

Email from M. Moscardelli to TLS, 4 March 2005 (page 1 of 2): no reply

mmoscardelli

Da: "Maria Moscardelli" <mmoscardelli@tiscali.it>
A: <letters@the-tls.co.uk>
Data invio: venerdì 4 marzo 2005 10.35
Oggetto: "Tainted heroes": Richard Bellamy's review

Rome, 3 March 2005

Dear Sir,

I have read Richard Bellamy's review of Elizabeth Leake's *The Reinvention of Ignazio Silone* (28 January 2005) and would like to offer a few corrective observations.

As an initial matter, I cannot help but wonder whether the reason why Bellamy so credulously accepts the ridiculous claims made by Leake has to do with a misplaced faith in the benefits of applying a "psychoanalytic approach" to a writer's text even when, as in this instance, it is based on little more than conjecture and ends up completely misrepresenting the well known facts of the writer's life.

Leake is nothing if not adept at making far-fetched psychological claims about Silone. First she reads between the lines of his novels to speculate that he came from a family with "acute psychological difficulties," was alienated from his father, and was prone to deceiving others. She then eliminates the lines altogether to hypothesize that the most significant event in Silone's life was *not* "his expulsion from the Italian Communist Party in 1931, nor even his brother's death in 1932", but rather his break with Guido Bellone", a fascist police inspector and, she believes, surrogate father-figure who employed Silone to spy on his Communist allies and with whom, she insinuates, he quite possibly had a homosexual affair. It was, Leake speculates, simply in order to get over "the trauma" of his break-up with Bellone that Silone decided that it was time to "reinvent himself" as neither Fascist nor Communist but rather as an anti-fascist socialist.

Bellamy may find such dime-store psychology convincing, but anyone who has followed the Silone controversy carefully would be hard-pressed, as I am, not to use more colloquial Italian word to describe it: *balle!* This is because Leake's entire pseudo-psychological analysis hinges on accusations made against Silone by two Italian historians, Biocca and Canali, claiming that he was a spy from 1919 to 1930. But as TLS readers should know not only has their Silone=spy equation never been proven, it has been credibly exposed as a hoax. The latter occurred four years ago when the eminent historian of Italian socialism, Giuseppe Tamburrano analysed the muddled documentary evidence and concluded that there was no proof to substantiate their allegations.

More recently, Mimmo Franzinelli, a well known expert on fascist espionage in Italy, has reviewed Canali's latest book *Le spie del regime* (L'Indice, January 2005). In his review, Franzinelli remarked on how "odd" it is that "after a decade of mass-media hype about il "caso Silone", knowledge of the motivation, length and consequences of the relationship between him and an inspector of the Roman police force was expected. There has been none of that." Instead, what we do know, Franzinelli continued, is that: "From 1927 onwards, the bastion of [the regime's] anti-Communist activities had been the OVRA [the Fascist secret police], an institution Silone had never had any contact with (except for the fact that he was closely spied on)" because of his work for the Communists *against* Mussolini's dictatorship. Strange, indeed--if not a further nail in the coffin of the Silone=spy equation.

In the final analysis, what we have here is yet another instance of flimsy and slipshod historical inquiry serving as the pretext for an even more flimsy and slipshod literary-critical flight of fancy. Leake's aim in writing her book seems to have been to show how Silone reinvented himself from being a duplicitous Fascist spy to being a saint of the democratic Left. But because of the

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erroneous, distorted and limited biographical information on which she bases her analyses as well as her willingness to employ a vulgar and flawed psychoanalytic approach based upon a by now discredited premise, the final result is actually Leake's preposterous reinvention of Silone. Would that your reviewer have understood and reported this to your readership in lieu of giving further credence to such arrant nonsense.

Yours faithfully,

Maria Moscardelli
Ignazio Silone's grandniece

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Email from M. Moscardelli to TLS, 17 May 2005
and
Reply from TLS to M. Moscardelli, 2 June 2005

mmoscardelli

Da: "TLS Letters" <letters@the-tls.co.uk>
A: "Maria Moscardelli" <mmoscardelli@tiscali.it>
Data invio: giovedì 2 giugno 2005 14.14
Oggetto: RE: Ignazio Silone (Richard Bellamy's letter of 6.5.05)

The Editor thanks you for your letter, but regrets that he is unable to publish it.

-----Original Message-----

From: Maria Moscardelli [mailto:mmoscardelli@tiscali.it]
Sent: 17 May 2005 20:56
To: TLS_Letters
Subject: Ignazio Silone (Richard Bellamy's letter of 6.5.05)

Rome, 17 May 2005

Dear Sir,

In his letter of May 6, Richard Bellamy invites us to accept that even heroes, being human, "suffer from the same flaws as the rest of us". Sound advice in general, but should such acceptance extend to even the basest accusations? And on what evidence?

The author of the book on Ignazio Silone that Bellamy reviewed, Elizabeth Leake, accepts that Silone sold out his Communist party comrades to a Fascist regime which imprisoned and tortured them to death and that he continued betraying everyone during the rest of his life as he reinvented a new and false heroic identity for himself. Those are some flaws! More demonic than human--and all attributed to Silone on the flimsiest of evidence. It is a pity that Richard Bellamy refuses to recognize Giuseppe Tamburrano great merit of revealing and documenting the biased historical and archival information on which Leake's book rests.

As a relative of Silone who was in regular contact with him from 1945 to 1978 and published a book containing firsthand information on his life, please allow me to leave TLS readers with at least three brief corrective observations.

First, Silone's feelings towards his parents are totally different from those attributed to him by Leake, i.e., hostility towards his father and lack of interest in his mother. In his private letters and his recollections with his cousins, as well as in his published works, he refers to both his parents with great tenderness and nostalgia. As regards his father, he wrote in his books and spoke with his relatives about him with fond admiration and pride.

Second, Silone also had, *pace* Leake, a strong relationship with his brother. The authentic and profound affection that bonded both brothers was witnessed by many (from relatives' accounts to private letters). Indeed, Silone felt a fatherly responsibility for his younger brother whom he regarded as impulsive and naïve. All Silone's relatives knew that Romolo's imprisonment and death in a fascist prison was the greatest sorrow of his life.

Third, in Silone's family there wasn't a "strong history of tuberculosis" and of "acute psychological difficulties". Men and women in Silone's family were the most robust and tallest in the village and were renowned for their longevity and wit: their descendants still have these characteristics and reaching the age of ninety has always been normal. Silone's brother, a robust young man, healthy and sporty (as witnessed by college teachers, relatives and military service companions), suffered only from the physical and psychological

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problems typical of a political prisoner who was held in a fascist prison, tortured, starved and constantly held in isolation.

Yours faithfully,

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Email from M.Moscardelli to TLS, 6 June 2005: no reply

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Da: "Maria Moscardelli" <mmoscardelli@tiscali.it>
A: <letters@the-tls.co.uk>
Data invio: lunedì 6 giugno 2005 8.58
Oggetto: Ignazio Silone (Richard Bellamy's letter of 6.5.05)

Dear Mr Stothard,

I make reference to previous correspondence on Richard Bellamy's letter of 6 May 2005 concerning Ignazio Silone and the fictional narrative written on Silone by Elizabeth Leake.

The Times Literary Supplement vaunts the fact that:

"Since 1902, the TLS has scrutinized, dissected, applauded, and occasionally disparaged, the work of the twentieth century's leading writers and thinkers. (...) Reviewing the books that matter, examining the questions central to our culture, the Lit Supp, as it has been known to generations of readers, provides a unique record of developments in literature, politics, scholarship and the arts, and brings a unique seriousness to bear on the major intellectual debates of our time.

"The TLS may not always have got it right - see, for example, some of the spectacular misjudgements of earlier years, on Eliot's *Prufrock*, or Joyce's *Ulysses*. But the hits are much more spectacular than the misses. In the course of its history the paper has earned an unrivalled reputation for intellectual rigour, impartiality - and curiosity: a reputation it keeps to this day."

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH SILONE?

On 17 May 2005, I forwarded to the TLS an explanatory letter clarifying some of the many details that had been ignored. My letter may have been long, but it was correct. Similarly, my previous letter of 4 March 2005 may have been too emotional. I am a relative of Silone; I am a member of the Fondazione Ignazio Silone and I have published a book containing firsthand information on his life.

My home address and telephone number were available. A shorter version of the same letter could have been prepared for publication and I would have considered it my duty to oblige.

"The TLS's authority is acknowledged world-wide and its approach is world-wide, too"

"A sweep of the paper's high points of the last twenty years would by anyone's reckoning include essays by Italo Calvino, Elizabeth Hardwick, Mavis Gallant, Milan Kundera, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Miroslav Holub, Mario Vargas Llosa, Joseph Brodsky, Orhan Pamuk, Juan Goytisolo and Alberto Manguel. Major contributions to scholarship and criticism have come in the form of, for example, George Steiner's extended engagement with Paul Celan, or Julian Barnes's with Flaubert."

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH SILONE?

"Every year, TLS Special Numbers offer extended in-depth coverage of several of these, with additional surveys of the USA, the Islamic world, France, Germany, Africa, the Far East.... In all areas, the TLS, as a writer in *Le Monde* put it, "has no rivals". You may, like Noam Chomsky, find it "provocative, stimulating, irritating, informative". But if you care about the life of the mind, you will certainly find it indispensable."

TLS is in no way keeping faith with this declared mandate if only one point of view is permitted and Silone's defenders are not allowed to speak to a thinking public - regardless of their political opinion.

I look forward to hearing further from you on this subject.

Yours sincerely,

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