto una somma di dolore umano che niente potrà cancellare, nessun bene mai sulla terra, questa è una cosa che non ha importanza. Essi non vi pensano, e non ne hanno colpa, a causa del male universale.' (184)

The novel ends the following autumn on an image of passivity; of men sitting on a wall waiting - the reader is not told for what. The population is coming to realize that the war has been lost but doing little or nothing to reconstruct their lives and their city. (Berto's notion of the war as lost is, moreover, unusual.) Not inconceivably, however, a juxtaposition of Berto's active desire to participate in the Second Revolution, and the passive acceptance of various other circumstances implies that under Fascism Berto had imbibed a selective passivity that happily precluded difficult moral issues - nor was the overthrow of the Fascist regime enough to dispel this reactionary passivity. The novel's title, suggested by Longanesi, instead of Berto's own, obviously pessimistic, choice 'La perduta gente', is owned by Berto to have had some part in the novel's initial success. Possibly Longanesi's title was deemed to hold a political allusion, although the allusion was actually Biblical (Mathew 16, 2-4) and not altogether irrelevant to the first pages of the book, where Berto denounces the callousness of the Italians who rejoice in the successful course of the war on foreign soil; he says:

'La gente senza dubbio pensava che la guerra fosse un male. Ma quella era una guerra che andava bene e si combatteva altrove, perciò la gente diceva che era santa e giusta e necessaria.' (185)

However, when the war is fought on Italian soil, public opinion pronounces

war horrendous. Berto, through the device of the American soldier Danny, who has a brother Daniele's age, indicates and promises a denunciation of the lack of fraternal feeling that characterizes war; and then shifts his perspective in order to portray the band of adolescents who survive on their own extra-social resources, against the background of the almost total apathy of the adult population; whose welfare, the schoolmaster observes, has devolved onto the Americans, by reason of their presence as an army of occupation. (Significantly, the partisans hardly figure, even by repute, in Berto's novel.) From his prisoner of war camp, which he considers an essential influence on this novel, Berto envisages only the passive dependence on external forces of adults, and the more or less despairing struggle for survival of his three lumpenproletarian protagonists, and Daniele, whose extreme youth precludes them from doing any constructive, or socially productive, work and causes them to resort to theft and prostitution as sole means of survival. (In fact they develop into some kind of family unit which is largely dependent on the proceeds of Carla's prostitution.)

Malaparte's despair is of a very different quality, but happily he himself discredits his literary technique, together with the veracity of his observation, in a thoroughly nasty episode, where he informs a French General that the extraordinary seeks him out, in the same way that an explosion caused a man's hand to 'land' in his couscous - and he, too polite to disturb his fellow diners, tactfully and tranquilly, ate it. Martelli argues that Malaparte's exploitation of the pornographic and the abhorrent serves a moral purpose. He says:

'In quel grido che sale dalla profondità dei visceri, egli affida l'ultima possibilità di risvegliare gli uomini dall'atonìa morale in cui sono caduti costringendoli a prendere coscienza di come sono diventati.' (186)



However, the gratuitousness of such episodes as the above suggests that this is a genre in which Malaparte took a perverse delight. Certainly Malaparte's eponymous thesis, that people will die with dignity, but stoop to anything in order to save their skin, is not without foundation. Nevertheless it tends to be submerged by the author's commiseration for, or empathy with the corrupted and by his fascination with his own literary persona - which he endows with almost superhuman mythical stature. Malaparte is a liaison officer with the Allied forces in Naples (once again, depicted as the plebian heart of Italy); the Allies not only recognize Malaparte's considerable literary merit - having all dutifully read 'Kaputt' - but also acknowledge in him the European man of culture; for them, as he says, he *is* Europe. Malaparte, like Italy and Europe, feels he is humiliated and degraded by the Americans in particular, whom he depicts as overtly contemptuous towards him, and towards all Italians in uniform. Under the circumstances, Malaparte is suitably humble, so humble indeed, that in a dream conversation he has with Mussolini, Malaparte states that he would not judge Mussolini, that he is not worthy to make another human being suffer: with obvious insinuations about the arrogance of those who might judge, and the injustice of any judgement that might be passed on him. (He also claims an impeccably non-Fascist past for himself.) Malaparte's humility, however, is, as might be expected, the supreme manifestation of pride permitted by his difficult circumstances; since he considers that the predominant mood after the Armistice is one of self-degradation (indulged in compulsorily for the benefit of the Allies, in order to convince them that they are truly victorious) he is determined not to shrink from it. Thus he condones, instead of condemning, the prostitution of children. He says:

'- se avessi un bambino, forse lo andrei a vendere

per potermi comprare delle sigarette americane. Bisogna essere uomini del proprio tempo. Quando si è vigliacchi, bisogna essere vigliacchi fino in fondo.' (187)

The deplorable, uncompassionate arrogance of Malaparte's stance is, perhaps, most clearly illustrated in an episode in which he encounters several crucified Jews. Notwithstanding his pity for these victims of the Nazis, Malaparte manages to portray himself as the victim of the Jews' cruelty - for in their universal condemnation of the Gentile, they make no special exception for him (although he assures his reader that his conscience is clear of ever hurting man or beast). The Jews, then, fail to recognize Malaparte's blamelessness, and therefore unjustly torture his sensibilities, and punish him by visiting the crimes of others upon him. Malaparte's argument is, simply, that it is better to be among the 'vinti' than among the 'vincitori'; but although ostensibly similar to that of the Neorealists, his conviction in fact smacks of a reprehensible opportunism. It is as if, having correctly divined the contemporary moral climate, and having arrogated blamelessness to himself, Malaparte ostentatiously selects for himself the foremost position in the ranks of the 'vinti'.

Brancati, on the other hand, chooses not to depict himself in his fiction, although Ermenegildo Fasanaro, (Antonio's uncle in 'Il bell' Antonio' [1949]) probably serves, in part, as a mouthpiece for Brancati's disillusionment with post-war Italy. Not, it should be noted, that Brancati seems to have envisaged any possibility of collective regeneration; rather he considers that if the Fascist regime was bad, the post-war political situation augurs no better, indeed probably rather worse. In 1935, Ermenegildo, whose aversion to Communism is self-evident, prophesies thus:

"I comunisti che stanno in carcere ? sarebbe peggio

dei fascisti. Perché questi almeno sono dei cialtroni e le bestialità che hanno in testa le fanno male, mentre quelli sono onesti e rigorosi e le bestialità le fanno bene....." (188)

'Il bell'Antonio' and the short story 'Il vecchio con gli stivali' (1944) are indubitably Brancati's two most accomplished works; neither his comic invention, nor his social observation flag as they do in 'Gli anni perduti'; and further Brancati avoids the risks inherent in an analysis of physical and mental inertia, which flawed his pre-war novel. Nonetheless, there is a certain continuity between Brancati's pre- and post-war works, both in his depiction of 'gallismo' - largely as metaphor - and in his caricature of Fascism. Of his continued preoccupation with an, almost exclusively, mythical sexuality, Manacorda says:

'il gallismo si presenta in maniera piú problematica e ambigua e svela una vena ancora piú triste e funerea.... nel *Vecchio con gli stivali* (o per dir meglio nel racconto così intitolato nel volume omonimo) non propriamente di gallismo si tratta, ma di quel suo analogo politico.....' (189)

In his depiction of Fascist stereotypes, Brancati manifestly takes full advantage of Italy's new freedom to ridicule his targets with a directness that was, prior to the overthrow of the regime, the exclusive prerogative of exiles like Ferrero and Silone. (Given the widespread knowledge of the consequences that would inevitably ensue, it would obviously have been both imprudent and futile to attempt any such overt criticism of Fascism within Italy, before the Liberation.) However, notwithstanding the greater explicitness of Brancati's post-war satire, and a certain inherent ambiguity, of which more will be said, its objects are essentially unchanged; and include stupidity - and the correlation between stupidity and the exercise of Fascist power - the political and social successes of the unprincipled - which perhaps constitute the Fascist interpretation of 'opportunity' - the Fascist myth of virility (that reveals itself in

'Il bell'Antonio' as the exploitation of sexuality towards the advancement of personal ambition in the inseparable spheres of politics and society) and, ultimately, especially in 'Il vecchio con gli stivali', the irrepressible talent for survival that characterized adept political turncoats. Similarly, Brancati's protagonists continue to be distinguished by the vacuum that characterizes their lives. Antonio and Aldo Piscitello (of 'Il vecchio con gli stivali') are both more or less impotent, but Antonio is sexually impotent, whereas Piscitello is impotent politically, and, as a result of the peculiarly Fascist distortion of human values, powerless in his social and familial life also. (Brancati is perhaps unusual in depicting the degree to which differences of political opinion divided families. Prior to the Allied landing, and her precipitate political conversion, Piscitello's wife declares that were it not for their children, she would pray for Piscitello to be imprisoned for his anti-Fascism.) Potency has been copyrighted by the Fascists, and, as is revealed (in 'Il bell'Antonio') by the stamina of the Party Vice-Secretary in a brothel in Catania, Brancati no longer cares to dispute this exclusive claim, but concerns himself primarily with interpreting the meaning, or social value, of impotence.

In order to distinguish Antonio and Piscitello from their pre-war predecessors, we might argue that they are perhaps more impotent, but, less inert. They also have a more profound sense of the tragedy of their situation. Before he conceived his great hatred for the machinery of the Fascist regime, and thence the regime itself, Piscitello was an utterly insignificant creature. But, as Brancati insists, he was not inherently ridiculous. Before putting Piscitello through his pantomime of virulent anti-Fascism, he establishes the fact of Piscitello's innate dignity by introducing him as:

'un uomo di mezza età, magro e curvo come di solito sono le persone alte, e nondimeno corto, molto più corto del normale, ma non spiacevolmente corto, al contrario ! Corto nel modo meno buffo, uno di quegli uomini piccini dei quali si apprende senza meraviglia che sono padri di ragazzi alti e ben fatti.' (190)

In 1935, apparently as a direct consequence of his abhorrence of Hitler's anti-Semitism, Piscitello's hatred for the regime became violent and he began to give vent to it by subjecting his Fascist insignia to the same kind of brutal and degrading treatment as was more usually inflicted on human rather than inanimate enemies. As a result of his hatred, Piscitello becomes significant, and Brancati adroitly exploits the situation he has created, by asking:

'Che diavole gli avevano fatto, a quest'uomo mite, che non s'era mai occupato di politica, che non aveva grandi ideali né ambizioni né bisogno di spazio e libertà per i suoi progetti ? In quale punto segreto lo avevano toccato ? E così senza parere, come aveva potuto, la società in cui egli viveva, stringerlo per il collo fino a farlo starnazzare come un pollo che ha capito improvvisamente le intenzioni della mano che pareva accarezzarlo ?' (191)

These questions are noteworthy, both because they convey something of the insidiousness with which the regime stifled its subjects, and because of the way they are worded. The stimuli for Piscitello's hatred, and for his departure from unimportance, come from outside himself. The answers to the questions Brancati poses are more problematic, for Piscitello's reaction against Fascism is on an intuitively emotional or 'gut' level. As he says, he has been deprived of his small pleasures; also he feels (like Gadda in 'Il castello di Udine') that the regime has profaned the Italy he dearly loves, and then, presumably, his reaction on learning of racial persecution (albeit in Germany) suggests either the exceptionality of compassion or of recognition of the humanity of

designated enemies (whether of Fascist Italy or Nazi Germany) or simply, the exceptionality of what is, ultimately, a moral stance: his refusal to let his humanity be submerged by Fascist propaganda. Thus Piscitello begins thinking his anti-Fascist thoughts, and uttering his 'Mah' of protestation. However limited such a protest may be deemed, it is a protest of sorts; and it therefore compares favourably with Antonio's a-political stance. What appears to be Antonio's most politicized statement naturally refers to his impotence. He explains:

" quella cosa non ha partito. Il brutto non era che le signore che io conoscevo fossero mogli di fascisti: m'importava poco, questo, a me; il brutto era che con quelle signore io dovevo limitarmi a fare la commedia, perché di serio non riuscivo a far nulla. Se con le mogli degli antifascisti, fossi stato piú capace.... l'Ovra, la Milizia e la Gil tutte insieme non mi avrebbero impedito di frequentarle." (192)

Inasmuch as Antonio is portrayed as a colourless creature, little more than a foil for the sexual obsession of his society, he is manifestly the fictional personification of Brancati's evaluation of the peculiarly Sicilian phenomenon of gallismo, described in an article entitled 'I piaceri del gallismo'. Brancati states:

'Si può essere ladri, fuggire davanti al nemico, mentire, adulare piegarsi alla tirannide; la misericordia popolare è disposta a rimettere qualunque di questi peccati, ma la colpa che non sarà mai perdonata è quella di non avere rispettato abbastanza il proprio onore e dignità di gallo.' (193)

Certainly Antonio's father, Alfio Magnano, embodies this rather superficial attitude; but this perhaps constitutes only one facet of Antonio's significance. Conceivably, Antonio represents more than just the status of the impotent in Sicilian society, conceivably he is a victim of the expectations generated by the regime - or, in other words, he has been castrated by these expectations and the mercilessness with

which the 'gentler sex' pursue them. After his separation from Barbara he is hunted, almost like an animal, by the women of Catania. But Antonio is evidently a very domestic animal, possibly indeed like Piscitello, and even more than Piscitello, he is the chicken of the above cited simile. After the Liberation of Catania, Antonio has a dream which for the first time in years offers him a sensation of potency. This dream moreover suggests that the repression of his sexuality corresponds to the stifling of his hatred. In his dream, Antonio assaults his concierge's niece violently:

'la sbatté a destra e a manca, la voltò e rivoltò, soffiando sempre fra i denti serrati, sempre mordendola e strizzandola, finché non provò una sensazione voluttuosissima e doppia, come di chi sfoghi un odio lungamente represso e riceva, nello stesso tempo, un'offesa che, ripagandolo di un male compiuto, lo sgravi da un rimorso intollerabile.' (194)

Arguably, the hatred Antonio momentarily experiences is against the metaphorical, rather than the flesh and blood hands that ostensibly seek to caress him. Possibly Antonio (a later creation than Piscitello) is so much more impotent than his predecessor, that his capacity for hatred (of the regime, or any identifiable object) has been totally expunged from his waking life.

It is precisely in this respect, that Brancati's post-war depiction of the vacuum - rather than *gallismo* - that characterizes his protagonists, appears equivocal. For, in absolute antithesis to the active virtues generally applauded in the post-war novel, and in contrast to Brancati's own previous treatment of this vacuum or inertia as, more or less, a concomitant of Fascism, in 'Il vecchio con gli stivali' and 'Il bell'Antonio' it is, seemingly, considered as a valid and far from negligible expression of anti-Fascism. Edoardo, Antonio's cousin, and another of Brancati's personae dogged by unemployment, proffers a

statement of infidelity towards the regime, which would read merely as a bitterly satirical observation of the compromise or 'doublethink' to which Sicilians (and Italians also, no doubt) were, advertently or inadvertently driven, were it not for the fact that Brancati elsewhere makes a declaration that seemingly corroborates Edoardo's view. Edoardo, an anti-Fascist of sorts, informs Antonio that he wishes to be appointed podestà of Catania and explains:

"Questo regime durerà piú di cento anni e non dovremo render conto a nessuno dei nostri atti; ma anche se il regime cadrà, io non mi preparo degli alibi. Se mi preoccupassi di far la figura dell'uomo fiero con quelli che verranno dopo, sarei uno sciocco e darei un'importanza spropositata alle apparenze. Perché l'essere gerarca e il non essere iscritti al fascio sono apparenze e inezie in confronto alla nera infelicità in cui saremo costretti a vivere sia facendo i gerarchi che rimanendo a casa per i fatti nostri. D'altro canto, io sarò un uomo onesto, e farò consistere la mia onestà nel non rubare, nel trattar tutti gentilmente e nell'augurare il male al regime che servo con quella precisione e coscienza che può avere soltanto chi gli sta bene addentro e ne conosce i segreti!"  
(195)

and Brancati states:

' Sotto il fascismo, io non riuscii a pubblicare nulla di mio.... Io non mi occupavo di politica nei miei scritti, perché i miei scritti erano sempre racconti, e la politica, in un racconto, per dirla con Stendhal, fa l'effetto di un colpo di rivoltella nel mezzo di un concerto. Ma che volete? L'uomo fiero è sempre un uomo fiero, anche quando fischieta una canzone, passando di notte per una strada deserta: .... Così accadeva anche a me. Anche se nei racconti descrivevo un tramonto o un'alba, si capiva ch'ero un uomo indomito; i miei aggettivi per il sole che sprofondava dietro i colli, o per la notte che fuggiva ... riuscivano a illustrare da una parte i fenomeni della natura e dall'altra, misteriosamente, il mio modo di pensare contrario al regime.' (196)

Such a declaration of anti-Fascism must surely be equivalent to Piscitello's 'Mah'. The significance of this comparison can perhaps be



inferred from Brancati's unequivocal statement of disdain for his own epoch. (197) If the above quotation is as unqualified as it appears to be, and furthermore, intended in good faith, it is less than surprising that Brancati should feel no love for his epoch. The embarrassment, or bad conscience, Brancati might reasonably be expected to feel on account of his early pro-Fascist (and Fascist acclaimed) literary successes - given his categorical and almost provocative declaration of anti-Fascism, in fact seems to find indirect expression in his unsympathetic attitude towards the self-professed anti-Fascists of Catania. The minor characters of 'Il bell'Antonio' who remain anti-Fascists throughout Mussolini's dictatorship are depicted as ineffectual creatures, unable to adjust to the return to democracy, since the acerbity of their anti-Fascist sentiments has come to constitute their predominant emotion and one which they have no wish to forego. However, as already demonstrated, Brancati is a reactionary, and, by his own definition, a moralist: in the latter capacity he is entitled, even obliged, to condemn those aspects of his age which he finds reprehensible. Accordingly, he asseverates his abhorrence for the Italian refusal to indulge in an examination of conscience and in a re-evaluation of the immediate past, and for the determination of free men to escape into servitude. (198) He also, and perhaps with good reason given his own circumstances, despises conformism and particularly what he considers the ultraconformism of 'revolutionaries'. It is his abhorrence for these vices, that cause a 'Mah' of protestation, or even the nonconformity of impotence to be regarded as positive qualities, or as the last vestiges of independent spirit of the 'free man'.

The conformity Brancati despises is, we must infer, primarily spiritual. If indeed he is sympathetic towards the anguished Edoardo, it is because thoughts not appearances or deeds are paramount in

determining the true moral stance of the individual. The equivocalness of such a conviction is illustrated by Tobino's 'Bandiera nera', which is, overall, a far less partisan novel than the majority of those thus far discussed. Tobino's novel constitutes a gentle appeal to the reader to retain a sense of perspective, which was evidently under menace from emotionalism, and the conflicting charges of left and right-wing novelists. Although 'Bandiera nera' reveals the typical explicitness of the post-war period, it is nonetheless rare in retaining something of the atmosphere of the pre-war dissident novel. The novel employs no elaborate metaphors but attempts to establish a truth that is no less noteworthy for being prosaic. Tobino has set himself the task of reminding his reader of a recognisable and - in all probability - common past. Hence he observes:

'Le dittature sono deprecabili innanzi tutto perché fanno nascere tra gli uomini una insormontabile incomprendione, e si dimenticano il perdono, la pietà e che tutti siamo in questo mondo poveri uomini, che ognuno ha le sue ragioni, che ben pochi hanno una adamantina virtù, che del resto esiste in ciascun uomo la coscienza che se anche non v'è il giudice sullo scranno che indica col dito, essa vive e indica.' (199)

The examination of conscience for which Brancati understandably yearns, can only be valid if it proceeds from an unbiased, and undistorted, depiction, such as Tobino seeks to convey, of the reality of Fascism, and of the less than adamant virtue of the majority of Italians (not least, various novelists). Certainly in 1936 the reality of Fascism appeared considerably less odious and less reprehensible than it would in subsequent years. Further in 1936, the moral compromises the regime exacted of its subjects could be relatively easily made by reason of the lack of any feasible - and especially economically feasible - alternative. Thus, the anti-Fascist, Merlini, under pressure, and out of

a sense of futility, finally decides to join the Fascist party, and accept the 'tessera' 'Per Necessitas Familia' as it was dubbed. By describing this commonplace reality Tobino makes a positive contribution to the post-war literary portrayal of Fascism, in which the humdrum domestic aspect of Fascist Italy in the mid-thirties otherwise rarely figures. Tobino's treatment of his subject matter is moreover uncommon; instead of seeking to dissociate himself from his fiction (or to identify with a symbol of impeccable moral rectitude) Tobino recounts with sympathetic comprehension the story of a group of young doctors who, notwithstanding their personal merits, decide to compromise themselves by accepting the 'protection' of an allegedly influential local Fascist hierarchy, when they sit the final examination that will permit them to practise medicine. The fact that they are doctors, rather than lawyers or whatever, would be purely incidental to the plot of the novel, were it not the case that Tobino thereby enforces his own identification with his characters. Tobino painstakingly enumerates the considerations that cause these fairly upright young men to act in what is - objectively speaking - a less than commendable way. One of their number, Cecchi, takes the following decision for the group:

'noi siamo contro, abbiamo forse idee precise, vorremmo distruggere questa società così congegnata ma siamo nati nel fascismo, non conosciamo altro che quello, esprimere ora ciò che precisamente vogliamo apparirebbe romantico; e come sarà il futuro, come si svolgeranno gli avvenimenti non lo possiamo sapere, crediamo a qualcosa che ci sembra giusto e morale, e per questo forse in seguito, se capiteranno le circostanze, combatteremo, ma ora c'è l'esame, dobbiamo diventar medici, uomini nella vita, questa è la prima condizione, non dobbiamo fermarci a questi che mi pare siano piccoli giochi di moralità, nel fascismo siamo nati, questa è la nostra vita, qui c'è l'esame di stato che dobbiamo superare, abbiamo studiato, siamo i migliori studenti del nostro anno, ma lo studio nel fascismo non è sufficiente, non basta aver lavorato, ci vuole anche la raccomandazione, anzi questa è la cosa più importante per esser promossi; ebbene procuriamoci anche la raccomandazione, ciò non cambia nulla delle

nostre intenzioni e delle nostre speranze, divenuti medici saremo piú sicuri, saremo, si puó dirlo ? piú forti.' (200)

Tobino's doctors differ from Brancati's Edoardo by recognizing the expediency of their action and accepting the pre-eminence of relative rather than absolute values; without claiming that it will cause them any undue mental anguish. Whereas in Edoardo's case his conduct can be justified and even condoned by the consequential suffering he has resolved to inflict upon himself. As Tobino frequently states in 'Bandiera nera' his doctors were born into Fascism, and therefore could not reasonably be expected to behave differently; they conform to existing norms in the same way, and with the same ease, as would the majority of their counterparts, in all probability, in other countries and other political climates. At this historical moment, in Italy, it is apparently the regime that is held responsible for the lapses of its youth. Overall, however, Tobino is comparatively sparing in his criticisms; as in this case where the issues are ill-defined and ultimately of no great consequence, Tobino suggests the refusal to measure up to impersonal ideals is both logical and sensible. Although he satirizes various Fascist or Fascistized figures who might be assumed to be typical (but are nevertheless not stereotyped) Tobino does so with little overt hostility or moral condemnation, but rather with a certain wry amusement. The witless sansepolcrista overwhelmed by the discovery of the power he wields in a small provincial town, the timorous university administrators, the obtuse G.U.F. hierarch Parisi, inadequately versed in both medicine and the art of successful opportunism, and the slyly cautious self-interested high-ranking Fascist hierarchs in Rome, who are past-masters of underhand strategy, are all rendered ludicrous through Tobino's treatment of the theme of manipulation. The inept are inevitably manipulated, since they are unable

either to resist manipulation or to retaliate, while the wily hierarchs of the capital are constantly alert to the risk of their own possible manipulation, even as they practise this art on others. Merlini, a tardy but talented manipulator, is also subjected to a certain ridicule, but his characterization is not devoid of pathos; through Merlini, a middle-aged man and therefore also a 'child' of democracy, who has been physically - and doubtless symbolically - half-paralyzed by syphilis (which he contracted in 1926, and a dubious distinction he may or may not have shared with Mussolini) Tobino illustrates the consequences of the schism between inner loyalties and outward appearances. Since his ostensible conversion to Fascism, and more important than the emblematic significance of his partial paralysis, Merlini has become aware:

'che c'era un mondo contro il fascismo, che non appariva finché si era antifascisti poiché l'antifascista è solo, rimane onesto davanti a se stesso, non fa gruppo con gli altri antifascisti; e vide che perfino i servi piú clamorosi erano contro, il loro stesso esser vili testimoniava contro la disumanità del fascismo, vedeva, vedeva ora, ora che era fascista, vedeva quanti erano contro, quanti erano attenti, che una moltitudine guardava:'  
(201)

Obviously one inference of Merlini's realization is that this tacit anti-Fascism, in fact favoured rather than discredited the Fascist myth of unanimity; and therefore, at least in the short term, helped perpetuate a somewhat unpopular regime. But, rather than overtly censuring this hypocritical Fascist façade, Tobino chooses to regard it as cause for faith - albeit fairly disenchanting faith - in the inevitability of the regime's destruction. His argument being that with large numbers of disaffected individuals undermining the regime from within its downfall must, ultimately, be assured. (Tobino's inference and his conviction are not necessarily mutually compatible, and this indicates a possible, presumably generous weakness in the latter.) Logically enough in view

of the plea for retrospective comprehension and recognition of a more or less universal motivation that the novel constitutes, Tobino offers no vision of regeneration.

Tobino's evaluation of the effects of Fascist conditioning on the aforesaid young doctors, is presumably more or less valid; it would, of course, be more difficult to determine whether or not Merlini's reflections on anti-Fascism within Fascist Italy, were prochronistic. But, at any rate, if there was widespread individual resistance to Fascism that persisted throughout Mussolini's dictatorship, there was, obviously, also widespread support for it, and not merely on the part of the psychologically and sexually disturbed, like Marcello in 'Il conformista'. While Marcello is among the least credible Fascist personae to emerge from the post-war novel, perhaps because of the brevity of their delineation two of the minor characters of 'Il conformista' emerge as almost credible prototypes (a charge that could hardly be levelled against Marcello) and moreover as truly ominous in their 'normal' lack of respect for human life, outside their immediate family circle. These two are Giulia, Marcello's wife, and the 'secret' agent Orlando, whose eminently unexceptional characterization is flawed by the 'mad' glint that appears in his eye when he expresses his devotion for his family and mother-country. This glint corroborates a crass joke made by the psychiatrist in charge of Marcello's paranoic father, to Marcello's mother:

"Ma per quanto riguarda il duce, siamo tutti pazzi come vostro marito, nevero signora, tutti pazzi da legare, da trattare con la doccia e la camicia di forza... tutta l'Italia non è che un solo manicomio, eh, eh, eh."! (202)

This joke, in turn, might be an over-simplification of the concept that Fascism reveals and is a manifestation of the psychopathology of the

masses; Moravia, however, equates abnormality, or neurosis, or whatever with outright insanity. Giulia, on the other hand, apart from her unusual, youthful sexual experience, is quite normal, and perfectly sane. But her self-interested, petty bourgeois outlook, or nature, allows her to condone political assassination, without moral qualms. After a number of years she admits to Marcello, her awareness of his involvement in the murder of Quadri and his wife, and recounts the reflections it caused her thus:

" mi sono sempre detta: Marcello in fondo non è che un soldato ... anche i soldati ammazzano perché sono comandati ... lui non ha colpa se gli fanno fare certe cose ... ma non credi che ti verranno a prendere ?" (203)

Curiously, Giulia's death, at the end of the novel, more or less corresponds to the fulfilment of a prophesy regarding the visitation of Marcello's sins upon him. But nothing is said of the sins imputable to Giulia, and this perhaps relates to Longobardi's complicated but astute assessment of Moravia's fiction as circles within circles.

Paradoxically, it is probably Bassani who most successfully and most convincingly conveys the intrinsic nature of a particular, affluent, bourgeois society, perfectly adapted and adaptable to the changeable climate of Fascism. And this, notwithstanding the fact that Bassani's self-professed aspirations and scope are considerably more modest and more personal than those of the majority of novelists who were predominantly concerned either with the statement of universal truths or with the depiction of the quintessence of Fascism. (It seems quite probable that many of the stereotypes that came into being in this period are, in fact, the by-products of unsuccessful attempts to convey a quintessential Fascism.) Bassani, however, by reason of his religion, was forced into the enlightened perspective of the outsider, from which

he examined his peculiarly personal experience; the differing outlooks and conduct of various other Ferrarese Jews, (not least that of the narrator's father in 'Gli occhiali d'oro') attest to the fact that Bassani's experience was, notwithstanding its identifiably Jewish characteristics, an essentially personal one. And the curiously detached or objective evaluation of subjective reality afforded him by his unwelcome vantage point, enabled him, more or less, to take stock of his native society and his own relation to it. Bassani does not use the tools or techniques of psychoanalysis to explain his past, for he is, as he admits, disinterested in the application of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic insights to literature (204), preferring to entrust his truth to the effable, which he defines thus:

'È effabile soltanto ciò che si dice, che si fa.' (205)

His concentration on the effable largely permits him to preserve the autonomy of his past; doubtless he has taken fictional licence with it, nevertheless he respects and retains its integrality, and the reader does not feel he practises any gross distortion of its essential features. (His fiction actually appears as a progressive rediscovery of and reconciliation with his past.) Happily, then, in 'Gli occhiali d'oro' Bassani does not seek to explain the Fascist period in terms of collective neuroses, gallismo, the undermining of moral fibre, the triumph of the principle of Evil, or whatever. Prior to the start of Mussolini's 'racial campaign' in 1937, Bassani belonged to and identified unquestioningly with the bourgeois society of Ferrara, and it is the minutiae of this society that he portrays with unfailing credibility. Bassani himself insists upon the particularity of his fictional works; he says:

'Il fascismo, in quegli anni, è effettivamente il



grimaldello per penetrare e capire una certa società, in un certo ambiente, in un certo momento. Il fascismo mi è servito per capire me stesso, il luogo dal quale sono nato: non ne allargo il significato a valori più generici... Non mi sono messo a scrivere dei romanzi per fare dei saggi sociologici. Il fascismo mi ha servito per una ricerca e una spiegazione dei fatti della mia giovinezza, della mia esperienza morale: quindi, mi riferisco sempre e solo a un fascismo ben preciso, al fascismo nella sua realtà storica, padana e ferrarese.' (206)

and Varanini pertinently comments:

'È, d'altronde, ben vero che d'una lente tanto non importa il diametro quanto la potenza, sì che l'approfondita conoscenza d'un settore apparentemente limitato e la sofferta esperienza di cose e di fatti che ad esso si riferiscono possono favorire in misura assai rilevante un'esplorazione in profondità della situazione esistenziale dell'uomo in assoluto e un'interpretazione complessiva del mondo.' (207)

Given the particularly painful and regrettably common, European, experience of racial persecution around that time (1937), Bassani's declaration of the particularity of his subject, is a generous and virile response to his past. Indeed, as we shall see, the most virile and courageous response he, personally, can make.

As Bassani says, Fascism, and indubitably its tardy and unnatural concomitant Antisemitism, offered him considerable insights into the nature of the 'good' society of Ferrara. 'Gli occhiali d'oro' begins with the narrator apparently passively echoing the anonymous composite voice of this society and the judgements it passes with reference to Fadigati - on whom, incidentally, it is dependent for the diversions from boredom his surgery provides. The expulsion of Fadigati and the narrator's involuntary alienation from this society, coincide with the embodiment of this voice in the figure of signora Lavezzoli, one of the 'architects' of public opinion in Ferrara. The narrator depicts signora Lavezzoli with suggestive economy: as a somewhat domineering

wife, whose social respectability is matched by the maliciousness of her tongue. (Bassani's refusal to evaluate character analytically suggests the subterranean links between various traits which taken separately might seem, and might be, insignificant.) Naturally enough, given the times, signora Lavezzoli is a pillar of the Fascist regime, effortlessly able to apply and believe the 'doublethink' the regime desires of her. Like Giulia in 'Il conformista', she has no difficulty in condoning murder, in this case the assassination of Dolfuss - her argument is, however, rather more sophisticated. She says:

"Sono purtroppo le esigenze della politica....  
Lasciamo stare le simpatie o antipatie personali:  
fatto si è che in determinate circostanze un Capo  
di Governo, uno Statista degno di questo nome, deve  
anche saper passare sopra, per il bene e il vantaggio  
del proprio Popolo, alle delicatezze della gente  
comune.... della piccola gente come noi." (208)

Clearly, her alleged humility is nothing more than an inverted expression of her disproportionate pride in, and identification with, the grandeur of Fascism. The above quotation reveals something of the disingenuousness of her political convictions, which is only corroborated by the statement of her religious convictions. She is, in fact, totally without pity, conscience or remorse in the cold-blooded persecution of her designated victims. In her own way, she is as merciless and as pernicious as Vittorini's Cane Nero; although, unlike him, it is improbable that she could ever be held directly responsible or taken to task for her part in the atrocities latterly committed by Fascism - except in the novel. For ultimately Cane Nero functions as the executor of policies accepted and even fostered by a signora Lavezzoli. Like Cane Nero, moreover, signora Lavezzoli is a 'monster', the extent of whose perniciousness relates directly to the political and moral climate in which she finds herself. Cane Nero benefits from the times, we must

assume, by the 'legitimate' outlets they afford for his homicidal tendencies, and signora Lavezzoli by the enhanced influence of her cruel tongue. Her callous, buta-sexual, sadism is manifest both in her humiliating treatment of Fadigati (whose persecution she would probably have undertaken in any political climate) and in her 'topical' comments to the narrator's parents on the historical justifications of Antisemitism. (In other words, her persecution of Fadigati is indicative of the power she - as it were traditionally - wields in society, and her incipient persecution of Bassani's family attests to the additional power conferred upon her by the new policies of the regime.) Her resumé of an article in 'Civiltà Cattolica' reveals the same kind of uncritical, precipitate acceptance of official pronouncements in the spiritual sphere, as does her above cited approach to temporal matters: both have been 'swallowed' whole from the respective organs of propaganda - whose interrelated interests are thereby revealed. Signora Lavezzoli explains:

'Secondo il Padre Gemelli.... le ricorrenti persecuzioni di cui gli 'israeliti' venivano fatti oggetto in ogni parte del mondo da quasi duemila anni non potevano essere spiegate altro che come segni dell'ira celeste. E l'articolo si chiudeva con la seguente domanda: è lecito al cristiano, anche se il suo cuore repugna, si capisce, da ogni idea di violenza, avanzare un giudizio su eventi storici attraverso i quali manifestamente si esprima la volontà di Dio ?'  
(209)

If, in 'Una lapide in via Mazzini' the social rejection of Geo Josz lacks the official sanction of the press, it nevertheless reveals that the lessons of Fascist propaganda have been thoroughly assimilated. Hence Geo Josz's debarment from the Circolo dei Concordi is explained with a certain righteous indignation, in terms of the exercise of the democratic rights of the majority:

'E poi, e poi ! se uno non può, da casa propria, escludere chi gli pare, dov'è la libertà, che senso ha parlare di democrazia ?' (210)

This quotation is not only an incisive denunciation of Ferrarese 'democracy', but also a prime example of the use of indirect speech that characterizes Bassani's prose, and which Bàrberi Squarotti considers, derives from Bassani's anger towards, and even biblical condemnation of, the society of Ferrara. Whether the ferocity apparent in Bassani's depiction is an innate feature of the society or whether it is the predominant note of Bassani's response towards this society, or indeed whether the truth lies somewhere between these two positions, Bàrberi Squarotti's evaluation is noteworthy. After mentioning Bassani's fury, he continues:

'Di qui deriva la stilizzazione "inquisitoria" della narrativa di Bassani:...soprattutto l'uso del discorso indiretto sociale, con funzione demistificante, col quale lo scrittore riesce a far dire, dal coro della società borghese, colpevole e depositaria dell'oppressione politica del fascismo, delle leggi razziali, della complicità col potere retto dall'assassinio della repubblica di Salò, e tenace coltivatrice, anche dopo la liberazione, degli stessi mali, le sue ragioni di interesse, di viltà, di profitto, costringendola a confessare la struttura negativa su cui si regge con la naturalezza dell'autodifesa e dell'autoapologia.' (211)

However, more than just expressing the rationale of self-defence, the depiction of signora Lavezzoli (in 'Gli occhiali d'oro') and of the anonymous voice of good society (in 'Una lapide in via Mazzini') tend to suggest that a fundamental reversal of the roles of victim and persecutor has occurred. In Bassani's Ferrara, conformism has been expediently - and it seems definitively - substituted for morality and conscience. (Once again, Bassani's insinuation is not so much that the regime is responsible for this substitution, as that this tendency abets Fascism.)

Both signora Lavezzoli and the anonymous voice of 'public opinion' are quick to recognise any affront to their conformity, such as is offered either by Fadigati's appearance with Delilliers in Rimini, or Geo Josz's public and prolonged commemoration of his dead and the Nazi concentration camps - in both cases society is quick to exercise its inalienable right to avenge itself. Naturally, the attitude of bourgeois society towards Delilliers (in 1937) and the old squadristi and Fascist hierarchs (in 1946) is essentially one of empathy; even if, in the case of the former, this attitude is complicated by signora Lavezzoli's quasi-maternal admiration for Delilliers's less than admirable characteristics, and by her inconsequential observation that military service will iron out his little eccentricities. Bassani, then, suggests that in this good society some people are life members and others, like Fadigati and himself, are merely guests to be tolerated or rejected at will. Clearly, the fact of Delilliers's homosexuality (which is, as far as possible, 'overlooked' by signora Lavezzoli) should, in theory, debar him from this society; if it does not - and Bassani does not state why it does not - this is presumably because of an instinctive affinity between signora Lavezzoli and Delilliers. Both are, ultimately, predatory animals; no more, but no less, than the law-abiding, peaceable family men of Ferrara who, in 'Una lapide in via Mazzini', after 1943, voluntarily join the Brigade Nere.

Now, signora Lavezzoli's sympathy for Delilliers, the adverse reaction of the Ferrarese to Geo Josz when he reappears in his camp or refugee rags, and much of the above should be consistent with an underlying sense of guilt. It should be possible to demonstrate conclusively that the hostility of Ferrara towards its victims is a manifestation of their bad conscience, and yet, any such argument is curiously unconvincing. If the Ferrarese are initially wary of Geo Josz it is because they are anxious to avoid compromising themselves in case of

a possible Fascist resurgence, and subsequently because of their innate callousness, which extends towards their partisan dead, no less than towards Geo Jozs - as is illustrated by their unqualified enthusiasm in 1946 for a dance-hall, within a hundred yards of the spot where these partisans were executed. As for signora Lavezzoli, we intuit that it is not underlying guilt that motivates her conduct, but a more dangerous superficiality; something akin to what Arendt would call the 'banality of evil'. (212) In the absence of profound, unshakeable convictions, the disengaged ferocity of which signora Lavezzoli is capable (Bassani's technique of delineation effectively suggests that she is ferocious, irrespective of her possible arcane motivation) can be directed against any designated target rendered vulnerable by nonconformity. Conformity and nonconformity are racial characteristics, admittedly; but of the predator and victim respectively. Whereas Fadigati is hounded and eventually driven to suicide, Delilliers is forgiven a youthful peccadillo, because he is what will shortly be defined as an impeccable specimen of the 'racially pure Italian' or whatever, like Diomede Lanciani in 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana'; and with the same implicit judgement on the moral character of this physically perfect specimen.

It should be noted that whereas signora Lavezzoli condemns Fadigati for the indiscreet form his homosexual conduct assumes in Rimini (and which is imputable primarily to Delilliers) the narrator despises Fadigati's abjectness, and a certain masochistic satisfaction that he occasionally derives from his victimization. Any doubts relating to the origin of Bassani's antipathy towards Fadigati are dispelled by the later novel and spiritual sequel to 'Gli occhiali d'oro', 'Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini', in which the narrator recounts his defense of homosexuality in an argument with Giampiero Malnate. He says:

'Io.... sostenevo che l'amore giustifica e santifica tutto, perfino la pederastia;' (213)

Bassani also comments that Malnate's insensitive and uncomprehending attitude towards sexuality is 'da vero *goi*' (214) and this summary classification of Malnate illustrates an important aspect of Bassani's self-discovery, as a consequence of Fascist racial discrimination.

With the beginning of the Fascist racial campaign Bassani, a member of a seemingly well 'integrated' Ferrarese Jewish family, discovers feelings of insecurity and mistrust for the Gentile, which are perhaps atavic, but more probably inculcated - since, as he says, his father instilled into him, from childhood, a sense of the precariousness of his acceptance into Italian society and national life. (Nonetheless, this knowledge born of long experience, did little to restrain what the narrator of 'Gli occhiali d'oro' considers his father's politically naïve faith in Fascism.) At any rate, Bassani's description of the feelings which distinguish him as a Jew from his fellows is credible and courageous. As well as being a mode of exorcising these undesirable and unworthy feelings, this exposition of them in a predominantly Catholic country is partly a condemnation of prevalent attitudes, which reduced him to this level, and partly a denunciation of the facet of his own nature that Antisemitism has uncovered - and one that he finds objectionable. He says:

'io sentivo nascere in me stesso, con indicibile ripugnanza, l'antico atavico odio dell'ebreo nei confronti di tutto ciò che fosse cristiano, cattolico: *goi*, insomma... *Goi, goim*: che vergogna, che umiliazione, che ribrezzo, a esprimermi così. Eppure ci riuscivo già, come un qualunque ebreo dell'Europa orientale, che non fosse mai vissuto fuori dal ghetto.'  
(215)

Notwithstanding the accuracy of Ferretti's observation that the above cited confession by the narrator of 'Gli occhiali d'oro' constitutes the

crystallization of a ghetto complex (216) this observation denotes precisely the kind of insensitive simplification of issues that Bassani terms 'da vero goi'. This definition Bassani employs is perhaps a small statement of racial superiority, and the sole compensation he can draw from his sudden reduction in status to an inferior being, a future social untouchable; the anguish of his circumstances has conferred upon him greater perspicacity and sensitivity than is the lot of the socially secure. Manifestly, the most salient illustration of this differentiation of the racial outcast from the insider, is the naïve, ambiguous and tragically allusive conversation that Nino Bottecchiaro holds with him. Nino predicts the ineffectuality of the racial campaign thus:

"tutto finirà nella solita bolla di sapone" (217)

and explains:

"Oh, noialtri italiani siamo troppo buffoni.... Potremo imitare qualunque cosa, dei tedeschi, perfino il passo d'oca, ma non il senso tragico che hanno loro della vita. Siamo troppo vecchi, credimi, troppo scettici e consumati !" (218)

Nino's prediction, in part, confirms the charge of superficiality levelled against signora Lavezzoli and the good society of Ferrara to which Nino belongs: Bassani casts no doubts on Nino's inherent goodness, for Nino is, in his own way, as liberal as his circumstances permit him to be, but merely records Nino's statement that he cannot vouch even for himself. Further, Nino's comment that Antisemitism could flourish only if more families conducted themselves like the Finzi-Contini, reveals some of the paradoxical elements of Antisemitism for the Jew; the polemic of integration versus aloofness, conducted by Bassani's politically committed and compromised father is, ultimately, irrelevant. (219)



The narrator of 'Gli occhiali d'oro' differs from his father in his response to the racial campaign, and particularly in his reaction to the rumour, deriving from official sources, that this campaign has only been instigated for the purposes of foreign policy. The narrator describes his father's attitude thus:

'La gioia di mio padre - pensavo -, era quella del bambino cacciato fuori di classe, il quale, dal corridoio deserto dove fu esiliato a espiare una colpa non commessa, d'un tratto, inaspettatamente, si veda raccolto, in aula, fra i cari compagni: non soltanto perdonato, ma riconosciuto incolpevole e pienamente riabilitato.' (220)

The narrator's own inability to rejoice, constitutes his conscious refutation of the implications of the racial campaign, not least that his own social acceptability is dependent on the more or less arbitrary policies of the Fascist regime. But, like his father, and like Fadigati, he has grown up with a sense if not of his social inferiority, at least of a hypothetical unacceptability; a sense which in Fadigati assumed the form of impeccable discretion regarding his homosexuality, and in Bassani's family, as emerges from 'Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini' especially, constant criticism of the nonconformity of the eponymous family. This criticism amounts almost to a brand of Jewish anti-Semitism and presumably indicates an unconscious reflection of attitudes, either real or supposed, ascribed to the dominant culture. Bassani's depiction of the return to 'normality' in Ferrara would tend to suggest that a kind of selective Antisemitism was an integral part of bourgeois conventionality in Ferrara. But, despite Bassani's exposition of the ugly, morally reprehensible aspects of middle-class Ferrara, his Jewish protagonists nonetheless nurture an intense, nostalgic love for their city and particularly for:

'il passato.... il caro, il dolce, il pio passato.' (221)

While this love is obviously an expression of regret for the lost, but not entirely irrevocable, past (which can and perhaps must be preserved in the memory of survivors, like Geo Jozs and Bassani himself) it also represents a statement of Italian identity that surmounts his realization of the 'humiliating' continuity of outlook with the Jews of Eastern Europe.

In contrast to the detailed analysis accorded Bassani, it is necessary to despatch Gadda's 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana' with only sketchy comment for two reasons; firstly, the density of allusion and significance contained within the novel which defy any attempt at comprehensiveness, and then, the fact that in most respects, it is entirely consistent with the pre-war novels. 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana', however, is distinguished from previous works by its greater accomplishment, and by the manifest enhancement of Gadda's mastery of language; quite possibly the novel is, as Cesare Cases terms it:

' una "nuova Enciclopedia Italiana"' (222)

Certainly, 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana' is an extraordinarily rich conglomeration of dialects, disciplines, literary genres and cultural traditions. Gadda's adhesion to a century-old cultural tradition that is European, rather than purely Italian, is revealed by this novel, no less than by his previous works, and stands in marked contrast to the deliberately, and often justifiably, narrower horizons of the Neorealists, whose fiction, by comparison, often seems quite parochial, even, occasionally, an impoverishment of the novel qua literary genre.

Overall, the points are numerous on which Gadda diverges from the literary approach of the Neorealists. As already mentioned, Gadda seems to feel towards Mussolini a strong, personal antipathy that

frequently finds expression in invective, whereas in the Neorealist novel - and the majority of post-war anti-Fascist novels, the higher reaches of the Fascist hierarchy are depicted (when, indeed, they are depicted) as more or less 'faceless'. Admittedly, the Fascist hierarchy is extraneous to the 'real' life of the common people; and equally it is irrelevant to a vision of regeneration based on manichaean or Communistic idealism. But conceivably, the Neorealists make little fictional reference to Mussolini because of a residual awe, or more simply the habit of caution acquired under the regime, which continued to maintain some kind of 'block' around the figure of Mussolini, whereas Gadda consistently and explicitly, desecrates the fallen idol, now that the times permit him to resort to overt vituperation. In 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana', no less than in 'Eros e Priapo', allusions to Mussolini abound, and are rendered unmistakable through the device of capitalization; these allusions represent one facet of the mood and outlook that characterize and differentiate Gadda from the Neorealists. Gadda contrasts his literary technique with that of the Neorealists thus:

'il modo con cui i neorealisti trattano i loro temi è, di preferenza, quello di un umore tetro e talora dispettoso come di chi rivendichi qualcosa da qualcheduno e attenda giustizia, di chi si senta offeso, irritato. Tutti ci sentiamo offesi, irritati da alcunché... Allora la polemica aperta, la diatriba, il grido, l'ingiuria sono preferibili ai termini pseudo-narrativi di una supposta obbiettività.. Sbaglierò....' (223)

Nonetheless Gadda's fundamental loathing for Mussolini, and for everything associated, and associable, with Mussolini does not preclude a critical evaluation of the unconstitutional nature of the Fascist regime. Gadda says:

'conglomerare le tre balie - da Carlo Luigi de

Secondat de Montesquieu con sì chiaroveggente  
 capa sceverate, libro undicesimo capitolo sesto  
 del suo trattatello di ottocento pagine circa  
 l'esprit des lois - conglomerarle, tutte tre,  
 in un'unica e trina impenetrabile e irremovibile  
 camorra. In un tale evento "le même corps de  
 magistrature a, comme exécuteur des lois, toute  
 la puissance qu'il s'est donné comme législateur.  
 Il peut ravager l'État "(intendete ? ravager l'État!)  
 "par ses volontés générales et, comme il a encore  
 la puissance de juger, il peut détruire chaque  
 citoyen par ses volontés particulières:" particulières  
 a lui, cioè al sullodato corpo'. (224)

Amongst its other meanings, then, 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via  
 Merulana' constitutes an exposition of the way in which Mussolini  
 arrogated all three powers to himself, depriving the citizen of his  
 freedom before the law. The conduct of the Pirrofici case, (225), in  
 particular, and to a lesser degree, Mussolini's intervention into the  
 investigation of Liliana Balducci's murder, attest to the arbitrary  
 and deleterious application of the law practised by the Fascist regime,  
 in accordance with the primary interest of expediency. The novel serves  
 to illustrate Mussolini's adroit exploitation of events for propaganda  
 purposes. Gadda says:

"Adoperare" l'avvenimento - quel qualunque  
 avvenimento che Giove Farabutto, preside a'  
 nuvoli, t'abbi fiantato davanti il naso, plaf,  
 plaf - alla magnificazione d'una propria  
 attività pseudo-etica, in facto protuberantemente  
 scenica e sporcamente teatrata, e il giuoco di  
 qualunque, istituto o persona, voglia attribuire  
 alla propaganda e alla pesca le dimensioni e la  
 gravizza di un'attività morale.' (225)

Thus, even sensational 'copy' like the Pirrofici affair has now been  
 usurped by the Fascist regime, and employed towards the creation of  
 political capital, where previously its exploitation would have been the  
 sole prerogative of the press. But the Pirrofici affair apparently  
 also illustrates what Montesquieu considers the third kind of power  
 exercised by a ruler or government (227), while the laws passed by

Mussolini towards the goal - or façade - of the so-called 'moralizzazione dell'Urbe', including the creation of 'pattuglioni della "buon costume"' (228) are indicative of the first kind of power, and the posturing of 'Testa di Morte' as peacemaker or war-monger regarding the Corfu incident, together with the reception of the Maharajah of Scepure, are illustrative of the exercise of the second power.

Whereas the Neorealists tend, ultimately, to portray the regime and its militant supporters, as the incarnations of an innate capacity for evil, Gadda offers a relatively enlightened and unbiased account of the functioning of the regime's judicial machinery, and the conduct of internal affairs; although, admittedly, in accordance with the criteria of Montesquieu. The different focal points of the Neorealists and Gadda are perhaps largely accounted for by their conflicting outlooks; whereas the Neorealists are to a greater or lesser degree, left-wing - in an ethical as much as in a political sense - Gadda is, as Roscioni defines him 'an anarchic reactionary' (229). Gadda renounces neither his own bourgeois identity, nor a certain ethical liberalism characteristic of the enlightened section of the middle classes, which, in fact, he uses as one yardstick for measuring the shortcomings of the Fascistized middle classes. His own élitist hypersensitivity is another equally valid yardstick. Obviously, the two are used in conjunction, often with one or the other predominating; and it is presumably the second that is uppermost in his depiction of the masses, whose treatment is less sympathetic and less attractive than at the hands of the Neorealists: a small but curiously telling example of this is the fact that the Neorealists' proletarian heroes never smell, whereas Gadda, remorselessly, recounts that the peony (in 'La cognizione del dolore') and Ines, (in 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana') are quite 'high'. Nor does any kind of idealism regarding the working-classes

appear to enter into Gadda's convictions, although it might be argued that their enhanced importance in 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana', their promotion to the forefront of the action, as it were, is itself, positive - within limits. However, although the justification for Roscioni's epithet is less immediately obvious in 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana' where the identification of the author with his characters - with all this entails - is reduced in comparison to his previous works, Roscioni's observation is still pertinent. The partial effacement of the direct expression of Gadda's personal prejudices and his dislike for Fascist Italy is, perhaps, attributable to three factors: the change of the novel's location from a more or less recognizable Lombardy to Rome - which presumably held different associations for the author; the post-war evanescence of the constant psychological bombardment of Fascist propaganda which Gadda had resented acutely, considering it - as it was - an invasion of personal privacy; and the post-war reappraisal of 'neurosis' and its reduction in status from the dissident, anti-Fascist value previously ascribable to it. (Rather, as already stated, after the Second World War, psychological disorders were not uncommonly associated with Fascist convictions.) At any rate, the inconsistencies in Gadda's political convictions, acknowledged by the author in 'Il castello di Udine' (230), further accredit Roscioni's diagnosis, and seem to be, in part, a manifestation in the political sphere of Gonzalo's neurosis in 'La cognizione del dolore'. Roscioni defines this neurosis as:

' la manifestazione ultima ed esasperata di una antica disperazione e malattia dell'anima italiana: condannata da sempre a rifugiarsi nell'ambito del "particolare" dalla insufficienza e viziosità del "commune".' (231)

Whether or not this malady, which the Neorealists were at pains to exorcise,

can be said to be an Italian national characteristic, it certainly serves to explain Gadda's sympathy towards Liliana; a sympathy which is otherwise incompatible with the class and environment of 'pescicani' to which she belongs.

Gadda apparently identified in part with the noble and melancholy Liliana (who is possibly a continuation of the earlier Maria Ripamonti in 'La Madonna dei filosofi') and he identified also with don Ciccio (Ingravallo) whose philosophical opinions, regarding the 'garbuglio', he shares. But beyond a possible personal identification with Liliana, Gadda apparently equates her assassination either with the martyrdom of the mother-country he loves, or with the destruction of a condition of personal privilege. In either case, the symbolic crime is incontestably imputable to the Fascist regime. Liliana's corpse is minutely and compassionately described. Although the corpse is unmistakably real - and therefore ascribable to a real murderer, various clues tend to suggest that it is also emblematic; amongst them, one detail of clothing, and two of facial expression. They are:

'Le giarrettiere tese, ondulate appena agli orli, d'una ondulazione chiara di lattuga: l'elastico di seta lilla, in quel tono che pareva dare un profumo, significava a momenti la frale gentilezza e della donna e del ceto,' (232)

'Il naso e la faccia, così abbandonata, e un po' rigirata da una parte, come de chi nun ce la fa più a combatte, la faccia! rassegnata alla volontà della Morte, apparivano offesi da sgraffiature, da unghiate: come ciavesse preso gusto, quer boja, a volerla sfregiare a quel modo. Assassino !' (233)

'Il dolce pallore del di lei volto, così bianco nei sogni opalini della sera, aveva ceduto per modulazioni funebri a un tono cianotico, di stanca pervinca: quasicché l'odio e l'ingiuria fossero stati troppo acerbi al conoscere, al tenero fiore della persona e dell'anima.' (234)

The epithet 'Testa di Morte' by which Gadda occasionally designates Mussolini, is one clue to the identity of the author of Liliana's emblematic

murder. However more conclusive evidence is contained in the following remarks:

'Le dite erano prive di anelli, la fede era sparita. Né veniva in mente, allora, di imputarne la sparizione alla patria. Il coltello aveva lavorato da par suo. Liliana ! Liliana ! A don Ciccio pareva che ogni forma del mondo si ottenebrasse, ogni gentilezza del mondo.' (235)

Thus, the use of juxtaposition and cross-reference serve to reveal both the identity of the emblematic murderer, and the privileged condition of 'gentilezza' that Mussolini destroyed. (236)

The year is 1927 when, as Gadda says, significantly just prior to Liliana's murder:

'Ereno i primi boati, i primi sussulti, a palazzo, dopo un anno e mezzo de novizzio del Testa di Morto in stiffelius, o in tight: ereno già l'occhiatecce, er vommito de li gnocchi: l'epoca de la bombetta.... stava se po'di pe conclude..... I radiosi destini non avevano avuto campo a manifestarsi, come di poi accadde, in tutto il loro splendore.' (237)

The foundations of Mussolini's future Empire are already being laid; possibly the Corfu episode represents a preliminary foray into the field of foreign policy, but, more important, Mussolini was already engaged in establishing a gulf in domestic affairs between the propaganda of official Fascist Italy, and the reality of proletarian and lumpenproletarian Italy. In other words:

'Si stava insomma preparando quell'immagine idillica del fascismo, propria degli anni Trenta, in cui predominano i "buoni sentimenti", l'amore e la cura della famiglia, il lavoro sereno e senza turbamenti di lotte e discussioni politiche, e soprattutto senza che venisse data notizia della disoccupazione montante,' (238)

..... nor of the underworld of criminality, prostitution, gigolos, pimps and madames, etc. This schism is, to some extent, reflected in the two



focuses evident in 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana', the first of which is, loosely speaking, the social milieu of the Balducci's - otherwise the sphere of influence of the Questura; while the second is the domain of Zamira and the underworld, or of the carabinieri. The link between these two contiguous but habitually separate worlds is don Ciccio, whose use of dialect collocates him, ultimately, in the real world of Zamira, rather than in the world where disbelief is suspended. The schism between dialect and official language is shown to be far more significant than a mere question of education, when Ingravallo interrogates the commendator Angeloni; Gadda comments:

'Più Ingravallo si buttava al folklore, tra Tevere e Biferno, più lo pizzicava dicendo pizzicarolo e guaglione, più lui si ritraeva come una lumaca in guscio nel sussiego della terminologia ufficiale: che non c'entrava nulla però, in quel clima di generica diffidenza questurinesca, di brisàvola e di carciufini all'olio.' (239)

(The use both of Roman dialect and of the term 'pasticciaccio' in the novel's title suggests that natural chaos cannot be subjugated by the artifact of Fascist order.) But language, however crucial it may be, is only one illustration of the schism that has occurred throughout Italian life. After Liliana's death, Ingravallo wonders whether this second crime at 29a via Merulana could be an 'ambo' or double number and logically dismisses this possibility as too remote to merit consideration. In fact, the novel is composed almost entirely of double numbers, starting from the two police forces. (240) As Gadda explains:

'La questura si ciba appunto di storie: in concorrenza coi carabinieri. Ognuna delle due organizzazioni vorrebbe monopolizzare le storie, anzi addirittura la Storia. Ma la Storia è una sola! Be', sono capaci di spaccarla in due: un pezzo per uno: con un processo di degeminazione, di sdoppiamento amebico: metà me, metà te. L'unicità della Storia si deroga in una doppia storio-grafia, si devolve in salmo e antifona, s'invasa in due contrastanti certezze: il rapporto della questura, il rapporto dei carabinieri.' (241)

The crimes which the police are investigating have been committed by youths who are also a double number; for despite their similarities, Enea and Diomede are two separate individuals. Ultimately then, if the identity of Liliana's real and emblematic assassins are hinted at, but not openly stated, it is, admittedly, in the case of the real murderer, a device employed in order to retain the novel's suspense, but arguably also because the accomplices of Liliana's emblematic assassin have not yet been implicated, or because their responsibility has not been sufficiently clarified. Bolla says:

'Il *Pasticciaccio*, preso nel suo insieme, è una impareggiabile e seria opera di critica del costume, ma non di quello fascista solamente, si badi, di quello *italiano* che sta alla base del fascismo, del costume italiano di sempre e quindi anche di ora, di quel costume che ha prodotto il fascismo a furia di eterni inamovibili luoghi comuni: fra cui la discendenza da Roma, vanto e gloria della nazione italiana, fra cui l'indiscusso appalto delle anime e degli spiriti alla Chiesa cattolica, fra cui il mammismo o singhiozzante sdilinquinamento intorno alla "mamma". Perché mai nessuno s'è sognato di mettere in dubbio nulla in Italia, neppure la continuità del valore storico di Roma città... Il fascismo dunque non è che una logica conseguenza: in un paese che ha bandito il dubbio e l'incertezza non poteva che arrivare al potere un regime che facesse obbligo di sicurezza e di certezza.' (242)

Bolla ascertains the fact that far from being random, Gadda's use of mythical names is actually almost entirely faithful to the genealogy of the Aeneid. (243) She then proceeds to explain the significance of the use of mythical names and classical references in 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana' thus:

' se l'*Eneide* è il poema d'un regime, è la commemorazione della fondazione di un impero valoroso, la unica novella "*Eneide*", l'unica epopea della fondazione del novello impero italico, con sede non più romana ma romanesca, non può essere ch' l'esposizione di un gran pasticciaccio, ovvero il Pasticciaccio. Dove i novelli eroi sono ladri e sfruttatori e le novelle vergini donne di malaaffare....

tutti continuiamo ad illuderci che i nomi, per il fatto di essere rimasti quelli di una volta, inalterati, significhino ancora le stesse cose di 2000 anni fa. In che altro modo poteva Gadda farci vedere lo spaventoso baratro che ci separa da Roma antica e la spaventevole finzione che è stata il fascismo....' (244)

Much remains to be said about the treatment of Fascism in 'Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana' about Thaon de Revel's fiscal policies, and the discrimination against bachelors and childless women, together with Mussolini's success in creating an aura of erotism around his person, which was duly worshipped by Fascist or Fascistized Womanhood. (Gadda's theories about:

'tutte le Marie Barbise d'Italia.... tutte le Magde, le Milene, le Filomene d'Italia:' [245]

are expressed at greater length in 'Eros e Priapo'.)

It is however necessary to abandon the labyrinthine connotations of Gadda's novel at this point, in order to compare and contrast Gadda's works with Fenoglio's 'Primavera di bellezza'. For, improbably, there are various analogies between the two writers. Fenoglio's use of language in 'Primavera di bellezza' certainly has more in common with that of Gadda, than with the characteristic Neorealist prose. Lagorio comments:

'Fenoglio.... non ha paura di usare termini arcaizzanti o di piegarli ai fini del suo discorso, con esiti di "un espressionismo verace, ricco quanto mai di succhi vivi", come osserva G. De Robertis... che conferma il primo cauto riferimento della Banti alla lezione di Gadda, così come al giovane Gadda de *Il castello di Udine* riconduce "la prosa densissima, concentrata, metaforico-lirica" di Fenoglio, Pietro Citati.....' (246)

Also Fenoglio, like Gadda was a political reactionary and quite possibly, in his own way, an anarchical reactionary. For, no less than Gadda,

Fenoglio harboured a profound resentment towards the Fascist regime, primarily because it invaded his privacy, depriving him of the freedom to enjoy modest personal pleasures. Hence in 'Primavera di bellezza' on the march that constitutes the glorious culmination of his pre-military service, Johnny is roused to fury by the order to sing - since he is apparently naturally refractory to any kind of regimentation.

Fenoglio says:

'cantare nei ranghi e a comando veniva secondo nella sua scala di intollerabilità, immediatamente dopo la messa obbligatoria... Johnny naufragava nell'ombra di tutte le perdute mattinate festive, il profanato, distrutto regno dei solitari contatti con la natura e delle opere individuali.... ma no! marciare inquadrati e cantare a squarciagola dietro un maggiore squilibrato, attorniato da subalterni idioti e servili.' (247)

Born in 1922, Fenoglio was obviously too young to be able to contrast the loathed reality of the Fascist regime with the notional virtues of pre-Fascist Italy. (Whether in fact Gadda believed in those virtues or whether they served as the necessary alternative element of an unfavourable comparison with Fascist mores is, ultimately, irrelevant.) All in all, it is probable that Fenoglio's anglophilia served much the same purpose as Gadda's capricious nostalgia. Beyond the inevitable consideration of personal inclination, the pre-Fascist society for which Gadda yearned and the England Johnny - and Fenoglio - knew through its literary works were both antithetical to the regime, both reviled by Fascist propaganda, and thereby both are rendered admirable. They were, then, valid expressions of dissent. Johnny comments that the Second World War will be waged by:

"Italy at her falsest against Britain at her truest." (248)

It is, I would argue, the counterpoint that confers absolute validity on

the second term. At school, Johnny converted his class to anglophilia and preached patience because:

'"Noi difettiamo proprio di pazienza. Le democrazie invece abbondano ed eccellono in pazienza, e invariabilmente trionfano con la pazienza.'" (249)

Post-war retrospective comments on the patience of the British were habitually - and with good reason - less enthusiastic than Johnny's statement, which clearly indicates the negative, reactive motivation of his political position.

Like Gadda, Fenoglio appears to be something of an élitist, and this facet of his character is revealed by the fine Northern contempt shown towards Southern Italians, Sicilians, and Sardinians, whose judgement is not always as sagacious as his own. Thus, it is only with the invasion of Sicily that these Southerners, etc. realize that Mussolini is not merely comic, as they thought but, as Johnny maintained, criminal for leading an unprepared and unarmed Italy into war. (This North-South hostility is to some degree reciprocated by the Southerners, and stands in marked contrast to the Neorealists' class, or more commonly manichaen, division of Italy in the post-war period.) Also, like the young Gadda of 'Il castello di Udine' and notwithstanding his anti-Fascism, Fenoglio regards the army, qua institution, as an 'honourable thing' (250). After the Armistice, and the humiliating dissipation of the Italian army, Johnny returns to the Langhe:

' e procedendo si rendeva sempre più conto che riconquistare la casa significava perdere il Paese.' (251)

In the Langhe, Johnny joins a rebel military force whose ideals are synonymous with his own. The word partisan is not used in 'Primavera di bellezza' because Johnny's activities and death seemingly take place before

the creation of an organized partisan movement, and also because the latter part of the novel is a vindication of Italian, soldierly virtues. The lieutenant of this force asks Johnny:

"Ti unisci a noi per purgarti dello schifo generale che è stato in Italia ?" (252)

and Johnny answers:

"Io ho visto Roma e laggiù è stato uno schifo," (253)

Presumably, for Johnny, Fascism, and the Paese of the antepenultimate quotation, are synonyms of 'schifo'. The laconism of these references to the edifice of Fascism are atypic in contemporary literature, but, more fundamentally, they are illustrative of Fenoglio's rigorous and consistent subjugation of the emblematic to the real in his fiction.

For, more than Gadda, and the majority of novelists under discussion, Fenoglio recognized and managed to convey the intrinsic importance of his chosen period. Fenoglio's fiction stands without reference to parallels - or whatever are taken to be such - in antiquity, and without resorting to the absolute yardsticks of Good and Evil. It is as if Fenoglio alone fully realized the significance, per se, of life, death and youth in the Resistance movement, and in the war years. As already stated, Fenoglio acknowledges the grandeur of the paradox and, particularly in the partisan stories of 'I ventitré giorni della città di Alba', in a tone that is often unsentimental to the point of mordant irony, he celebrates the heroism and the pathos of human frailty. Fenoglio's treatment of the Resistance (and of the years before and after it) all but discredits the depiction favoured by the Neorealists; for his is the heroism of reality - a habitually squalid reality - and theirs is, all too frequently, an ideal of heroism. Possibly, Fenoglio was opposed to the development of an 'official' mythicized and therefore false version

of the Resistance, and possibly like Calvino, he intended to impress upon the reader the fact that no matter how cowardly, irresponsible, obtuse or even humanly dislikeable his partisans might be, they are superior to the armchair activists. Especially in 'I ventitré giorni della città di Alba' Fenoglio's inference seems to be that post-war Italy owes the partisans at least a debt of recognition; recognition, that is, of their true stature. At the beginning of 'Il partigiano Johnny' Johnny, in hiding from the Germans, becomes curious about the partisans:

'-Com'erano ? domandò Johnny col cuore in gola.  
Tutto era possibile fuorché fossero uomini come tutti  
gli altri.' (254)

In fact, Fenoglio deliberately depicts the partisans as being just like other people, specifically like other adolescents; although the portrayal of the partisan leadership appears, per contra, somewhat glamourized. The partisans' sameness is the prerequisite of their heroism, in the same way that the Nazis' humanity is the precondition of their culpability, as discussed with reference to 'Uomini e no'. Beyond this concern with the partisans' stature, Fenoglio's political convictions, revealed most clearly in 'Il partigiano Johnny' are contained in his support for Badoglio, a generic desire for restoration rather than regeneration, and a marked hostility towards Communism - which is, however, mitigated in 'Una questione privata'.

In conclusion, it is possible to argue that in the post-war years, in terms of purely literary criteria the fiction of reactionary novelists is generally more accomplished than that of the Neorealists. Further, we might concur with Asor Rosa in observing that the populism of left-wing novelists, with time, became increasingly alien to the reality of post-war Italy, and even that:

....'l'Italia continuava a produrre generazioni di

intellettuale ingenuamente fiduciosi nella funzione socialmente rigeneratrice dell'arte e della poesia. Il mondo (questo mondo: il mondo della disgregazione dei valori e della lotta di classe, il mondo delle più assurde e tragiche invenzioni dello spirito e della società capitalistica di massa) era ancora aperto per loro all'influenza benefica dei sentimenti e delle virtù popolari.' (255)

but not in censuring this - frequently deliberate - ingenuity insofar as it reveals a preoccupation with social regeneration: whether or not the form this assumes is misguided. Indeed it is questionable whether this preoccupation with social and moral regeneration could have assumed any form that was not misguided; that is to say out of step with the reality of capitalist society in post-war Italy. However, both in Italy and abroad, capitalist society does not want for apologists, and thus Asor Rosa's apparent implication that novelists with populist sympathies should concern themselves with depicting this society, is curious. The shortcomings of the more, or less, populist novel are more than offset by their undisputed merit, which resides in the assertion of collective morality rather than social expediency. And on this score left-wing novelists accomplish more than do the reactionaries (who seem to have been unwilling, or unable, to transcend their cynicism, if not aversion, towards the expression of human and class solidarity). For left-wing writers are successful in revaluing concepts that were defiled by the Fascist regime, and in providing a necessary collective alternative to cynicism. Above all, they succeeded in restoring meaning to language and in safeguarding the place of collective morality and optimism in the novel. Obviously such an achievement is, per se, far from negligible; indeed it is ultimately perhaps the outstanding, if frequently underestimated achievement of Neorealism, as a movement or school, in the post-war period.



## Notes

- (1) Cesare Pavese *Prima che il gallo canti* p.136
- (2) Pavese *Il compagno* p.237
- (3) Op. cit. p.213-4
- (4) Elio Vittorini *Il Politecnico* p.156-67, quoted in Pullini *Il romanzo italiano del dopoguerra* p.12
- (5) Renato Viganò *L'Agnese va a morire* p.233
- (6) Op. cit. p.166
- (7) Giovanni Falaschi *La resistenza armata nella narrativa italiana*, p.67. Falaschi states this with reference to the short story but it is applicable also to the partisan novel.
- (8) Simone Weil *L'ombra e la grazia* quoted in Silone *Scelta di sicurezza* p.148
- (9) Falaschi *La resistenza armata nella narrativa italiana* p.78
- (10) Manifestly, in addition to the absolute time-scale of historical events, Pratolini also introduces into *Scronache di giorni aranti* the mythical time-scale of Biblical events.
- (11) Vasco Pratolini *Scronache di giorni aranti* p.273-9
- (12) Alberto Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo* p.153-1
- (13) Vittorini *Conversazione in Sicilia* p.132
- (14) Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo* p.271
- (15) Carlo Cassola in *La generazione degli anni difficili* p.90-1, quoted in *Letteratura e ideologia* Ferretti, p.163
- (16) Pavese *La letteratura americana*, p. 226, quoted in *Scrittori e popolo* Asor Rosa, p.171
- (17) Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo* p.153
- (18) Op. cit. p.203-7, p.251. re: Cassola "In lui i miti del progressismo appaiono addirittura rovesciati: il popolo è rappresentato come vittima, non come protagonista della storia.
- (19) In fact, the contrast between the themes of Carlo Levi (*In Cristo si è fermata a Eboli* and *L'orologio*) and those of Vittorini, depends on a number of factors, the most important presumably being their different philosophies or mythologies. However, another possibly significant factor is that Levi, apparently, was an active participant in the Resistance, while Vittorini was not: he was involved with the partisan press, and therefore, arguably, may have felt the need to compensate for this shortcoming (given his own criteria) by the commitment of *Emme 2*, a protagonist whose emotional life is more or less shared by a first-person narrator, loosely identifiable as Vittorini. Also Levi belongs to the established "middle" middle class of Torino, and is endowed with a strong cultural and liberal heritage (apparent in his works) whereas Vittorini's thought, according to Asor Rosa, is and remains based on inadvertent petty bourgeois premises. In *Scrittori e popolo*, Asor Rosa contrasts the middle and upper middle-class outlook (represented by *Sadta* and the "bourgeois maturity" of Levi) with the lower middle-class outlook, or "spocchia piccolo-borghese, la gretta mentalità di classe" (p.138)

represented by Vittorini and the majority of the Neorealists. He states (*Scrittori e popolo*, p.279): 'Il grande-borghese riesce sempre a spezzare le condizioni date, ricomponendo il processo di conoscenza e di rappresentazione poetica nella direzione più corretta anche dal punto di vista storico. Il piccolo-borghese resta fermo alle cose che può toccare con le sue mani e vedere con i suoi occhi: quando non arriva addirittura a presumere, come spesso avviene, che il suo piccolo mondo sia il vero mondo, *la totalità dei sentimenti e delle condizioni umani.*'

- (20) Pratolini *Cronache di poveri amanti* p.156
- (21) Pavese 'Il comunismo e gli intellettuali' (1946) in *La letteratura americana*, quoted by Asor Rosa in *Scrittori e popolo*, p.171
- (22) An argument unconvincingly employed by Cassola given the specific circumstances: Cassola *Fausto e Anna*, p.277.
- (23) This notion is corroborated by O. Pastore in *I liberali del secolo XX* in 'L'Unità' 31st August 1948, quoted in Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.245: 'Noi siamo i liberali del secolo XX perché lottiamo per dare la maggior libertà possibile al maggior numero possibile di uomini...'
- (24) Antonio Gramsci *Letteratura e vita nazionale* p.105 quoted by Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.209
- (25) Corrado Alvaroin *Vie nuove*, 12th October 1947. Quoted by Giuliano Manacorda in *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940-1965)* p.7-8
- (26) Manacorda *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940-1965)* p.31-2
- (27) Italo Calvino *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, Prefazione p.21.
- (28) Ibid p.7
- (29) Vittorini *I gettoni* No. 8 Einaudi 1952, quoted in *Diario in pubblico*, p.399
- (30) Calvino *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, p.12
- (31) This point is in part corroborated by a somewhat curious assertion made by the narrator of *Uomini e no* (1st edition) who declares (p.165): '-Io penso che sia molta umiltà essere scrittore.

Lo vedo come fu in mio padre.....

Ascoltava quello che chiunque gli diceva, e non scuoteva il capo, dava ragione. Era molto umile nel suo scrivere; diceva di prenderlo da tutti; e cercava, per amore del suo scrivere, di essere umile in ogni cosa: prendere da tutti in ogni cosa.'

I have preferred the first edition of *Uomini e no* and of *Le donne di Messina* to the second (except where specified to the contrary) because the first editions reveal the author's creative process more clearly and also, his relationship to and involvement with his protagonist - of which more will be said. The above quotation seems to imply that Vittorini considered the writer's function as mouthpiece of collective notions, and the deference of his own judgement to collective judgement the statement of his human and intellectual humility. The notion of the writer as a collective mouthpiece is, of course, an important element of Neorealism. Perhaps the most salient example of this occurs in the conclusion of the second edition of *Le donne di Messina* where the villagers' deference to the style of life of the city-dwellers constitutes Vittorini's

abjuration of robinsonianismo: not, apparently, because he finds it intellectually and emotionally unsatisfying, but because of its discrepancies with post-war economic reality and its pointlessness and lack of attractions for the people, in the face of readily obtainable material comforts.

- (32) Vittorini *Uomini e no*, p.15-6
- (33) Ibid p.131-2
- (34) Ibid p.211
- (35) Giulaj's death is, in fact, an indirect judgement on El Paso's fraternization with capitano Clemm. I would suggest that Enne 2's assessment of El Paso's murder of Clemm and comparison to his own situation is therefore inaccurate. El Paso was, presumably, motivated by guilt, anger and remorse for his failure to kill Clemm earlier.
- (36) Vittorini *Uomini e no*, p.222
- (37) Ibid p.94
- (38) Regrettably, this insistence on the psychopathology of the Fascists (rather than the more subtle, underlying psychopathology of Fascism) still continues, not least in Bertolucci's recent film "'900"; where, for good measure, the principle Fascist figure is also a pederast.
- (39) A point made by Berto's aged Fascist school-teacher in *Il cielo è rosso*.
- (40) Manacorda *Storia della letteratura contemporanea (1940-1965)*, p.42-3
- (41) Viganò *L'Agnese va a morire*, p.207-8
- (42) Vittorini *Uomini e no*, p.245
- (43) Viganò *L'Agnese va a morire*, p.194
- (44) A curious counterpoint could be made between Agnese the emancipated Communist woman, and Alessandra, Alba de Céspedes's questionably 'liberated' feminist protagonist in *Dalla parte di lei*. Alessandra, at one point, like Agnese acts as a partisan go-between. When later asked if she was afraid she retorts: "Paura?.....  
"Perché?"
- Fu allora che tutti mi guardarono stupiti; e anch'io ero stupita d'esser guardata così. Sapevo di aver superato altri pericoli, molto maggiori, e certo anche loro li avevano superati, nel corso del lungo giorno: non capivo perché dessero tanta importanza all'avventura della bicicletta e delle bombe. In essa, tutt'al più, potevo morire.' p.500. Alessandra's surprising nonchalance is caused, apparently, by her total preoccupation with her husband, or more precisely, with her own feelings about love. Thus she reflects regarding her involvement with the partisans: 'quello era stato, soprattutto, un mezzo per conoscere di lui anche ciò che mi faceva soffrire, che m'era naturalmente estraneo, o nemico, e includerlo nel nostro amore;' *Dalla parte di lei*, p.506. Previously, Alessandra had felt excluded from the political side of Francesco's life. Written in 1949, this novel altogether by-passes the numerous important issues raised by the Resistance, to concentrate on one of de Céspedes's typically shallow, egocentric women.
- (45) Viganò *L'Agnese va a morire*, p.166

- (46) Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.202-3
- (47) Calvino *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, p.20
- (48) Rigoni Stern *Il sergente nella neve*, p.137-8
- (49) Eugenio Corti *I più non ritornano*, p.7
- (50) Ibid p.268, note 7
- (51) Ibid p.6
- (52) Calvino *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, p.147-8
- (53) Emilio Cecchi's critical appraisal of Pavese's novel *Il compagno* might be interpreted as an involuntary confirmation of a lesser preoccupation with the individual in Italian literature, that continued for a decade and more after the war. Cecchi says: "Io mi domando però come mai il suo "compagno" ha tutta l'abulia, la meccanica indifferenza, il vagabondaggio lirico del convenzionale personaggio all'americana. Di italiano non ha niente. Ma allora perché farne un operaio torinese; ma allora perché dargli figura di italiano sotto il fascismo; perché presentare questo romanzo come un documento sociale (sia pure d'arte) del ventennio?" (Cecchi *Di giorno in giorno, note di letteratura contemporanea (1945-54)* quoted in *Il compagno*, p.38. Cecchi's comments are not altogether unjustified; Pavese's novels obviously derive from American models, and *Il compagno* noticeably employs a fairly mechanical imitation of Hemingway's dialogue and other linguistic devices. However, as Venturi observes, 'Un legame assai stretto è possibile instaurare tra i *Dialoghi con Leucò* ed *Il compagno*, anche se, apparentemente, essi sono lontanissimi l'un dall'altro. La molla segreta di entrambi è l'indagine e la ricerca del destino, inteso quest'ultimo nei *Dialoghi* come maledizione e sublimazione dell'uomo e nel *Compagno* come storia esemplificante.' (Venturi *Pavese*, p.86.) Moreover Pavese is always perfectly, often excruciatingly, sincere in the depiction of his autobiographical protagonists. Certainly he differs from other novelists by his manifest preoccupation with his own personality disorders, perhaps even to the point where his sense of national identity is submerged. But evidently this does not render him less intrinsically 'Italian' (just as the Neorealists' preoccupation with a collective humanity does not preclude the possibility of their individual neuroses); that is unless - as might be inferred from Cecchi's statement - novelists were tacitly obliged to conform their characterization to specific national stereotypes; presumably of a vestigial Fascist nature.
- (54) Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti *La narrativa italiana del dopoguerra*, p.157-8
- (55) Calvino *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, p.13
- (56) Ibid p.13-4
- (57) Ibid p.146
- (58) Ibid p.144
- (59) Ibid p.147
- (60) Falaschi *La Resistenza armata nella narrativa italiana*, p.129-30
- (61) Calvino *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*, p.150
- (62) Pratolini *Cronache di poveri amanti*, p.485-6

- (63) Ibid p.104
- (64) Ibid p.103
- (65) The narrator comments, p.487: 'Basta, alla nostra strada, per correttiva al proprio bene, tutto il male che ospita con Nanni, Carlino, la Signora, creature che non subiscono infingimenti, gente che paga di persona e davanti alla quale occorre togliersi il cappello. Via del Corno non tollera i bastardi:' and Asor Rosa comments on the depiction of Carlino's type thus: 'C'è nella loro rappresentazione come un residuo della simpatia giovanile per essi provata da Pratolini, come un modo di confessare ch'essi un giorno gli piacquero, proprio per quella violenza senza compromessi, che poteva sembrare sinonimo di spirito rivoluzionario,' Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.182
- (66) Pratolini *Cronache di poveri amanti*, p.316-7
- (67) Ibid p.394
- (68) Ibid p.537
- (69) Francesco Paolo Memmo *Pratolini*, p.71-2
- (70) Pratolini *Cronache di poveri amanti*, p.492. This quotation is also indicative of a greater degree of liberation apparent in the treatment of sexuality in the post-war novel: a sense of naturality has replaced the guilt-ridden adultery characteristic of Fascist writers, and the uneasy sexual awakening of the adolescent, commonly described by dissidents.
- (71) Ibid p.516-7
- (72) Ibid p.537
- (73) Ibid p.541
- (74) Fulvio Longobardi *Vasco Pratolini*, p.39
- (75) Longobardi *Vasco Pratolini*, quoted in Manacorda *Storia della letteratura contemporanea (1940-1965)* p.122
- (76) Ignazio Silone *L'avventura di un povero cristiano*, p.34-5
- (77) Francesco Jovine *Le terre del Sacramento*, p.42
- (78) Ibid p.228
- (79) Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.242
- (80) Jovine *Le terre del Sacramento*, p.172
- (81) Ibid p.80
- (82) Ibid p.104
- (83) Ibid p.187
- (84) Ibid p.85
- (85) Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.186
- (86) Vittorini *Uomini e no*, p.69
- (87) Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.188-9
- (88) Levi's peculiarly strong sense of personal and national - or more precisely group - identity is perhaps best illustrated by contrasting it with the uneasy relationship of Bassani's protagonists to self; a counterpoint that is legitimized by

the fact that both are Jewish. Bassani consistently portrays himself as irremediably scarred, in the same way that many other Jewish writers are scarred, by the Nazi holocaust. The Levi of *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* and *L'orologio*, however, seems almost entirely unscathed; a reference to the bars of soap made of human fat occurs in *L'orologio* (p.157) another to the bereaved Teresa la Guidia and one to an ex-camp inmate whose values have become so distorted that he admires the Nazis. Otherwise such reflections as the holocaust caused Levi are generally subordinated to other considerations; the above mentioned soap represents the ultimate consequence of abstraction, and Levi's central thesis remains the need to rid Italy of depersonalized and dehumanizing institutions.

- (89) Levi *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli*, p.136
- (90) Ibid p.210
- (91) Ibid p.210
- (92) Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.192-3
- (93) Manacorda *Storia della letteratura italiana contemporanea (1940-1965)*, p.124
- (94) Levi *L'orologio*, p.166
- (95) Ibid p.167
- (96) Ibid p.301
- (97) Levi, in writing *L'orologio*, (1947-9) admittedly stood at a distance of a couple of years from the events and political climate he describes. Nevertheless his lucidity and a certain realism caused him to confront the discomfiture of his hopes for a populist reformation of Italian national life more quickly and more directly than did various other writers.
- (98) Levi *L'orologio*, p.51
- (99) Ibid p.75
- (100) Ibid p.242
- (101) Longobardi *Moravia*, p.71
- (102) Alberto Moravia *La ciociara*, p.262
- (103) Ibid p.337
- (104) Longobardi *Moravia*, p.71
- (105) The reactionary element inherent in Moravia's (prosaic) celebration of proletarian virtues is confirmed in the following passage from *L'uomo come fine* where he examines what he considers to be Pavese's decadence regarding popular speech. He says p.90: '.....il linguaggio popolare è tale non tanto perché esso adoperi modi di dire colloquiali e dialettali, quanto perché con questi modi esso esprime una concezione della vita e dei valori tradizionale, ancorata al senso comune, strettamente limitata e determinata dalle necessità naturali e pratiche; quanto dire per niente decadente e irrazionale.'
- (106) Moravia *La romana*, p.446
- (107) Moravia *La ciociara*, p.273
- (108) Vittorini *Uomini e no*, p.265

- (109) Vittorini *Diario in pubblico*, January 1947, p.297-8:  
 'L'influenza che la cultura può esercitare agendo da mezzo della politica sarà sempre molto esigua. E accade inoltre che sia inadeguata, che sia imperfetta. Tanto di più serve invece, obbiettivamente ... che la cultura adempia il proprio compito, e continui a porsi nuovi problemi, continui a scoprire nuove mete da cui la politica tragga incentivo (malgrado il fastidio avutone sul momento) per nuovi sviluppi della propria azione. Nel corso ordinario della storia, è solo la cultura autonoma ... che "arricchisce" la politica e, quindi, giova "obbiettivamente" alla sua azione; mentre la cultura politicizzata, ridotta a strumento di influenza, o, comunque, privata della problematicità sua propria, non ha nessun apporto qualitativo da dare e non giova alla azione che come un impiegato d'ordine può giovare in un'azienda.' (First published in *Il Politecnico*, no. 35.)
- (110) Vittorini *Uomini e no*, p.70
- (111) Ibid p.73. Of his own position the narrator says (p.101):  
 'Penso a volte, l'ho detto, se non sono davvero il suo Spettro; e a volte, di più, penso se non sono lui in persona, anche l'uccisore che ora è lui, così come è lui, e il patriota che è lui, l'uomo che è lui stesso. Pure io non credo di avere mai adoperato una rivoltella. Ho mai ucciso? Non credo. E la sua storia non è la mia. Io non ho che patito mentre lui ha fatto; e io di me non potrei dire nulla che sia semplice e chiaro, mentre di lui posso dire che fece questo, fece quest'altro, e subito è chiaro tutto.' Elsewhere the narrator says the character he most resembles is Giulaj.
- (112) Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.167
- (113) Vittorini *Uomini e no*, p.167-8
- (114) Vittorini *Le donne di Messina*, p.371
- (115) Bàrberi Squarotti *La narrativa italiana del dopoguerra*, p.31
- (116) Vittorini *Uomini e no*, p.232
- (117) Vittorini *Le donne di Messina*, p.266
- (118) In fact, Vittorini tends to discard the possibility a priori, insisting instead on the somewhat different phenomenon of spiritual rebirth that occurs in the village. Berto is the only writer discussed in this study who explicitly appeals for the rehabilitation of ex-Fascists. (He does this in the preface to his war diary entitled *Guerra in camicia nera*.)
- (119) Pavese *Prima che il gallo canti*, p.142
- (120) Pavese *Prima che il gallo canti*, p.119
- (121) Ibid p.172-3
- (122) Dante Alighieri *Inferno*, canto 3 l.60. p.33
- (123) Pavese *Poesie*, p.83
- (124) Gianni Venturi *Pavese*, p.91
- (125) Pavese *Il compagno*, p.280
- (126) Nor are they mentioned by any other epithet indicative of class-consciousness on the part of Stefano, or his creator. Further, the attitude of these 'Luigini' towards Fascism is conventional

in the extreme; they carp about it in much the same fashion as do the a-political against a democratic government. In other words, they would appear to be more or less impervious to - or unaffected by - the peculiar features of Fascism. However, it would perhaps be unfair to advocate comparison of Levi's *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* and Pavese's *Il carcere*, since after July 1943 expressions of anti-Fascism assumed radically altered proportions, in accordance with the enhanced awareness of the significance of Fascism, afforded essentially by its overthrow.

- (127) Pavese *Il compagno*, p.310
- (128) Beppe Fenoglio alone managed successfully to resolve the incompatibilities of romantic love and partisan activities in *Una questione privata*, (1965)
- (129) Pavese *Prima che il gallo canti*, p.133
- (130) Ibid p.148
- (131) Ibid p.280-1
- (132) Ibid p.281
- (133) Venturi *Pavese*, p.106
- (134) Pavese *Prima che il gallo canti*, p.251
- (135) Ibid p.278-9
- (136) Ibid p.155
- (137) Ibid p.173-4
- (138) Ibid p.187
- (139) Ibid p.221
- (140) Fenoglio tends to imply that the extreme youth of the majority of its participants made the Resistance movement heroic, and this consideration enhances the partisans' human stature, while pervading Fenoglio's partisan fiction with a subtle, unspoken pathos. It is an awareness of the pathos of the partisans' situation that underlies the caretaker's answer to Milton's question regarding Fulvia's whereabouts in *Una questione privata*. She says (p.13): 'E partita più di un anno fa, quando voi ragazzi avete messo su questa vostra guerra.'
- (141) Pavese *Prima che il gallo canti*, p.132
- (142) Ibid p.140
- (143) Ibid p.162
- (144) Ibid p.214
- (145) In *Le donne di Messina* a somewhat ambiguous interchange follows Turchino's assertion that Ventura and all Nazi-Fascists in killing their enemies (whose death does not ostensibly weigh upon their conscience) find they have killed their mother. The ex-partisan Toma, having participated in the firing-squad that executed Ventura, inquires (p.447): "'È avremmo ucciso nostra madre anche noi?'" to which Turchino's band unsatisfactorily reply (p.447): 'Che bisogno aveva avuto..... di ficcarsi nel plotone se non capiva l'importanza di far fuori della società civile un essere che le aveva arrecato dolori e luttie avrebbe continuato ad arrecarle dolori e ad arrecarle luttie?' They conclude that he is new to executing war criminals.



- (146) Guido Piovene *Pietà contro pietà*, p.89
- (147) Gabriele Catalano *Piovene*, p.122
- (148) Ibid p.5
- (149) Ibid p.123
- (150) Piovene *Pietà contro pietà*, p.8
- (151) Ibid p.92
- (152) Pavese *Prima che il gallo canti*, p.140
- (153) Such an assertion is improbable enough to merit quotation. Catalano states (*Piovene*, p.123.) '... si tratta di un marxismo soffocato dai residui borghesi e problematici tuttora vivi nella impostazione del libro;'
- (154) Piovene *Pietà contro pietà*, p.56
- (155) Rodolfo Macchioni Jodi observes: 'il sottofondo del romanzo è autobiografico, non solo per quanto attiene all'esperienza diretta (della Resistenza, poniamo), ma anche alle convinzioni morali, al giudizio storico e politico. Lo stesso Cassola ha ammesso tale natura di *Fausto e Anna*, considerandolo il suo solo romanzo veramente autobiografico.' Macchioni Jodi *Cassola*, p.78-9
- (156) c.f. Cassola's declaration quoted on p. 308 of this chapter
- (157) Cassola *Fausto e Anna*, p.246. 'Il partito d'Azione, disse (Fausto), era stato fondato nel 1930 da un gruppo di fuorusciti. Esso aveva il compito di rinnovare il socialismo.'
- (158) Macchioni Jodi *Cassola*, p.95
- (159) Cassola *Fausto e Anna*, p.196
- (160) Ibid p.217
- (161) Ibid p.266
- (162) Ibid p.275
- (163) Ibid p.264
- (164) Ibid p.264-5
- (165) Ibid p.268
- (166) Ibid p.177
- (167) Ibid p.276
- (168) Giovanni Guareschi *Don Camillo's dilemma*, p.154
- (169) Ibid p.154-5
- (170) Goffredo Parise *Il prete bello*, p.66
- (171) Ibid p.117
- (172) Ibid p.120
- (173) Ibid p.212
- (174) Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.223
- (175) Carlo Bo 'Paragone' No.88 April 1957 p.3-9 quoted in *La Letteratura italiana il novecento* Caretti and Luti p.628-9

- (176) Paolo Petroni *Bilenchi*, p.1
- (177) Romano Bilenchi *Una città*, p.217
- (178) Giuseppe Berto *Le opere di Dio*, p.90
- (179) Ibid p.97
- (180) Berto *Guerra in caricia nera*, p.8
- (181) Berto *Il cielo è rosso*, p.214
- (182) Berto *Guerra in caricia nera*, p.41
- (183) Berto *Le opere di Dio*, p.26
- (184) Berto *Il cielo è rosso*, p.69-70
- (185) Ibid p.11
- (186) Giampaolo Martelli *Malaparte*, p.150
- (187) Curzio Malaparte *La pelle*, p.181
- (188) Vitaliano Brancati *Il bell'Antonio*, p.24
- (189) Manacorda *Storia della letteratura contemporanea (1940-1965)*  
p.111
- (190) Brancati *Il vecchio con gli stivali*, p.113
- (191) Ibid p.121-2
- (192) Brancati *Il bell'Antonio*, p.202
- (193) Brancati *Il borghese e l'immensità*, p.149-50
- (194) Brancati *Il bell'Antonio*, p.320
- (195) Ibid p.50-1
- (196) Brancati *Il borghese e l'immensità*, p.277
- (197) c.f. the article entitled *Non amo la mia epoca*, in Brancati  
*Il borghese e l'immensità*, p.163-5
- (198) These sentiments are expressed in *Il borghese e l'immensità*,  
p.166 and p.165 respectively.
- (199) Mario Tobino *Bandiera nera*, p.132
- (200) Ibid p.14-5
- (201) Ibid p.129
- (202) Moravia *Il conformista*, p.134
- (203) Ibid p.275
- (204) Giorgio Varanini *Essani*, p.12
- (205) Ibid p.12
- (206) Ibid p.13
- (207) Ibid p.19
- (208) Giorgio Bassani *Gli occhiali d'oro*, p.104
- (209) Ibid p.105
- (210) Bassani *Dentro le mura*, p.161
- (211) Barberi Squarotti *La narrativa italiana del dopoguerra*, p.165-66

- (212) c.f. Hannah Arendt *Eichman in Jerusalem*
- (213) Bassani *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*, p.263
- (214) Ibid p.263
- (215) Bassani *Gli occhiali d'oro*, p.135
- (216) Gian Carlo Ferretti *Letteratura e ideologia*, p.47
- (217) Bassani *Gli occhiali d'oro*, p.136
- (218) Ibid p.136-7
- (219) In both *Gli occhiali d'oro* and *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini* the narrator's father is depicted with considerable compassion as a gentle, irresponsible, paternal figure. Bassani's depiction of his father (his mother barely figures in these novels) differs from the treatment and importance usually ascribed to the father-figure in the post-war novel, and also from the portrayal most commonly encountered in the pre-war novel.
- (220) Bassani *Gli occhiali d'oro*, p.167
- (221) Bassani *Il giardino dei Finzi-Contini*, p.292
- (222) Cesare Cases *Un ingegnere de letteratura*, 'Mondo operajo' no. 5 May 1958 quoted in Roscioni *La disarmonia prestabilita*, p.57
- (223) Carlo Emilio Gadda *I viaggi la morte* p.252
- (224) Gadda *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, p.92
- (225) Gadda recounts this and examines its implications in *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, p.107-10
- (226) Gadda *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, p.108
- (227) Montesquieu defines these three powers thus: 'Par la première, le prince ou le magistrat fait des lois pour un temps ou pour toujours, et corrige ou abroge celles qui sont faites. Par la seconde, il fait la paix ou la guerre, envoie ou reçoit des ambassades, établit la sûreté, prévient les invasions. Par la troisième, il punit les crimes ou juge les différends des particuliers.' *'Politique de Montesquieu*, p.128
- (228) Gadda *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, p.80 and p.54 respectively.
- (229) Gian Carlo Roscioni *La disarmonia prestabilita* p.143
- (230) Gadda *Il castello di Udine*, p.67 note 7.
- (231) Roscioni *La disarmonia prestabilita*, p.142-3
- (232) Gadda *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, p.62
- (233) Ibid p.64
- (234) Ibid p.77
- (235) Ibid p.75
- (236) In *La disarmonia prestabilita*, p.48-51 Roscioni offers an idea of the extent to which the use of cross-reference is necessary to an understanding of Gadda's work
- (237) Gadda *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, p.58
- (238) Adriano Seroni *Gadda*, p.74

- (239) Gadda *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, p.43
- (240) A fairly exhaustive list of double numbers is offered by Elisabetta Bolla in *Come leggere "quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana"* p.79-80
- (241) Gadda *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, p.177-8
- (242) Bolla *Come leggere "quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana"*, p.85-6
- (243) *Ibid* p.82-4
- (244) *Ibid* p.86
- (245) Gadda *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*, p.59
- (246) Gina Lagorio *Fenoglio*, p.79-80
- (247) Fenoglio *Primavera di bellezza*, p.31-2
- (248) *Ibid* p.96
- (249) *Ibid* p.91
- (250) *Ibid* p.16
- (251) *Ibid* p.169
- (252) *Ibid* p.171
- (253) *Ibid* p.171
- (254) Fenoglio *Il partigiano Johnny*, p.24
- (255) Asor Rosa *Scrittori e popolo*, p.279

## CONCLUSION

Obviously, it is difficult to know how to conclude a thesis that, probably rather foolhardily, seeks to analyse such a vast subject as the Italian novel and Fascism. It would be possible to draw a number of neat deductions from the foregoing discussion, but a conclusion of this sort would, inevitably, distort and oversimplify the issues involved. Thus, having examined the texts, related them to their social and historical climate, and considered their implications, it seems preferable to conclude by taking into account various other factors which bear directly upon the question of 'The Italian novel and Fascism' - although for one reason or another, they have not been included in the preceding examination of the texts.

Primarily, the truism that novelists generally fared far better in Fascist Italy than in Nazi Germany attests not only to the less rigorous enforcement of repression and coercion in Italy - and possibly to the obtuseness of the censor on occasion - but also to the dangers of adducing a direct and constant link of causality between developments in the novel and Fascism. The most obvious illustration of this is the influence on dissident writing of the American novel. The Neorealists' emulation of the American novel was indubitably, in part, a reaction against the stultifying and repressive provincialism of the regime, and a repudiation of its inhumanity both in the conduct of the Abyssinian, and Spanish, wars and in its indifference to the extreme hardship endured by the peasantry, particularly in Southern Italy. Nonetheless, there is reason to suppose that even without the stimulus of the Fascist regime, the influence of the American novel -

both stylistically and thematically - would have been considerable, given its innovatory qualities. Per contra, it would be erroneous to minimize the degree of economic coercion the Fascist regime was capable of exerting on a writer; in the case of Cardarelli, economic necessity reduced him to a ritual genuflection to Mussolini (in 'Il cielo sulle città') after almost two decades of refusal to compromise with Fascism.

Then, perhaps the most fundamental premise of this thesis is that the novel reflects both the zeitgeist and the features of contemporary reality. However, as became increasingly evident during the course of this research, this basic premise requires some qualification. The reality the novel portrays is, at best, selective; the majority of serious novelists were, naturally enough, literati by aspiration and vocation; and as such they were obviously sensible to the aesthetic dictates of fiction and chary of the apparently irremediably prosaic. Thus, in the post-war period, the prevalent tendency was to depict a somewhat sentimentalized lumpenproletariat, or peasantry, rather than a realistic proletariat, just possibly glimpsed by Corrado (in 'La casa in collina') as somewhat disappointingly, or anti-climactically or whatever, going dutifully to work the day after Mussolini's deposition. (This episode further indicates the failure of the working classes to wholeheartedly embrace the revolutionary role optimistically ascribed to them by Left-wing novelists.) And perhaps it also indicates another problematic issue: the zeitgeist among literary intellectuals and the reality of Italy were not always coincident.

Certainly, during the Fascist period, the disenchantment of

serious novelists matched a mood of disenchantment that characterized considerable numbers of the population - although it would be difficult to determine from the novel whether the disenchanted were in the majority, or whether they constituted a fairly substantial minority. The Neorealist credo, whose most accomplished exemplar probably remained Vittorini's 'Conversazione in Sicilia' proved an adequate vehicle for expressing dissent towards the depersonalization effected by the Fascist regime and an antithetical, vaguely Communistic faith in eventual regeneration. In the post-war years however, Neorealism revealed itself to be an inadequate mode of approaching the immense and urgent problems confronting Italy; whether because these problems were, and are, unanswerable in terms of the novel, or because the somewhat simplistic schematism of manichaean Neorealist beliefs vanified the examination of problems that cannot, without distortion, be reduced to homogeneity.

But it is easy enough to expound upon the flaws of a novel and to undervalue its merits, especially when, as is the case of this thesis, the writer's concentration centres upon a single aspect of the novel, and one which, particularly in the post-war period, attests to the shortcomings attendant upon the author's deliberate resolve not to detach or distance himself from his creation. Rather, an insistence on the identification between the novelist and either his fictional protagonist or the predominant sentiment of the novel was, most notably for the Neorealists, a necessary declaration of engagement. Thus, paradoxically, the merits of ingenuousness are, all too frequently, detrimental to the Neorealists' fiction - that is if we choose to judge this fiction by literary, or other allegedly -

impersonal criteria. While begging the question of impersonality in literary criticism, it is worth returning to the fact that the Neorealists seek to appeal to the reader's sane, spontaneous and profound emotions, and the ingenuousness of their manner, in so doing, is presumably intended to warrant the impeccability of their motivation. Certainly the fact that sincerity (together with altruism and various other virtues) managed to survive their Mussolinian perversions, is far from being insignificant. But perhaps still more remarkable, despite its possible explanations, is the Neorealists' overt assertion of spiritual solidarity with the oppressed; an assertion that has not been obstructed by the previously unimaginable trauma of the war, as has the articulation of compassion in the contemporary American novel. (Norman Mailer's 'The Naked and the Dead' offers an obvious and immediate illustration of the reluctance to acknowledge compassion after the Second World War.) Ultimately, perhaps the most remarkable achievement of the post-war Italian novel (and the most apposite with which to conclude this thesis) has been the attempt, despite two decades of Fascism and the experience of the tragedy of international and more or less civil war, to forge a valid collective idealism that offered a viable alternative to the menace of stagnation both in the novel and in Italian life.



## INDEX

- Abbate M., 50 (76).  
 Alianello C., 223-226, 312.  
 Alvaro C., 148-155, 170, 183, 200,  
     212, 221-222, 227-229, 234,  
     239 (10), 314.  
 Angioletti G.B., 149.  
 Arcari P., 54, 140 (2), 183.  
 Asor Rosa A., 307, 309, 310, 330,  
     346, 349, 350, 352, 362-363,  
     395, 442-443, 444-445 (19),  
     448 (65).  
 Bacchelli R., 54, 67, 148, 169-178,  
     237, 241 (44).  
 Barberi Squarotti G., 226, 334,  
     364, 423.  
 Bassani G., 138, 317, 418-429,  
     448-449 (88), 454 (219).  
 Bernari C., 180-183.  
 Berto G., 317, 326, 397-403,  
     405 (118).  
 Bilenchi R., 146, 178, 184, 188-193,  
     194, 195, 241-242 (69),  
     396-397.  
 Bo C., 397.  
 Bolla E., 437, 455 (240).  
 Bontempelli M., 55, 67, 72, 141 (41).  
 Borgese G.A., 29, 30-33.  
 Bottai G., 146.  
 Brancati V., 136, 160, 211-212,  
     214-221, 312, 313, 381, 405-413,  
     415.  
 Buzzati D., 146, 201-214, 396.  
 Calvino I., 311, 314, 315, 317, 330,  
     333-338, 358, 374, 442.  
 Campanile A., 93-94, 131, 159, 160, 162.  
 Cardarelli V., 456.  
 Carocci G., 142 (82), 143 (112).  
 Cases C., 429.  
 Cassius *alias* Michael Foot, 294.  
 Cassola C., 301, 308-309, 317, 321, 325,  
     326, 385-391, 444 (18), 452 (155), (157).  
 Catalano G., 380-381, 382-383, 452 (153).  
 Cecchi E., 447 (53)  
 Celletti T., 67, 69, 70, 104-114, 116, 121,  
     130, 134, 139, 140 (6).  
 Churchill W., 294-295 (20).  
 Cicognani B., 58-66, 133.  
 Cinelli D., 70, 77-78, 460.  
 Cockburn C., 458.  
 Comisso G., 33.  
 Corti E., 317, 332-333.  
 Corti M., 241 (69).  
 Crispi F., 112, 121, 177.  
 Croce B., 50-51 (76), 134, 354.  
 D'Ambra L., 55, 67, 70, 71, 72-73, 84, 88,  
     183.  
 D'Annunzio G., 2, 3-6, 10, 13, 14, 15-19,  
     20, 21, 44, 45, 165.  
 De Céspedes A., 446 (44).  
 D'Eramo L., 294 (6).  
 De Robertis G., 149.  
 Falaschi G., 304, 305, 337, 444 (7).  
 Fenoglio B., 302, 304, 335, 388, 438-442,  
     451 (128) (140).  
 Ferrero L., 276-291, 293, 406.  
 Ferretti G.C., 426.

- Gadda C.E., 130, 148, 161-169, 170-171, 200, 240 (25), 312, 322, 335, 408, 429-438, 439, 440, 441, 444 (19).
- Garibaldi G., 174.
- Gentile G., 50 (76), 65.
- Giolitti G., 177.
- Gissing G., 133.
- Gobetti P., 43, 48 (42), 49 (72).
- Gotta S., 55, 68-69, 70, 73, 83-84, 88-89, 91-92, 93, 95-96, 106, 108, 129-130, 131, 138, 160, 249.
- Govoni C., 70-71, 73.
- Gramsci A., 312, 395.
- Guareschi G., 312, 391-393, 460.
- Guarnieri S., 52-53, 74, 135, 160, 171, 240 (23), 241 (44).
- Howe I., 295 (35).
- Isnenghi M., 48 (48).
- Jahier P., 33.
- Jovine F., 170, 173, 174, 181, 223-225, 308, 344-349.
- Lagorio G., 438.
- Levi C., 258-259, 299, 310, 349-356, 358, 371, 444 (19), 448-449 (88), 449 (97), 451 (126).
- Lombrassa D., 106.
- Longobardi F., 343-344, 357, 358-359, 418.
- Loria A., 84, 85.
- Macchioni Jodi R., 386, 452 (155).
- Malaparte C., 33, 43, 49 (72), 145, 165, 239 (4), 312, 369, 403-405.
- Manacorda G., 144, 163, 164-165, 181-182, 214, 314, 326, 353, 406.
- Marinetti F.T., 6-12, 13, 17-20, 21, 342, 460.
- Martelli G., 49 (72), 403.
- Massa M., 79-83.
- Matteotti G., 35, 178, 180.
- Memmo F., 342.
- Milanesi G., 55, 77, 98-104, 106, 131, 134.
- Monelli P., 322.
- Montesquieu C., 430-432, 454 (227).
- Morante E., 304.
- Moravia A., 148, 155, 156-162, 181, 307, 324, 339, 356-361, 389, 417-418, 449 (105).
- Mussolini B., 1, 2, 23, 26, 34-44, 45, 46, 49 (64), 52, 55-56, 59, 68, 70, 74, 82, 106, 107, 111, 113, 116, 118, 121, 122-124, 125, 128, 129, 132, 134, 135, 136-137, 140, 142, 143, 144, 147, 172, 177, 217, 248, 249, 251, 255, 267, 272, 277, 289, 294-295, 298, 311, 322, 341-342, 351, 378, 394, 395, 401, 404, 412, 416, 417, 419, 429, 430-432, 434-435, 440, 456, 461.
- Nietzsche, 1,2,3,4.
- Nitti F., 251.
- Ojetti U., 29-30.
- Palazzeschi A., 200, 229, 233.
- Papini G., 13, 14-17, 20-21, 37-38, 45, 165.
- Parise, G., 308, 393-394.

- Pavese C., 146, 147, 154, 156, 183,  
184, 189, 193, 195-201, 299-300,  
309, 311, 312, 314, 329, 367-380,  
447 (53), 449 (105), 451 (126).
- Piovene G., 233-237, 379-385, 389.
- Pratolini V., 27, 133, 178, 184, 193-195,  
306-307, 308, 311, 324, 338-344,  
358, 444 (10), 448 (65), 448 (70).
- Remarque E.M., 30.
- Rigoni Stern M., 317, 326, 330-331,  
332, 333.
- Roscioni G.C., 432-433, 454 (236).
- Salinari C., 2, 3, 10, 18.
- Salvaneschi N., 56-58, 59, 66.
- Salvemini G., 49 (64).
- Sanguinetti E., 158.
- Sapori F., 34, 42, 56, 67, 73, 74,  
76, 87, 96-98, 106, 114-125,  
131, 138, 145, 160, 249, 258.
- Sarfatti M., 1, 23, 24, 34,  
43-46, 70, 129, 134.
- Sciascia L., 303.
- Silone I., 74, 119-120, 163, 170,  
183, 204, 226, 245-275, 277,  
278-279, 281, 291, 292-293,  
294 (6) (9), 295 (25), 296,  
(47) (49), 296 (50), 344, 352,  
406.
- Silva U., 144.
- Soffici A., 6, 21-29, 33-34, 45, 48,  
165.
- Stanghellini A., 29-30, 32.
- Starace A., 395.
- Tannenbaum E.R., 179.
- Tobino M., 324, 413-417.
- Varanini G., 420.
- Venturi G., 369-370, 374, 447 (53).
- Vergani O., 54, 55, 74-77, 78-79, 130.
- Viganò R., 302-304, 321, 323,  
325-330, 359, 369.
- Vittorini E., 95, 114, 138, 146, 147,  
156, 178-180, 184-188, 193, 201-209,  
231-232, 241 (53), 299-301, 304, 305,  
306, 307, 308, 310, 312, 315, 317-323,  
328, 342, 348, 349-350, 352, 358,  
361-367, 372, 379, 421, 444-445 (19),  
445-446 (31), 450 (109), 450 (111),  
450 (118), 451 (145), 461.

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## PREFACE

It should be stated that this thesis does not purport to be exhaustive; given the amount of potential 'material' readily available, such a prospect would be daunting for the reader no less than for the author. Omissions, however, tend to be the result of chance, rather than any kind of deliberate selectivity. Although, on the other hand, the incommensurateness of the earlier and later chapters reflects both the preponderance of relevant and revelatory fiction written by non and anti-Fascists, and, ultimately, also a personal preference for the serious novel, rather than the 'pot-boiler'. The disproportionate length of the chapter devoted to Silone and Ferrero, two writers in exile, can perhaps be justified in part by the international recognition encountered by Silone's first novel 'Fontamara' - which was, presumably, the best known contemporary fictional denunciation of Fascist Italy, and remains one of the most incisive. Ferrero has been included in this study despite the fact that he was, primarily, a playwright because, like Silone, he took full advantage of the freedom of speech which was the prerogative of the exile, to denounce the reality of Fascist Italy. His depiction of *his* society - the upper and middle middle classes - and of its penetration by the regime, provides a more or less unique insight. All too often, for various reasons, non-Fascist and anti-Fascist writers offer a falsified portrayal of these classes; not, perhaps, by ascribing improbable characteristics or conduct to them, but because the perspective of the alien, habitually hostile observer tends toward a certain grotesque distortion. Fascist writers conversely

tend towards a no less dubious glorification. Then, Silone and Ferrero convey an impression of the social and economic reality of Fascism and of the mode of the enactment of Fascist domestic policies that is indispensable to an understanding of the exercise of power in Fascist Italy, but that is otherwise generally wanting. Together, they portray the recondite face of the regime; that of its dealings with dissentients. Naturally enough, Fascist novelists make no reference to this aspect of the regime, but nor is it explored at any length in either the pre- or post-war novels of anti-Fascist writers. Certainly the public and covert conduct of the regime, the policies it adopted and the often seemingly discordant, or even antithetical, economic changes they effected, could have been documented from histories of the period, but at the cost of excluding the human insights that are the peculiar prerogative of literature. A good deal has been written about Fascism and, indeed, about the twentieth century Italian novel, but, as yet, there has been little systematic collation of the two. Perhaps it is not even immediately obvious *why* any such collation should be undertaken. There is, after all, enough factual evidence about Fascism that can be profitably studied and analysed without resorting to the - in many ways - equivocal assertions of fiction; an inevitably emotive and manipulative source of revelation. And yet, although much of what is depicted in the novel under discussion may be of questionable actuality, the writer - whose creative vision, personal qualities and values inform the novel - cannot fail to be a product of his times. Like his unliterary fellows, he may be generous, idealistic and compassionate; self-seeking, mediocre

or petty; or any more or less apparently feasible combination of these and numerous other qualities that evidently colour the characterization and help determine the course of - and especially the significance he ascribes to - his work. The interaction, conflict or accord between the qualities and values of the individual and the prevailing social - and, by logical extension, also political - order expose the novelist as a product of his times, and furnishes the contemporary human insights that could not easily be obtained from other sources.

Further the novel affords a fairly concrete exposition of the myths and illusions (both voluntary and inadvertent) together with their underpinning of emptiness and credulity that favoured the successes of Fascism and, directly or indirectly, conditioned anti-Fascist reaction before and after the Second World War. Ultimately, therefore, this thesis focuses systematically on an exposition of character rather than on the political or economic aspects of the Fascist regime. And then, inasmuch as it is possible to do so - inasmuch, that is, as the portrayal of the various writers, their characters and fiction permits - I have attempted to concentrate on accounts of normal rather than grossly abnormal personalities. For it is axiomatic - although, sadly, apparently never too frequently repeated - that the conduct of some forty million Italians, or whatever proportion at one time or another, more or less seriously declared themselves to be Fascists, cannot reasonably be explained in terms of gross psycho-sexual disorders, but only in terms of susceptibility to the promises of the regime, engendered, in part, by the vacuum underlying Italian life. The issues of susceptibility and the antidote to Fascism are central to this thesis and are

systematically examined with reference primarily to the criteria of individual and class values. In fact, the insistence on class distinctions and to a point on a class mentality (specifically a bourgeois mentality) reflects the Fascist regime's deliberate and constant manipulation of class consciousness, the exacerbation of existing class hostilities the regime accomplished (resulting in an increasing sense of humiliation and even degradation for the lower classes) and the diminution of the awareness of individual meaningfulness and worth it effected throughout the nation - but which was probably most acutely experienced by the middle classes. To minimize these features and overlook the importance of social class would therefore have been in a sense to evade one quintessential aspect of the nature of the Fascist infiltration of Italian society.

So too, I believe, would have been a more conventional approach to my subject matter; the approach I have adopted is not the most obvious one, and perhaps not even the simplest; nevertheless it seemed, and still seems, the most apposite. Much of Fascism - and of Mussolini's public persona - seems simple and indeed crude to the point of crassness. Yet to equate Fascism with crassness represents a considerable error of judgement; for Fascism made capital out of its crassness (according to Fenoglio in 'Primavera di bellezza' until as late as 1943) just as Mussolini capitalized on a certain uncouthness. Then the ostensible simplicity of Fascist policies and pronouncements serves to divert attention away from its underlying motives and goals and to conceal the collusion and mutual 'back-scratching' indulged in by the regime and the bourgeoisie. This, in turn, obfuscates the regime's erosion of the bourgeois's



sense of autonomy but equally fosters bourgeois self-interest by making it, most commonly, identifiable with the Fascist artifact of Patriotism. And then, most importantly, the concentration of Fascists and anti-Fascists alike on the peculiarities of Fascism tends to negate the subtle all-pervasive exploitation of the familiar, the usual, the conventional and even the allegedly normal, by which the regime assured itself of the acquiescence of the middle classes; while the peasants and urban workers were subjugated by the proliferation of 'normal' as much as 'abnormal' injustices.

Overall, the relation between Fascist pronouncements and the Fascist reality is a complex and tortuous one which I believe would have been distorted or oversimplified by a structural, analytical approach. Nor is it my intention in this thesis to discuss different Fascist structures, but rather to explore the consciousness of numerous creative intelligences and *through them* to adduce a composite picture of the edifice of Fascism, and of the outlook and predicament of the individual before, during, and after the Fascist period. This intention then determines the form this thesis has assumed. The views and values of various novels and novelists are compared or contrasted so as to reveal the effects produced by Fascism on individuals of different classes, political opinions, cultural and geographical backgrounds and ages.

The first chapter deals with various manifestations of the Superuomo, outlining its positive aspects and indicating the underlying, motivating inadequacies which largely predetermined its failure. The selection and ordering of the various texts is intended to convey the idea of personal insignificance - intolerable to its

holder - that necessitated the projection of a glorified self. The dislocation - and tacit explosion of these fantasies of superhumanity - effected by the First World War is shown to aggravate the individual's dilemma and cause him to desire a more concrete, if hardly more viable, resolution of his problems. And 'Lemmonio Boreo', like 'Rubè', points to a certain moral indelicacy that the - Superhuman - Mussolini (embodied and) profited from when, by the intrusion of his persona into Italian government, he providentially 'saved' the nation from confronting the reality of the post-war situation.

The second chapter examines the self-image and Weltanschauung the middle classes found acceptable and sought to propagate. The conventional bourgeois conception of the *institutions* of Family, Religion, Patriotism, the Place of the Lower Orders (and the institutionalized aberration of adultery) is examined through the accounts of various authors, and the case is made for the irreproachability of bourgeois preoccupations. This includes an attempt to assess the degree of responsibility for Fascism of the conventional (and conformist) bourgeoisie; a statement of the way in which conventional bourgeois values were enlisted to enhance the public image of Fascism; and a detailed exposition of the nature of Fascism by three ardent apologists who, however, portrayed three somewhat different, but more or less orthodox, Fascist States, in accordance with their divergent lights... Finally, the bourgeois claim to social irresponsibility is re-evaluated and its reprehensibility outlined.

The third chapter discusses non and anti-Fascist dissent prior to the Second World War, but rather than simply enumerating

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manifestations of dissent, it emphasizes how, and to what degree, the Fascist regime grated on and ostensibly evirtuated the moral and emotional resources of the caring and the cultured. Initially, as an illustration of the polarization to which, for a number of reasons, dissentients were driven, I have contrasted 'Gli indifferenti' (probably the archetypal depiction of bourgeois indifference under Mussolini) with Alvaro's novella about the urgency of the peasant's life. Several expressions of personal insecurity and of the erosion of a sense of individual meaningfulness are considered and the hollowness of Fascist social institutions is uncovered. Vittorini's regenerative identification with the underprivileged and Palazzeschi's personal solidarity with the humble are compared so as to reveal the influence of the regime against which both novelists were reacting. The chapter ends with a counterpoint between their ingenuousness, and the egoism of Piovene's creatures who, seemingly, have been contaminated by the bad faith of Fascism.

Since the content of the fourth chapter has already been reviewed, it only remains to be said that Silone and Ferrero both chronicle the (official and unofficial) normalization of injustice, various intimidatory techniques the regime employed, and also personal qualities and circumstances that were reconcilable with the Fascist reality and those the regime deemed inimical to itself.

Finally the somewhat unwieldy proportions of the fifth chapter reflect a personal literary preference, but also a profound conviction (which developed spontaneously during the course of this thesis) that although the previous chapters convey something of the human foundation of Fascism's appeal and of the dissent it provoked,

nevertheless a vital aspect of the question has been left untouched; that of retrospectively evaluating and coming to terms with Fascism. In a sense the subject is so large as to require a separate thesis, but in another more important sense to have minimized its importance would have been tantamount to refuting the validity of my own argument. For the significance of Fascism in human terms clearly did not cease to matter with the fall of Fascism: for, while prior to, and during the first few years of Mussolini's rule, it had not been given to the majority to foresee the totalitarian evolution of the Fascist State, a State whose success had been in part promoted by their outlook, it is, or should be, of the greatest consequence to everyone to eliminate the roots of Fascism. Certainly, anti-Fascism is the most obvious and ostensibly most efficacious tool; however, it is my belief, that the success of the *kinds* of anti-Fascism portrayed in the novel was quite limited. A natural reluctance to probe certain wounds too deeply, and a compensatory tendency to polarize the Italian nation into innocents and others, with a predictable idealization of the former, meant that it could not have been otherwise. What I have, then, attempted in this final chapter is to outline the problems of regeneration as they emerge from the approaches of the different novelists, with regard to the changed perspective they assumed with the passing years, and changing historical situation of post-war Italy. Accordingly, I have outlined some of the problems of redefining collective identity and coming to terms with the trauma of the war, and the reasons why a number of novelists resolved these by a Communist engagement. I have attempted to do justice to the generosity of the

Neorealists' vision and to the considerable positive value of the preoccupation with regeneration. Alternative interpretations of the significance of the regime and Fascism are considered and set against one another. The shortcomings of regenerative fiction are examined and the importance of Pavese's protagonist Corrado (in 'La casa in collina') is assessed and counterpointed with the Neorealists' wittingly manichaean fiction. Then, so as to confer a valid perspective on this enumeration of the failings of the relatively Left-wing novelists, their stance is contrasted with that of the reactionaries, and various equivocally motivated evasions of responsibility and self-knowledge are discussed. Conflicting assertions of the normality and abnormality of Fascist loyalties are evaluated. The chapter ends with Bassani's and Gadda's indictments of Fascistized society and Fenoglio's *unmythologized* account of the beginnings of the Resistance.

Then, it is necessary to acknowledge the element of personal prejudice, which inevitably infiltrates any discussion, and therefore particularly a discussion of a highly emotive nature, like that of Fascism. Certain facts are then perhaps worth stating. Firstly, before beginning this thesis, and in ignorance of Fascism, I was unaware of the gamut of persuasions and positions that the term 'Fascist' was obliged to cover and considered it uniformly opprobrious in all its applications. I fell into the regrettably common error of assuming that all Italians were Fascists, rather than realizing that the majority of Italians were, of necessity, under a coercive regime, ostensibly Fascistized to a certain degree. Secondly, having recognized this error, I attempted to deal with Fascist novels and

the novels prefiguring Fascism in a spirit of open-minded inquiry; but this attempt was frequently undermined by the novels' inherent shortcomings. For they are commonly badly written, trite, tiresome and superficial.

Not, of course, that these qualities are peculiar to the Fascist novel; they are, if anything, characteristic of 'pot-boilers' and ephemeral bestsellers everywhere. In 'Bestseller The Books Everyone Read 1900-1939' - whose eponymous claim is based on the author's use of the bestseller lists for the period - Claud Cockburn reviews a number of popular British novels, which could hardly be said to be less Fascistic than their Italian counterparts. Both were written for an essentially reactionary middle-class audience, and both are seemingly equally superficial. In England, no less than Italy, it would appear that the pot-boiler served to reinforce prejudices and to exclude the spectre of self and class doubt; whose execrability for the bourgeoisie can be deduced from the antithetical preoccupation with family, and any ostensible manifestation of security or continuity, including Fascism. Paradoxically (or perhaps logically) the Fascist novel is possibly marginally more 'moral' than its British counterpart, on the whole less anti-Semitic and also possibly less racist. On the other hand, it might be argued that the Fascist novel offered a unique 'legitimate' outlet for sadistic impulses through the portrayal and justification of the exploits of the squadristi, but also through the overall vogue enjoyed by bellicose imagery.

Violence is, moreover, one of the pivotal issues on which the pot-boiler radically diverges from the serious novel. The small

space allotted specifically to the justification of Fascist terrorism suggests that the middle classes were never fundamentally troubled by doubts regarding the right of the Fascists to resort to allegedly defensive, or surgical - that is to say therapeutic - violence. It seems probable that after exposure to bloodshed and death on a large scale, over the years of the First World War, the middle classes were, at best, indifferent to the post-war acts of violence, which were directed against their 'class enemies'; especially when the perpetrators of these acts were their own children. Certainly, it is thus that the squadristi are commonly depicted by anti-Fascist novelists after 1945. Serious novelists sought to restore the aberrant and despicable connotations of violence and sadism to fiction, and in so doing frequently overstated - and vitiated - their own case, by reference to Fascism as the ultimate incarnation of absolute Evil, or utterly inhuman sadism or whatever.

By contrast with the pot-boiler then, the works of serious novelists - whose ranks number only anti-Fascists and non Fascists of all shades of opinion - cannot fail to be attractive. Their work is technically more accomplished and innovative, and also more profound. Further the ethical judgements of the anti- and non Fascists are habitually closer to the currently accepted norms in contemporary liberal society.

In fact, I would argue that the pot-boiler and the serious novel are ultimately two overlapping but diverging genres. Where the two genres are most divergent the pot-boiler tends to mirror predominant attitudes and prejudices (the questionable criteria of 'social morality' and personal irresponsibility) whereas the serious

novel strives to impress upon the reader new perspectives and contemporaneously valid ethical concerns. Hence it is logical that the Fascist and pre-Fascist pot-boilers (in which category I would include most of D'Annunzio's prose fiction and Marinetti's 'Mafarka le futuriste') inadvertently, but consistently, depict the connotations of the authoritarian family, and notably a real father-figure who falls short of expectation; often the unrealistic expectation of conventional morality. While the election of the child's point of view by dissident writers under the Fascist regime constitutes an implicit refutation of the posturing of paternalism - and, by extension, Mussolinian Paternalism. In contrast to the pot-boiler's insistence on human weakness - and chiefly 'the weakness of the flesh' - which readily translates itself into a vindication of social inertia, the serious novel is inspired by, and at best inspires, a collective idealism whose goal is the amelioration of human society.



Chapter 1. Summary

- 1) Fabrication of Mussolinian myth. p1.
- 2) D'Annunzio's assimilation of Superuomo. p2.
- 3) Dannunzian Superuomo in *Trionfo della morte* and *Il fuoco*. p3.
- 4) Poet as Superuomo. p4-5.
- 5) *Mafarka le futuriste* as subversion of bourgeois novel and oppugnation of conventional values. p6-7.
- 6) Futurist exaltation of war and violence. p8-9.
- 7) Attempt to overcome mortality through volition. p10-12.
- 8) Apotheosis of Futurist: sterility of Futurist beliefs and Superuomo myth. p12.
- 9) Positive aspects of Superuomo myth. p13.
- 10) Unquestioned irrationality of Superuomo myth in *Un uomo finito*. p14-15.
- 11) Underlying and unacceptable inadequacies necessitating D'Annunzio's and Papini's projection of superhuman figure. p15-17.
- 12) Papini's authoritarianism. p17.
- 13) Sado-masochistic attitude towards women of D'Annunzio's and Marinetti's Superuomini. p17-18.
- 14) Exaltation and appeasement of idealized Mother-figure. p18-20.
- 15) Papini's discovery of regionalism. p20.
- 16) Regionalism as valid emotive expression of national identity during First World War. p20.
- 17) Failure of projection of cerebral Superuomo. p21.
- 18) *Lemmonio Boreo*, a metamorphosed Superuomo, p21.
- 19) supreme arbiter of human affairs. p22-23.
- 20) Prefiguration of Mussolini. p23.
- 21) Integrity and justification of authoritarianism. p23-24.
- 22) Lemmonio's band as forerunners of Fascist squadristi. p25.
- 23) Merits of Socialism. p25-26.
- 24) Emotive, exploitative potential of oratory. p26.
- 25) Route of Socialists. p25.
- 26) Assertion of efficacy of terrorism. p27-28.
- 27) Championship of equivocal notion of 'decency'. p28.
- 28) Symbolic value ascribed to rape by Silone. p28.
- 29) Chastening of an 'unpatriotic' writer. p29.
- 30) Influence exerted by Fascism on diaries and novels recounting experience of First World War. p29-30.
- 31) Cautiously pro-Fascist stand of *Rubè*. p30-31.
- 32) Wartime transformation of faint-hearted Interventionist. p31.
- 33) Society's obligation towards soldier. p31-32.
- 34) Comradeship formed in war. p32.
- 35) *Rubè's* -apolitical- exaltation of violence. p32-33.
- 36) *Dux*: Sarfatti's attempted legitimization of political reality. p34.
- 37) Conferment of conventional respectability on Mussolini. p35.
- 38) Fascist artifact of national identity. p36.
- 39) Mussolini's universal appeal. p36.
- 40) Exploitation of Socialist language and concepts by Papini and Fascism. p37-38.
- 41) Fascism: man's right to assert and protect himself. p38-39.
- 42) Definition of Mussolini's regime as chivalrous, strong government. p39.

- 43) Mussolini:supreme realization of Superuomo myth, p39.
- 44) who compensates for subjects' sense of inadequacy. p40.
- 45) The paragon. p40-42.
- 46) Ambiguity of bourgeois deference to Mussolini's background. p42-43.
- 47) Malaparte's refutation of benevolent façade of Fascism. p43-44.
- 48) Mussolini's prevalence over D'Annunzio. p46.
- 49) Conclusion. p44-46.

Chapter 2. Summary

- 1) Definition of personal Fascism. p52-53.
- 2) Audience for whom Fascist and pro-Fascist pot-boiler destined. p.53-55.
- 3) External constraints imposed on novelist and positive contribution required of him by regime. p55-56.
- 4) Reconcilableness of novel's values with Fascism; prerequisite of acceptability. p56-58.
- 5) Identifiability of *Villa Beatrice* as Fascist novel. p58-59.
- 6) Conformation of characters to various stereotypes. p59.
- 7) Ascendency of new bourgeoisie. p59.
- 8) Convention of obloquy. p59-62.
- 9) Development of typically Fascist paterfamilias. p62-63.
- 10) Reduction to conformity by agent of Divine Authority, p63-65.
- 11) and lack of human charity. p66.
- 12) Ritual genuflections to Fascism. p66-69.
- 13) Appropriation by regime of conventional conservative values. p69 including
  - 14) Family, p70.
  - 15) Heroism, p70-73.
  - 16) Novelist's refutation of values of his art. p.72.
  - 17) Fascism as reinforcement of social and moral stance. p73-74.
  - 18) Vergani's depiction of ineluctable hierarchical order of society. p74-77.
- 19) Cinelli: the inadvisability of attempting self-betterment. p77-78.
- 20) Statical society in *Levar del sole*. p78-79.
- 21) *L'ospite pazzo*; expediency of voluntary conformity. p80-81.
- 22) Disasters attendant on unconventional assertions of individuality. p81-83.
- 23) Social displacement of aristocracy. p83-84.
- 24) Hierarchy of affection. p84.
- 25) Implications of parent-child bond. p84-88.
- 26) Supremacy of parental bond over marital bond. p88-89.
- 27) Depiction of adultery. p89-91.
- 28) Family as refuge from vice and chaos. p92.
- 29) Catholic dogma as bastion of institutional morality. p92-93.
- 30) Campanile's frivolous treatment of adultery. p93-94.
- 31) Bourgeois's image of self as philanthropist, p94-96.
- 32) and use as endorsement of Fascism. p96-98.
- 33) Milanese's celebration of aggressive, unpaternalistic Fascism. p96-98.
- 34) His *Weltanschauung*, p99-104.
- 35) and vilification of Republican forces fighting in Spanish civil war. p102-104.
- 36) Woman as stable foundation of family and Fascism in *Tre tempi*. p105-106
- 37) Opportunities for self-betterment; the regime's antidote to Socialism. p106-108.
- 38) Topicality of *Tre tempi*: antisemitism, sanctions, autarky. p108-109.
- 39) Two women's contributions to prevalence and achievements of Fascism. p109-110.
- 40) Peasantry as Italian *Herrenvolk*. p109-110.
- 41) Significance of conquest of Abyssinia. p111.
- 42) Historical justification of colonialism. p111-113.

- 43) Exposition of past injustices suffered by Italian migrants as validation of regime. p113.
- 44) and reward of nationalistic virtue. p114.
- 45) More traditional (but equally topical) depiction of regime's domestic achievements in *Sotto il sole*. p114-115.
- 46) Sublimation of Fascist violence. p115.
- 47) Paternalism of regime and of provincial philanthropist, p116.
- 48) eliminating need for thought. p116-117.
- 49) Equation of obedience and authority. p117-118.
- 50) Ultra-conformity in schoolroom. p118.
- 51) Response to Mussolini's visit. p118-119.
- 52) Privileges accorded ex-servicemen by Fascist regime. p119-120.
- 53) Fascist Italy as Second Roman Empire. p121-122.
- 54) Mussolini's exploitation of peasants' awareness of conformity. p122-123.
- 55) Saponi's panegyric on Mussolini and regime. p123-125.
- 56) Fascist conquest of death. p125,
- 57) Negativity of values of Fascist and pro-Fascist novel. p126.
- 58) Concluding remarks: Fascist Italy envisaged as best of all possible worlds. p127.
- 59) Adhesion to Fascism of various social strata. p128.
- 60) Fascist and pro-Fascist novel as reaction against feelings of insecurity. p128.
- 61) Bourgeois's sense of personal futility. p129.
- 62) Recency of bourgeois's ascendancy. p129-130.
- 63) Political default, p130-132.
- 64) and preoccupation with attractive mirror image. p132-133.
- 65) Motives for allegiance of middle classes to Fascism. p133-134.
- 66) Fascist fosterage of inertia and erosion of bourgeois's sense of self. p135-136.
- 67) Regime's obfuscation of its policies. p136-137.
- 68) Disingenuousness of argument of bourgeois irresponsibility. p137-139.

### Chapter 3. Summary

- 1) Prescribed themes and mood of Fascist literature. p145.
- 2) Definition of dissent. p145-146.
- 3) Fascismo di sinistra. p146.
- 4) Preoccupations of dissident novel. p147-148.
- 5) Approbation accorded *Gente in Aspromonte* by literary critics. p149.
- 6) Refutation of idyllic life of peasants in *Gente in Aspromonte*. p149
- 7) and expression of human solidarity. p150.
- 8) Subordination of Southern, to Northern Italy in *Vent'anni*. p150-152.
- 9) Southerners' capacity for endurance. p152.
- 10) Injustice of peasants' condition. p153.
- 11) Innate uprightness of peasant and irrelevance of institutionalized injustice. p154-155.
- 12) Ascendency of speculating over property-owning, bourgeoisie in *Gli indifferenti*. p156-157.
- 13) Spiritual sterility of bourgeoisie. p156-158.
- 14) Moravia's use of clichés. p158-159.
- 15) Hostile critical reception of *Gli indifferenti*, p159.
- 16) occasioned by demystification of sensuality. p159-161.
- 17) Sensuality as abdication of responsibility. p161.
- 18) Gadda's 'inaccessibility', p162.
- 19) Eccentricity, p163.
- 20) Antipathy to Fascism and complementary bourgeois vacuousness. p163-167.
- 21) Non-resignation as resistance, and predicament of isolated dissident. p167-168.
- 22) Preoccupation with mental disturbance and alternative depiction of mother-figure. p168-169.
- 23) *Il mulino del Po*: celebration of peasant virtue and fortitude in containing adversity. p170-173.
- 24) Unhappy consequences for peasant of Unification of Italy. p173-174.
- 25) Dissident explanation of lessons of century of Italian history. p175-178.
- 26) Fascismo di sinistra and superiority to Communism in *Il garofano rosso*. p178-180.
- 27) Regime's dupery of youth. p179.
- 28) Novel's unacceptability to censor. p180.
- 29) *Tre operai* contribution to creation of anti-heroic climate. p180-181.
- 30) Denunciation of workers' conditions. p182-183.
- 31) Arcari's exaltation of paternity. p183.
- 32) Dissident examination of child's alienation from parents. p184-185.
- 33) Indictment of regime's social policies: *Erica e i suoi fratelli*. p185-187.
- 34) Sexual abuse of child. p187-188.
- 35) Insecurity vis-à-vis parents of Bilenchi's protagonist. 188-189.
- 36) Evocative quality of 'La siccità' and 'La miseria'. p189.
- 37) Antithetical attitudes of 'La siccità'. p189-191.
- 38) Suppression of independence in 'La miseria' and collusion of victim. p191-193.

- 39) Pratolini's statement of culpability for war. p194.
- 40) Pavese's depiction of depersonalization. p195, 200.
- 41) Disorientation and devitalization of town dweller in 'La spiaggia'. p196-199.
- 42) Meaningfulness of country and vitality of peasant. p199.
- 43) Debt to American literature. p200.
- 44) Emotional anaesthesia of *Conversazione in Sicilia*. p201-202.
- 45) Rediscovery of childhood, primal emotion and human solidarity with vulnerable. p203-204.
- 46) Refutation of Fascist myth of glorious death. p205-208
- 47) Statement of human and social commitment. p209.
- 48) Desirability of heroic death in *Il deserto dei tartari*. p210-214.
- 49) Closed world of Brancati's fiction. p214.
- 50) Unhappy consequences of unemployment.
- 51) Fascism as life-denying force. p215-216.
- 52) Illusion as means of filling empty existence. p218-220.
- 53) Delineation of totalitarianism in *L'uomo è forte*. p221-222.
- 54) Jovine's optimistic assertion of supremacy of human and Christian love. p223.
- 55) Alianello's and Jovine's alternative Southern depiction of Unification of Italy. p224.
- 56) Alianello's Catholicism. p225-226.
- 57) Characteristics of totalitarian society. p227-228.
- 58) Indomitability of will of fragile dissident individual. p229.
- 59) Palazzeschi's solidarity with pure of heart and unpretentious. p230-231.
- 60) Adjustment of pre-war generation to changed world. p232-233.
- 61) Piovene's depiction of bad faith. p233-237.
- 62) Conclusion. p237-238.

#### Chapter 4. Summary

- 1) Correspondence between *Silone's* life and fiction. p245.
- 2) Primitive Christianity or utopianism. p246.
- 3) Characterization of peasants in first and revised editions of *Silone's* early novels. p246-248.
- 4) Urgency of exile to denounce Fascist policies. p248-249.
- 5) Political career of Peppino Goriano. p249-250.
- 6) Fascist mobilization of dispossessed. p250.
- 7) Regime's erosion of integrity and fosterage of parasitism. p250-251.
- 8) Relationship of Church and regime. p251-254.
- 9) Church as traditional agent of repression. p254.
- 10) *Fontamara* as symbol and allegory of regime's exercise of power and discovery of peasantry. p254-255.
- 11) Refutation of regime's credit abroad. p255-256.
- 12) Fascist institutionalization of injustice. p256-257.
- 13) Falsity of Fascist claim to be welfare state, p257-258.
- 14) or modern industrialized state. p259.
- 15) Fascist counterfeit of national identity. p259-260.
- 16) Consequences of Unification of Italy for peasants and relation with town. p260-261.
- 17) Emergence, under Mussolini, of new, capitalist, class. p262-264.
- 18) Abuse of language and power. p264.
- 19) Regime's façade of popular government and underlying fear. p265.
- 20) Fascist fomentation of disunion. p266.
- 21) Simulacrum of social reform, p266-267.
- 22) and celebration of nominally enhanced welfare of peasants. p267-268.
- 23) Peasant's assertion of regime's illegality. p268-269.
- 24) Transition of *Silone's* protagonist from doctrine to faith, p269.
- 25) and unity effected by Berardo's death. p269-270.
- 26) Peasant's evaluation of their circumstances. p270.
- 27) Denunciation of regime's use of torture, rape and murder. p271.
- 28) Symbolic significance of rape. p272.
- 29) Underestimate of popularity of regime. p272.
- 30) Logicality of escalation of violence against Fontamarese. p272-274.
- 31) Difference between regime and previous ruling class. p273-274.
- 32) Politic divorce of words of official Italy from reality. p274.
- 33) Fascism as logical consequence of previous order. p275.
- 34) 'Monolithic' façade: menace of dissident individual. p276.
- 35) *Ferrero's* contrasting evaluation of dissident's capacity. p277.
- 36) Privilege of *Ferrero's* position. Levity of family's persecution. p277-278.
- 37) Value of his testimony: counterpoint with *Silone*. p278-279.
- 38) Substitution of obedience to law and Italian accommodation to 'normalization'. p279-280.
- 39) Denunciation of Fascist Italy's international admirers and Italian bourgeoisie. p281-282.
- 40) Similarities between fictional state delineated in *Angelica* and Fascist Italy. p283.
- 41) Orlando and shortcomings of uprightness. p283-284.
- 42) Collusion of citizens with dictatorial Regent. p284-286.
- 43) Refractoriness of bourgeoisie to democracy. p286-288.

- 44) Bourgeois mandate for Regent's government. p289.
- 45) Creation of tyrant as compensation for subjects' inadequacies. p289-290.
- 46) Importance of enjoyment of misfortunes of others. p290-291.
- 47) Man's predicament in unlawful regime. p291.
- 48) Conclusion. p292-293.



Chapter 5. Summary

- 1) Urgency of redefining collective identity of nation and refuting Fascist myths. p298-299.
- 2) Irrational and rational grounds for subscribing to (populism and) Communism. p299-301.
- 3) Hostility towards English and development of Communist mythology in *L'Agnese va a morire*. p302-303.
- 4) Distortion of perspective of war. p303-305.
- 5) Paradox of Neorealists' manicheism. p305-306.
- 6) Nature of populism. p307-308.
- 7) Divorce of populism and modern industrialized society. p307-308.
- 8) *Engagement* as antidote to malady of Fascism. p308-312.
- 9) Communism seen as sole genuine democracy. p311-312.
- 10) Post-war *moral* judgement of reactionary novelists. p312-313, 314-315.
- 11) Importance of Neorealism. p313-314.
- 12) Neorealists' destitution of precedents and certainties. p315.
- 13) Need to communicate and different levels of 'reality' depicted. p316-317.
- 14) Dialectic of death and happiness in *Uomini e no*. p317-318.
- 15) Conferment of meaning on death. p319-320.
- 16) Right of offesi to resort to violence and problematic statement of oppressor's humanity. p320-322.
- 17) Characterization of Mussolini and Nazi-Fascists in anti-Fascist novel. p322-324.
- 18) Necessity of establishing guilt and moral impeccability. p325-326.
- 19) Vergani's unproblematic faith in innate altruistic Communism. p326-327, 329.
- 20) Depiction of collaborators in *L'Agnese va a morire*. p327-328.
- 21) Celebration of generosity of bourgeois Communist. p329-330.
- 22) Neorealists' class uneasiness. p330.
- 23) Rigoni Stern as personification of Neorealists' "Man". p330-332.
- 24) Corti's faith in Italian national character, denunciation of Russian brutality. p332-333.
- 25) Contribution of psychiatry to regeneration of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*. p333-334, 338.
- 26) Transcendency of manichean Neorealist premises. p334-335.
- 27) Irrelevance of ideology for Calvino's lumpenproletariat. p336.
- 28) Calvino's interpretation of 'History'. p337.
- 29) Penetration of motivation of Fascists in *Cronache di poveri amanti*. p338-340.
- 30) Bourgeois non-responsibility. p340-341.
- 31) Microcosm of via del Corno. p341-342.
- 32) Importance of not antagonizing petty bourgeoisie. p343.
- 33) Optimism of Pratolini and Jovine. p343-344.
- 34) Allegorical element of *Le terre del Sacramento* and paradox of peasants' situation. p345-347.
- 35) Depiction of Fascists. p347.
- 36) Jovine's Christian conception of regeneration. p348.
- 37) Levi's treatment of Southern peasantry and anti-Fascism. p349-350.
- 38) Fascism as political instrument of 'Luigini', need for 'Contadino' revolution. p350-353.
- 39) Definition of Contadini and Luigini. p353-354.

- 40) Post-war erosion of idealism and nature of Levi's solidarity with peasants. p354-356.
- 41) *La ciociara*: Moravia's contribution to Neorealist, regenerative literature. p357-359.
- 42) Class as determinant of reprehensibility. p359-360.
- 43) Moravia's heritage of disenchantment. p360.
- 44) Vittorini's failure to adapt ideology to post-war reality. p361, 364-367.
- 45) Failure of intellectual to merge with people. p362-363.
- 46) Fascism of personal conduct. p363-364. Unpardonableness of Nazi past. p366.
- 47) Alter egos in Pavese's fiction. p367-368.
- 48) Condemnation of abdication of moral responsibility in *Prima che il gallo canti*. p368-369.
- 49) Marxism and Christianity as instruments of enlightenment. p370-371.
- 50) Counterpoint with Vittorini's fiction. p372.
- 51) Pavese's portrayal of *Zeitgeist* of war years. p372-373.
- 52) Moral responsibility towards dead. p373-375.
- 53) Guilt of various generic figures. p376-379.
- 54) Limitations of culpability of Germans. p376-379.
- 55) Piovene's definition of Pietà in *Pietà contro pietà*. p379-382.
- 56) Irrational anxiety and lovelessness underlying annihilative vindictiveness. p382-385.
- 57) Selectivity of Cassola's human solidarity. p385.
- 58) Catholicism of Fausto and denunciation of Communists. p386-388.
- 59) Need for fair play in warfare. p388.
- 60) Underestimate of partisans' contribution to Liberation of Italy. p388-389.
- 61) Motives for Fausto's rebellion against Fascist establishment. p389-390.
- 62) Social dislocation and need for compassionate personification of Justice. p390.
- 63) Guareschi's depiction of 'Red' obtusity and triumphant humanity of Catholic Church. p392-393.
- 64) Subordination of religious to Fascist beliefs in 'Il prete bello'. p393-394.
- 65) Sexual obsession fostered by regime. p394-395.
- 66) Hollowness of regime's social policies. p395.
- 67) Gramscianismo of lumpenproletariat. p395-396.
- 68) Bilenchi's hope of rediscovering continuation of past. p396-397.
- 69) *Berto*'s acknowledgement of responsibility. p398-399.
- 70) Attempt to establish 'supplementary' innocence. p399-400.
- 71) Justification of Italian intervention in war. p400.
- 72) Motives for volunteering and Fascist convictions. p400-402.
- 73) Depiction of war in *Il cielo e rosso*. p402-403.
- 74) Malaparte's despair: *La pelle* as putative *Zeitgeist*. p403-405.
- 75) Anti-Communism of *Il bell'Antonio*. p405-406.
- 76) Relation of sexuality to Fascism. p406-407, 409-410.
- 77) Anti-Fascism of Brancati's post-war protagonists. p407-411.
- 78) Brancati's equivocal assertion of pre-war anti-Fascism. p411-412.
- 79) Tobino's depiction of normality, and consequence of compromise with Fascism. p413-417.
- 80) Satirical sketch of Fascist figures. p415-416.

Chapter 5. Summary

- 1) Urgency of redefining collective identity of nation and refuting Fascist myths. p298-299.
- 2) Irrational and rational grounds for subscribing to (populism and) Communism. p299-301.
- 3) Hostility towards English and development of Communist mythology in *L'Agnese va a morire*. p302-303.
- 4) Distortion of perspective of war. p303-305.
- 5) Paradox of Neorealists' manicheism. p305-306.
- 6) Nature of populism. p307-308.
- 7) Divorce of populism and modern industrialized society. p307-308.
- 8) *Engagement* as antidote to malady of Fascism. p308-312.
- 9) Communism seen as sole genuine democracy. p311-312.
- 10) Post-war *moral* judgement of reactionary novelists. p312-313, 314-315.
- 11) Importance of Neorealism. p313-314.
- 12) Neorealists' destitution of precedents and certainties. p315.
- 13) Need to communicate and different levels of 'reality' depicted. p316-317.
- 14) Dialectic of death and happiness in *Uomini e no*. p317-318.
- 15) Conferment of meaning on death. p319-320.
- 16) Right of offesi. to resort to violence and problematic statement of oppressor's humanity. p320-322.
- 17) Characterization of Mussolini and Nazi-Fascists in anti-Fascist novel. p322-324.
- 18) Necessity of establishing guilt and moral impeccability. p325-326.
- 19) Vergani's unproblematic faith in innate altruistic Communism. p326-327, 329.
- 20) Depiction of collaborators in *L'Agnese va a morire*. p327-328.
- 21) Celebration of generosity of bourgeois Communist. p329-330.
- 22) Neorealists' class uneasiness. p330.
- 23) Rigoni Stern as personification of Neorealists' "Man". p330-332.
- 24) Corti's faith in Italian national character, denunciation of Russian brutality. p332-333.
- 25) Contribution of psychiatry to regeneration of *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*. p333-334, 338.
- 26) Transcendency of manichean Neorealist premises. p334-335.
- 27) Irrelevance of ideology for Calvino's lumpenproletariat. p336.
- 28) Calvino's interpretation of 'History'. p337.
- 29) Penetration of motivation of Fascists in *Cronache di poveri amanti*. p338-340.
- 30) Bourgeois non-responsibility. p340-341.
- 31) Microcosm of via del Corno. p341-342.
- 32) Importance of not antagonizing petty bourgeoisie. p343.
- 33) Optimism of Pratolini and Jovine. p343-344.
- 34) Allegorical element of *Le terre del Sacramento* and paradox of peasants' situation. p345-347.
- 35) Depiction of Fascists. p347.
- 36) Jovine's Christian conception of regeneration. p348.
- 37) Levi's treatment of Southern peasantry and anti-Fascism. p349-350.
- 38) Fascism as political instrument of 'Luigini', need for 'Contadino' revolution. p350-353.
- 39) Definition of Contadini and Luigini. p353-354.

- 40) Post-war erosion of idealism and nature of Levi's solidarity with peasants. p354-356.
- 41) *La ciociara*: Moravia's contribution to Neorealist, regenerative literature. p357-359.
- 42) Class as determinant of reprehensibility. p359-360.
- 43) Moravia's heritage of disenchantment. p360.
- 44) Vittorini's failure to adapt ideology to post-war reality. p361, 364-367.
- 45) Failure of intellectual to merge with people. p362-363.
- 46) Fascism of personal conduct. p363-364. Unpardonableness of Nazi past. p366.
- 47) Alter egos in Pavese's fiction. p367-368.
- 48) Condemnation of abdication of moral responsibility in *Prima che il gallo canti*. p368-369.
- 49) Marxism and Christianity as instruments of enlightenment. p370-371.
- 50) Counterpoint with Vittorini's fiction. p372.
- 51) Pavese's portrayal of *Zeitgeist* of war years. p372-373.
- 52) Moral responsibility towards dead. p373-375.
- 53) Guilt of various generic figures. p376-379.
- 54) Limitations of culpability of Germans. p376-379.
- 55) Piovene's definition of Pietà in *Pietà contro pietà*. p379-382.
- 56) Irrational anxiety and lovelessness underlying annihilative vindictiveness. p382-385.
- 57) Selectivity of Cassola's human solidarity. p385.
- 58) Catholicism of Fausto and denunciation of Communists. p386-388.
- 59) Need for fair play in warfare. p388.
- 60) Underestimate of partisans' contribution to Liberation of Italy. p388-389.
- 61) Motives for Fausto's rebellion against Fascist establishment. p389-390.
- 62) Social dislocation and need for compassionate personification of Justice. p390.
- 63) Guareschi's depiction of 'Red' obtusity and triumphant humanity of Catholic Church. p392-393.
- 64) Subordination of religious to Fascist beliefs in 'Il prete bello'. p393-394.
- 65) Sexual obsession fostered by regime. p394-395.
- 66) Hollowness of regime's social policies. p395.
- 67) Gramscianismo of lumpenproletariat. p395-396.
- 68) Bilenchi's hope of rediscovering continuation of past. p396-397.
- 69) *Berto's* acknowledgement of responsibility. p398-399.
- 70) Attempt to establish 'supplementary' innocence. p399-400.
- 71) Justification of Italian intervention in war. p400.
- 72) Motives for volunteering and Fascist convictions. p400-402.
- 73) Depiction of war in *Il cielo e rosso*. p402-403.
- 74) Malaparte's despair: *La pelle* as putative *Zeitgeist*. p403-405.
- 75) Anti-Communism of *Il bell'Antonio*. p405-406.
- 76) Relation of sexuality to Fascism. p406-407, 409-410.
- 77) Anti-Fascism of Brancati's post-war protagonists. p407-411.
- 78) Brancati's equivocal assertion of pre-war anti-Fascism. p411-412.
- 79) Tobino's depiction of normality, and consequence of compromise with Fascism. p413-417.
- 80) Satirical sketch of Fascist figures. p415-416.

- 81) Equation of 'Fascist' and 'Psychopath' in *Il conformista*. p417-418.
- 82) Bassani's depiction, from perspective of outsider, of society adaptable to Fascism. p418-433.
- 83) Denunciatory technique. p423.
- 84) Race and conformism as criteria of conduct. p423-425.
- 85) Superficiality of good society. p425, 427.
- 86) Response to anti-Semitism and statement of Italian identity. p426-429.
- 87) Contrasting approaches of Gadda and Neorealists. p429-430, 432-433.
- 88) Gadda's depiction of unconstitutional nature of Fascist regime. p430-432.
- 89) Redefinition of neurosis. p433-434.
- 90) Identity of murderer in *Quer pasticciaccio brutto de via Merulana*. p435-535, 437.
- 91) Gulf between official propaganda and Italian reality. p435-436.
- 92) Use of mythical names. p437-438.
- 93) Analogies between Gadda and Fenoglio. p438-440.
- 94) Fenoglio's anglophilia. p439-440.
- 95) Depiction of Resistance to Nazi-Fascists and partisans' authentic stature. p441-442.
- 96) Conclusion. p442-443.