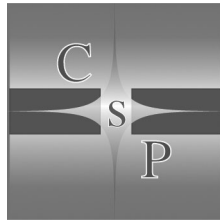


Postmodern Ethics

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By

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout *Postmodern Ethics*:

Leonardo Sciascia, *Opere 1956-1971*, ed. Claude Ambroise (Milan: Bompiani, 2001), is abbreviated as *I*.

Leonardo Sciascia, *Opere 1971-1983*, ed. Claude Ambroise (Milan: Bompiani, 2001), is abbreviated as *II*.

Leonardo Sciascia, *Opere 1984-1989*, ed. Claude Ambroise (Milan: Bompiani, 2002), is abbreviated as *III*.

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Part I

Text and Society: Text in Society

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In *La fine del postmoderno*, Romano Luperini argues that recent events, such as the two Gulf Wars, the destruction of the Twin Towers and mass immigration into Italy, require a response from a new type of writer-intellectual, able to use intellectual debate as a means of addressing contemporary issues.¹ Luperini suggests that such discourses have been absent since the mid 1970s, with 1972-73 marking “la progressiva scomparsa della figura dello scrittore-intellettuale.”² Luperini praises the work of writers such as Leonardo Sciascia in the early 1970s, and laments the growth of the new generation of writers such as Antonio Tabucchi, “nati dal culto postmoderno dall’interstualità e dal citazionismo colto.”³ Luperini’s assertion that a new breed of intellectuals is required to confront the contemporary socio-political climate underscores a belief that from the mid 1970s until 2005, writers have failed to offer a sustained engagement with society.

Postmodern Ethics seeks to challenge this viewpoint, by focussing on works written by Sciascia and Tabucchi in precisely the period which Luperini views as characterized by an “ilare nichilismo [...], il lusso della leggerezza e della irresponsabilità” (Luperini, *La fine del postmoderno*, 12-13). It represents the first comparative study of socio-political engagement in the works of Sciascia (1921-1989) and Tabucchi (1943-). *Postmodern Ethics* focuses on the ways in which the two writers engage with society through their texts, and on the means through which they assert a belief in the value of literature as a tool for understanding and for acting in the contemporary world. It builds on the valuable but limited studies on Tabucchi’s writings to offer a radically different interpretation of engagement in Tabucchi’s work. Previous research has suggested that Tabucchi’s texts may be divided into different strands, which either address socio-political concerns or which concentrate solely on postmodernist debates such as ontology, multiplicity or division of the subject.

¹ Romano Luperini, *La fine del postmoderno* (Naples: Alfredo Guido, 2005).

² Romano Luperini, *Controttempo: Critica e letteratura fra moderno e postmoderno: Proposte, polemiche e bilanci di fine secolo* (Naples: Liguori, 1999), 173.

³ Luperini, *Controttempo*, 176. Luperini refers to Sciascia’s earlier works in *La fine del postmoderno*, 125-29. No mention is made of any of Sciascia’s writing after 1974.

In her recent monograph, *L'uomo inquieto: Identità e alterità nell'opera di Antonio Tabucchi*, Pia Schwarz Lausten suggests that the divided subject and the search for the other underpins all of Tabucchi's writing.⁴ Flavia Brizio-Skov's earlier monograph, *Antonio Tabucchi: Navigazioni in un arcipelago narrativo*, suggests that *rovescio* represents the underlying theme of Tabucchi's writing, and she acknowledges the presence of engaged writing only in Tabucchi's 1994 text, *Sostiene Pereira*, and his 1997 text, *La testa perduta di Damasceno Monteiro*.⁵ Recent articles and chapters written on Tabucchi have also examined the committed writing of *Sostiene Pereira* and *La testa*, viewing these texts as separate from Tabucchi's other writings, which examine more literary and ontological themes.⁶ *Postmodern Ethics* counters such readings of Tabucchi's texts, to suggest that socio-political commitment underpins all of Tabucchi's works, and that the themes pinpointed by other critics as divorced from engagement in fact represent a different yet powerful form of committed writing.

Critics have long recognised that a belief in literature as a means of engaging with society underscores Sciascia's writing, and much of the critical analysis of Sciascia's texts makes a passing reference to *impegno*. Texts such as Adamo Liborio's *Leonardo Sciascia: Tra letteratura e impegno* do not however unpack the term *impegno*, or question the extent to which it is an appropriate term to employ from the 1970s onwards.⁷ As yet no research has been published which examines the ways in which Sciascia's commitment faces and overcomes the obstacles posed to notions of *impegno* during the 1950s and 1960s. Incisive works have been published, which examine Sciascia's texts through the prism of a genre or a theme in his writing, and which comment on aspects of his

⁴ Pia Schwarz Lausten, *L'uomo inquieto: Identità e alterità nell'opera di Antonio Tabucchi* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2005).

⁵ Flavia Brizio-Skov, *Antonio Tabucchi: Navigazioni in un arcipelago narrativo* (Cosenza: Pellegrini, 2002).

⁶ Bruno Ferraro, "Letteratura e impegno in *Sostiene Pereira* di Antonio Tabucchi," *Narrativa* 8 (1995 July): 157-72; JoAnn Cannon, *The Novel as Investigation: Leonardo Sciascia, Dacia Maraini, Antonio Tabucchi* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2006); Angela M. Jeannet, "A Matter of Injustice: Violence and Death in Antonio Tabucchi," *Annali d'Italianistica* 19 (2001): 153-69; Jennifer Burns, *Fragments of Impegno: Interpretations of Commitment in Contemporary Italian Narrative 1980-2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2001), 61-80. In addition to her insightful reading of *Sostiene Pereira* and *La testa*, Burns also suggests that Tabucchi's representation of the underclass may be usefully viewed as an extension of Vittorini's concept of "il mondo offeso." My own, very different, reading of the importance of the underclass, and the underworld which they inhabit, is explored in chapter five of *Postmodern Ethics*, "Representations of Geographical and Border Spaces in Tabucchi's Texts."

⁷ Adamo Liborio, *Leonardo Sciascia: Tra letteratura e impegno* (Enna: Papiro, 1992).

engagement. Francesca Bernadinin's edited volume, *Leonardo Sciascia: La mitografia e la ragione*, Massimo Onofri's *Nel nome dei padri: Nuovi studi sciasciani* and Ricciarda Ricorda's *Pagine vissute: Studi di letteratura italiana del novecento* represent fascinating studies of Sciascia's dialogue with other writers, at times hinting towards ways in which such dialogue may have a pedagogical value.⁸ Anne Mullen's chapter on "Leonardo Sciascia's Detective Fiction and Metaphors of Mafia" offers a perspicacious study of Sciascia's use of detective fiction to engage with the problem of the mafia, and Ruth Glynn's recent analysis of the Italian historical novel illustrates Sciascia's commitment in an early historical novel, *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*.⁹ Despite their very real value, these studies are necessarily limited by their specificity to a certain genre or a single text. On the other hand, monographs such as Massimo Onofri's comprehensive *Storia di Sciascia*, or Joseph Farrell's excellent *Leonardo Sciascia*, seek to touch upon all aspects of Sciascia's vast opus.¹⁰ Although these texts address the notion of commitment, they do not unpack or analyse his methods of engaging in a sustained and critical manner. *Postmodern Ethics* seeks to fill such a gap in scholarly research, offering a framework in which to examine the different manifestations of socio-political engagement in Sciascia's various forms of writing, in a climate informed by the doubts and scepticism of postmodernism. Critical readings of Sciascia's work tend to focus on his early writing, whereas the focus of *Postmodern Ethics* is on his later texts, examining his engagement with a more complex literary and socio-political climate.

Postmodern Ethics is structured in five parts. The first part seeks to locate Sciascia and Tabucchi in the traditions of committed writing, and then to analyse the ways in which they comment directly on current affairs, through both fictional and non-fictional texts. It examines the literary prisms adopted by both writers in their non-fiction and challenges the perception that their fiction

⁸ Francesca Bernadini, ed., *Leonardo Sciascia: La mitografia e la ragione*, (Rome: Lithos, 1995); Massimo Onofri, *Nel nome dei padri: Nuovi studi sciasciani* (Milan: La vita felice, 1998); Ricciarda Ricorda, *Pagine vissute: Studi di letteratura italiana del novecento* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1995), 153-191.

⁹ Anne Mullen, "Leonardo Sciascia's Detective Fiction and Metaphors of Mafia," in *Crime Scenes: Detective Narratives in European Culture Since 1945*, ed. Anne Mullen and Emer O'Beirne (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 88-99; Ruth Glynn, *Contesting the Monument: The Anti-Illusionist Italian Historical Novel* (Leeds: Legenda, 2005), 43-60. Other particularly useful studies of Sciascia's historical fiction include Carlo Boumis, "Strategie della retorica e pedagogia falsa nella *Strega e il Capitano*," in *La mitografia e la ragione*, ed. Bernadini Napoletano, 175-203; Rosario Castelli, ed., *Leonardo Sciascia e il Settecento in Sicilia: Atti del Convegno di studi, 6 e 7 dicembre 1996* (Caltanissetta-Rome: Salvatore Sciascia, 1996).

¹⁰ Massimo Onofri, *Storia di Sciascia* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1994); Joseph Farrell, *Leonardo Sciascia* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

and non-fiction may be considered as separate entities. Part two examines the ways in which the representations of space in the texts of Sciascia and Tabucchi engage with society. *Postmodern Ethics* details the changing depiction of Sicilian space in Sciascia's writing, from a real, geographical space, to an empty metaphorical space and finally to a spatial representation which lies somewhere between the two extremes, and seeks to root such a pattern in the changing socio-political framework. It locates Sciascia's portrayal of historical space in the debates of microhistory and charts the representation of historical space against a backdrop of socio-political events. Part two also examines a shift in Tabucchi's representation of geographical and border spaces, and suggests that such changes respond to debates surrounding Italy's place in Europe, internal tensions exacerbated by the rise of the *Lega Nord*, and by immigration. Parts three and four analyse the means through which Sciascia and Tabucchi draw on arguments which on the surface appear antithetical to engagement, and use them to reinforce their commitment. The representations of a de-centred truth, and interplay with the notion that language cannot fully express ideas, are examined in part three, whilst part four details the roles of dialogue, intertextuality and self-reflexivity in Sciascia's and Tabucchi's texts. Part five examines the values with which Sciascia and Tabucchi imbue journalism as opposed to literature, and assesses the importance which the two writers ascribe to literature as a means of engagement.

Parts three and four suggest that Sciascia and Tabucchi further their engagement through the very issues which challenge and undermine *impegno* during the 1960s. Such different forms of commitment necessitate a distinction between Sciascia's and Tabucchi's engagement and the *impegno* championed by post-war writers in Italy. This introduction will examine the notions of commitment outlined by early practitioners of *impegno*, and their subsequent rejection of commitment in the light of the issues which challenged *impegno* during the 1950s and 1960s. The introduction will propose that Sciascia's continued dialogue with contemporary affairs from the 1970s onwards indicates that he is more usefully studied in relation to Tabucchi, who also engages with society in a culture influenced by the uncertainties of postmodernism, than in relation to his contemporaries Calvino (1923-1985) and Pasolini (1922-1975), who reject literature as a valuable form of engagement during the 1960s and 1970s. The introduction will suggest that Tabucchi, as well as Sciascia, represents a particular and unique intellectual who stands apart from his contemporaries, and will also outline the significance of 1975 as a starting point for this study.

Post-war belief in literature

Surveying the role of the intellectual in Italy from the Middle Ages to the end of the twentieth century, David Ward argues that “the history of Italian intellectuals’ attempt to exert an influence over Italian society is a history of gallant well-intentioned effort, but above all a history of failure.”¹¹ Although the success of intellectuals in influencing society may have been no greater in the years immediately following the Second World War than during any other period, the post-war era is marked by a new-found belief that writing could influence the shape and the direction of post-fascist Italy.¹² Guido Bonsaver defines the three major characteristics of the neorealist writing which emerged in the wake of World War Two as:

a) the exploration of the reality of Italian society - particularly the crude reality of working class life affected by unemployment, poverty and deprivation; b) a clear social and often political commitment, on the parts of writers and directors, that turned those works into powerful moral pictures of Italian society; c) as its name suggests, the preferred narrative technique was that of realism, that is, a naturalistic approach which would emphasize the representational, documentary value of the work.¹³

Lino Pertile stresses the centrality of this second element, known as *impegno*, arguing that the primary aim of the neorealist writers was “to sow amongst the people the seeds of a social awareness which in turn, it was thought, would bring about a radical renewal of society.”¹⁴ In the aftermath of fascism and of war, writers believed that literature could (and indeed should)

¹¹ David Ward, “Intellectuals, Culture and Power in Modern Italy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Italian Culture*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Rebecca J. West (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 81-96 (81).

¹² Ward suggests that even in the postwar period the impact of committed writing was limited, as writers aligned closely with the *Partito comunista italiano (PCI)* focussed on “high” culture, which alienated vast swathes of the population (although offering valuable new opportunities to a minority) (Ward, “Intellectuals,” 83-91). This view is reiterated by Stephen Gundle in “The Legacy of the Prison Notebooks: Gramsci, the PCI and Italian Culture in the Cold War Period,” in *Italy in the Cold War: Politics, Culture & Society 1948-1958*, ed. Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff (Oxford: Berg, 1995) 131-47 (142-43).

¹³ Guido Bonsaver, *Elio Vittorini: The Writer and the Written* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2000), 120.

¹⁴ Lino Pertile, “The Italian Novel Today: Politics, Language and Literature,” in *The New Italian Novel*, ed. Zygmunt Barański and Lino Pertile (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 1-19, (6-7).

help to fashion a blueprint for a new society. Gramsci had argued that the lack of shared experience between writers and readers made it hard for literature to engage with the need for change in Italy, writing

non esiste, di fatto, né una popolarità della letteratura artistica, né una produzione paesana di letteratura “popolare” perché manca una identità di concezione del mondo tra “scrittori” e “popolo”, cioè i sentimenti non sono vissuti come propri dagli scrittori, né gli scrittori hanno una funzione “educatrice nazionale,” cioè non si sono posti e non si pongono il problema di elaborare i sentimenti popolari dopo averli rivissuti e fatti propri.¹⁵

The experience of the Resistance, in which Italians from all walks of life had developed a close bond of communication as they worked for a common goal, offered an unprecedented opportunity for writers to live the same experiences as the reader, and to use literature as an agent for change. Calvino outlines this belief in the 1964 preface to his neorealist novel *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (first published in 1947); a preface which in many ways serves as a post-dated manifesto for the neorealist programme. Calvino writes that:

l'essere usciti da un'esperienza—guerra, guerra civile—che non aveva risparmiato nessuno, stabiliva un'immediatezza di comunicazione tra lo scrittore e il suo pubblico: si era a faccia a faccia, alla pari, carichi di storie da raccontare, ognuno aveva avuto la sua, ognuno aveva vissuto vite irregolari drammatiche avventurose, ci si strappava la parola di bocca. La rinata libertà di parlare fu per la gente al principio smania di raccontare.¹⁶

¹⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere: Volume terzo, Quaderni 12-29*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Milan: Einaudi, 1977), 2114, Q 21§ 5. For fuller consideration of Gramsci's concept of the role of intellectuals, see Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere: Volume primo, Quaderni 1-5*, ed. Valentino Gerratana (Milan: Einaudi, 1977), especially *Quaderno 3*; Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere: Volume terzo, Quaderni 12-29*, especially *Quaderno 21*; Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, ed. David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, trans. William Boelhower (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1985); Paul Ransome, *Antonio Gramsci: A New Introduction* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 179-200; David Ward, “Intellectuals,” 87-89. Gramsci's notions of “national popular literature” and the role of the “organic intellectual” were open to different interpretations, partly due to the fragmentary nature of the *Quaderni*. Subsequent editing of the *Quaderni* allowed the *PCI* to privilege certain elements, as Stephen Gundle explores in “The Legacy of the Prison Notebooks,” 131-47.

¹⁶ Italo Calvino, *Presentazione*, in *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* (Milan: Mondadori, 1993), v-xxv (vi).

The implicit trust between writer and reader facilitated the writers' aim of fashioning a new civil society, a new Italy. Such a belief was shared by many writers of the period, and in her analysis of three key neorealist writers, Jennifer Burns asserts that:

Vittorini, Calvino and Pasolini all convey a powerful sense that reality was somehow palpable at that historical moment; that the problem of creating a truly representational literature was suddenly attenuated, as the filters of class and cultural experience which had stood firm between intellectual and public suddenly seemed to have been removed. (Burns, *Fragments*, 15)

The post-war climate afforded new possibilities for writers to engage with and to influence society in a meaningful and powerful fashion.

Opinions as to the exact form that this *impegno* should take varied between writers, but they were united in their belief in literature as an agent of change.¹⁷ Vittorini expresses this certainty in his *Diario in Pubblico*, suggesting that engagement is inherent in a writer:

io nego che uno scrittore (o un pittore, un musicista) possa impegnarsi a lavorare in un senso piuttosto che in un altro, e poi averne qualche risultato valido. Uno sforzo velleitario, da parte sua, non coinvolge, al più, che il suo intelletto e non fa che accentuare il lato "intellettualistico" della sua arte [...]. Ma c'è un engagement "naturale" che agisce in lui al di fuori della sua volontà. Gli viene dall'esperienza collettiva di cui egli è spontaneo portatore, e costituisce, segreta in lui stesso, l'elemento principale della sua attività. [...] Nell'engagement naturale [...] l'artista contribuisce alle trasformazioni della realtà.¹⁸

¹⁷ Burns outlines the differing positions of Vittorini, Calvino and Pasolini in *Fragments*, 13-37. She defines Vittorini as a strategist, for whom *impegno* involves discovering the place of literature within culture, the place of culture within society and then the promotion of culture as an inclusive and multi-referential area of exploration in which all classes of society can participate, moving towards the goal of self-fulfilment. She suggests that Calvino may be seen more as a creator, who believes that *impegno* involves producing models of rational human activity within the literary text, which might then function as the blueprint, or at least the inspiration, for individual action within society and which may serve the common good of all social groupings. Pasolini, Burns argues, is a stylistician, for whom *impegno* is a matter of expression, of discovering and re-discovering the forms of expression used by social groups conventionally excluded from cultural recognition and of promoting the use and the appreciation of such forms.

¹⁸ Elio Vittorini, *Diario in Pubblico* (Milan: Bompiani, 1957), 347-49. Vittorini expressed these ideas at a conference in Geneva in August 1948.

This notion is reiterated seven years later in Calvino's 1955 essay, "Il midollo del leone", in which Calvino declares that:

noi crediamo che l'impegno politico, il parteggiare, il compromettersi sia, ancor più che dovere, necessità naturale dello scrittore d'oggi, e prima ancora che dello scrittore, dell'uomo moderno. Non è la nostra un'epoca che si possa comprendere stando *au dessus de la mêlée*, ma al contrario la si comprende quanto più la si vive, quanto più avanti ci si situa sulla linea del fuoco [...] Noi pure siamo tra quelli che credono in una letteratura che sia presenza attiva nella storia, in una letteratura come educazione, di grado e di qualità insostituibile.¹⁹

Calvino's faith in literature as a form of socio-political engagement faltered in the years following 1955.²⁰ His responses to the key challenges facing *impegno* are charted in *Una pietra sopra*, a collection of Calvino's essays drawn from 1955-1978. Despite the clear limitations inherent in viewing the course of *impegno* through the lens of one writer, this text offers a valuable means of navigating changing attitudes towards socio-political engagement, as well of course as painting a portrait of Calvino-*scrittore*.

The challenges facing *impegno*

Three causes are generally seen to have undermined the notion of *impegno* and the neorealist movement: the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956; the economic boom; and changes in the literary environment, which saw a shift away from political themes towards non-political themes and towards linguistic experimentation.²¹ From the immediate post-war period, *impegno* was linked to the *PCI* and to a socialist vision of Italy's future. Although the extent to which the *PCI* exercised any level of influence over the writers has been brought into

¹⁹ The essay "Il midollo del leone" was first published in *Paragone*, 66 (June 1955) and is reproduced in Italo Calvino, *Una pietra sopra: Discorsi di letteratura e società* (Milan: Mondadori, 1995), 5-22 (15-17). The text was first published in 1980.

²⁰ Burns suggests that his belief in literature had been shaken even by 1955, arguing that his declaration in "Il midollo del leone" rings hollow as a mere two years later he published *Il barone rampante*, in which the protagonist lives in the trees and is literally "*au dessus de la mêlée*" (Burns, *Fragments*, 21).

²¹ Burns (*Fragments*, 26-27) stresses the importance of linguistic experimentation, whereas Pertile ("Italian Novel Today," 7) emphasizes a re-emergence of non-political themes such as the psychological, the fantastical and the sentimental.

question, the shared reforming vision was clearly left-wing.²² Following the Soviet invasion of Hungary, many Italian intellectuals (including Calvino) distanced themselves from the party and were alienated from the communist project.

Socialist reforming zeal was also undermined by the economic boom which occurred in Italy during the 1960s.²³ As the working classes became increasingly content with their lot, the desire for revolutionary change faded into the background. Calvino expresses his revulsion at this new material culture in his 1959 essay “Il mare dell’oggettività” (*Una pietra sopra*, 47-54). He writes that:

la resa all’oggettività, fenomeno storico di questo dopoguerra, nasce in un periodo in cui all’uomo viene meno la fiducia nell’indirizzare il corso delle cose [...] perché vedo che *le cose* [...] *vanno avanti da sole*, fanno parte d’un insieme così complesso che lo sforzo più eroico può essere applicato al cercar di aver un’idea di come è fatto, al comprenderlo, all’accettarlo. (50, italics in text)

Burns suggests that Calvino’s opposition to this new material culture is intellectual rather than moral, since he is concerned at the lack of individual control as the intellectual becomes subsumed into society, indistinguishable from the masses.²⁴ As such, the writer loses his privileged position and his capacity to direct social change.

David Ward suggests that it is the complacency of the working classes following the boom which pushed artists towards literary experimentation and towards a focus on language and literature as the elements which shape consciousness and perception. Ward writes that:

if language was one of the vehicles for the bourgeois codes which had conditioned the working class, it was only by revising those codes that the preconditions for change could be created. This conclusion had radical consequences: intellectuals no longer needed the working class as a direct ally. They were free to carry out their work independently; and the kind of writing encouraged was of a far more experimental nature than the Neorealist texts

²² See David Ward, “Intellectuals,” 83-91. Bonsaver examines the tensions between Vittorini and the PCI leadership concerning artistic freedom and party orthodoxy, in Bonsaver, *Vittorini*, 120-23.

²³ The boom is generally perceived as reaching its peak between 1958-1963, as Paul Ginsborg argues in *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988* (London: Penguin, 1990), 210-53. Martin Clark takes a wider view, positing that the boom lasted from the late 1950s to the late 1960s in *Modern Italy 1871-1995* (London: Longman, 1996), 345-53.

²⁴ Burns, *Fragments*, 23.

sanctioned by the PCI - a kind of writing, in fact, that had little meaning for a mass readership. (“Intellectuals,” 91)

By challenging a language enmeshed in the ideology of the bourgeoisie, the *neo-avanguardia* could challenge reality in a way in which the neo-realist texts could not. The nucleus of experimental writing in Italy lay in the *Gruppo 63*, which focused on writing which systematically debunked traditionalist forms. The group, which lasted from 1963-67, included Nanni Balestrini, Renato Barilli, Umberto Eco, Angelo Guglielmi, Francesco Leonetti and Edoardo Sanguineti. The movement defined itself as a reaction to the “falsa coscienza” of *impegno*, and Barilli and Guglielmi outline the main concept of the group as being that:

l'azione, anche intesa nel senso più pregnante e dinamica, estesa cioè fino al momento rivoluzionario, deve cominciare a trovarsi *dentro* il linguaggio, il quale non serve né come “specchio” di contenuti predeterminati, né come eco consolante dei tormenti psichici individuali.²⁵

The linguistic experimentation of the *neo-avanguardia* was distanced from a mass readership, and directly challenged the notion of a close dialogue between reader and author as championed by the practitioners of *impegno*.

As a result of these challenges, even the architects of *impegno* began to question the notion of socio-political engagement through literature. Calvino's 1964 preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno* consigns neorealism and *impegno* to a very specific historical moment (the years immediately following the war), a period so distant that “tutto è lontano e nebbioso,” (*Il sentiero*, xxv). In 1967 Calvino develops this notion of the historicity of *impegno* even further, in his essay “Per chi si scrive? (Lo scaffale ipotetico)” (*Una pietra sopra*, 193-98). In the essay, Calvino responds to Gian Carlo Ferretti's open question “per chi si scrive un romanzo? Per chi si scrive una poesia?”²⁶ Calvino responds that a book should be written to form part of a bookshelf, to dialogue with other written texts. The crucial error of neorealism, he suggests, was to seek to make written texts dialogue with a socio-political project rather than a literary framework:

²⁵ Renato Barilli and Angelo Guglielmi, *Gruppo 63: Critica e teoria* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976), 17 (italics in text).

²⁶ Ferretti's question appeared in *Rinascita*, 39 (1967), and Calvino's essay featured in issue 46 of the same journal that year.

negli anni 1945-50 i romanzi si volevano far entrare in uno scaffale che era essenzialmente politico, o storico-politico, rivolgersi a un lettore interessato principalmente alla cultura politica e alla storia contemporanea, e di cui pure pareva urgente soddisfare anche una “domanda” (o carenza) letteraria. L’operazione, impostata così, *non poteva che fallire*: la cultura politica non era qualcosa di dato, ai cui valori la letteratura doveva affiancare o adeguare i propri (visti anche questi – tranne poche casi – come valori costituiti, “classici”), ma era anche qualcosa da fare, anzi è qualcosa che richiede continuamente d’essere costruita e messa in discussione confrontandola con (e mettendo insieme in discussione) tutto il lavoro che il resto della cultura sta compiendo. (*Una pietra sopra*, 194, my italics)

Calvino expressly rejects the notion that writing may successfully dialogue with the socio-political climate, and suggests that such a project is doomed to fail. Calvino goes on to stress the limited function that literature may play in the contemporary climate, writing:

per prima cosa occorre che la letteratura riconosca quanto il suo peso politico è modesto: la lotta si decide in base a linee strategiche e tattiche generali e rapporti di forza; in questo quadro un libro è un granello di sabbia, specie un libro letterario. L’effetto che un’opera importante (scientifica o letteraria) può avere sulla lotta generale in corso è di portarlo su un livello di consapevolezza più alto. (*Una pietra sopra*, 197)

Calvino is not alone in his view that literature is no longer (if it ever was) an effective means of influencing the socio-political climate. Pasolini outlined his own personal crisis in literature at a literary circle in Brescia in 1964, where he had been invited to speak on “Marxismo e cristianesimo,” following a screening of his latest film, *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*.²⁷ Pasolini revealed that between 1960 and 1964, when he had conceptualized and produced *Il Vangelo*, he had suffered a personal, psychological crisis. Pasolini realized that this loss of faith coincided with a more general predicament in Italian culture, a profound and significant crisis which would undermine the literature of the preceding years. Pasolini argued that the notion of *impegno* itself had become unfashionable, and that the wave of hope and communication engendered by the Resistance had passed, leaving writers alone and isolated. As a result, Pasolini felt that literature no longer offered an effective means of engagement, and argued that cinema represented a more suitable medium for directly communicating with a wider

²⁷ Details of Pasolini’s Brescia lecture are outlined in Marco Belpoliti, *Settanta* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), 53-55.

audience. His belief in the power of cinema was such that during the 1960s Pasolini released sixteen films.

It is important to signal the centrality of not only the Italian movement but also of the French avant-garde, both in terms of Calvino's rejection of *impegno* and in relation to the re-appropriation of socio-political engagement by Sciascia and Tabucchi in later years. France and French literary culture provide key reference points for all three writers, who each spend a significant time in the country: Calvino lived in Paris from 1967-1979; Tabucchi spent a year as a student in Paris; and Sciascia was a frequent visitor to the French capital.²⁸ As Belpoliti observes, Calvino gave a reading of Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author" in his 1968 essay "Cibernetica e fantasmi (Appunti sulla narrativa come processo combinatorio)" long before the essay was known in Italy.²⁹ Barthes' arguments can have done little to restore Calvino's faith in the power of literature to act as an agent of change, and indeed Guido Bonsaver suggests that Calvino struggled to reconcile his position as a committed left-wing intellectual with the ideas espoused in Barthes' essays.³⁰ It is worth recalling the terms of Barthes' essay, as it represents one of the elements which undermine socio-political engagement for the architects of *impegno*, whilst simultaneously providing the material for a rebirth of socio-political engagement in the works of Leonardo Sciascia and Antonio Tabucchi. Barthes writes that:

We now know the text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture [...] the writer can only imitate, a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power

²⁸ Tabucchi outlines some of his Parisian experiences in *Alberto Arbasino, Italo Calvino, Andrea Camilleri, Umberto Eco, Mario Luzi, Claudio Magris, Dacia Maraini, Antonio Tabucchi raccontano se stessi*, ed. Alberto Scarponi (Rome: Gangemi, 2002), 112-13. In a series of conversations with Domenico Porzio during 1988 and 1989, Sciascia states that "nel 1977, a dire il vero, avevo trasferito la residenza a Parigi. Ma Panella mi ha poi persuaso a entrare nelle liste radicali e sono stato eletto. Infine la passione per il caso Moro. Questi fatti messi assieme mi hanno convinto di tornare in Italia." Domenico Porzio and Leonardo Sciascia, *Fuoco all'anima: Conversazione con Domenico Porzio* (Milan: Mondadori, 1992), 30.

²⁹ Belpoliti, *Settanta*, 168. "Cibernetica e fantasmi" is included in *Una pietra sopra*, 199-219.

³⁰ Guido Bonsaver, "Il Menabò, Calvino and the 'Avanguardia': Some Observations on the Literary Debate of the Sixties," *Italian Studies* 50 (1996): 86-96 (95).

is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as to never rest on any one of them.³¹

Intertextuality provides an obstacle to engagement for Calvino, as literary and socio-political discourses are divorced: literature is home to explorations of intertextuality, and cannot offer a valid meaning in a socio-political context.

Calvino's uneasy response to French post-structuralist discourse, and his sense that engagement becomes impossible in a post-structuralist world, is confirmed in his 1976 essay "Usi politici giusti e sbagliati della letteratura" (*Una pietra sopra*, 345-55). Calvino's bewilderment in a post-structuralist world is palpable as he writes that:

tutti i parametri, le categorie, le antitesi che usavamo per definire, classificare, progettare il mondo sono messi in questione. Non solo quelli più legati a valori storici, ma anche quelli che sembravano essere categorie antropologiche stabili: ragione e mito, lavoro ed esistenza, maschio e femmina, e perfino la polarità delle topologie più elementari: affermazione e negazione, sopra e sotto, soggetto e oggetto. (Calvino, *Una pietra sopra*, 346)

The terms of Calvino's argument suggest a close dialogue with Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and with his lecture on "Différance." As in the case of Barthes' essay, it is worth recalling the original texts, as these also constitute the "ashes" of *impegno*, the destructive force which is re-appropriated as the basis for engagement by Tabucchi and Sciascia. In his work on the trace, Derrida re-evaluates many of the divisions and binaries that have shaped Western thought. In *Of Grammatology* he writes that "all dualisms, all theories of the immortality of the soul or of the spirit, as well as all monisms, spiritualist or materialist, dialectical or vulgar" belong to "a metaphysics whose entire history was compelled to strive toward the reduction of the trace."³² Thus once we fully consider the implications of the trace, then the old binaries are problematized and undermined. Derrida reiterates this point in the lecture on "Différance", stressing the need to

reconsider all the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not in order to see opposition erase itself but to see

³¹ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in Roland Barthes, *Image, Music Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142-48 (146).

³² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 71.

what indicates that each of the terms must appear as *différance* of the other, as the other differed and deferred.³³

Binaries and oppositions become contaminated, with no clear concepts, and this leads to Calvino's anxieties that "tutti i parametri, le categorie, le antitesi che usavamo per definire, classificare, progettare il mondo sono messi in questione." In such a world literature cannot engage with socio-political concerns.

Engagement in the 1970s

Burns observes that the absence of fixed parameters is represented in a slightly less anxious fashion in Calvino's 1972 essay "Lo sguardo dell'archeologo" (*Una pietra sopra*, 318-21).³⁴ In this earlier essay Calvino writes that the parameters, categories and antitheses used to classify the world "sono in discussione," whereas by 1976 they are "messi in questione."³⁵ In the first instance, the concept is a work in progress, a problem to be resolved, whereas four years later, Calvino has been able to find no response and accepts that they are irrevocably undermined, with no answer forthcoming. What is certainly the case is that from 1972, the year in which Calvino raised his concerns in "Lo sguardo dell'archeologo," until 1979, Calvino published no literary texts. Calvino's absence from the Italian literary scene was both figurative and literal, as he spent the period from 1967-1979 in Paris.³⁶ Thus, Calvino was outside Italy in 1968, when the uprising and social turmoil perhaps offered the possibility for writers to become involved in events through their texts. Calvino saw the events of 1968 as a missed opportunity, which confirmed his notion that writers could engage with society through the media but not through fiction. He assesses the period following 1968 in his 1976 essay "Usi politici giusti e sbagliati della letteratura," writing that:

³³ Derrida's lecture "Différance" was given to the *Société française de la philosophie* and is reproduced in *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 61-79 (70).

³⁴ Burns, *Fragments*, 50.

³⁵ Calvino's 1972 essay, "Lo sguardo dell'archeologo" is notable in that it uses much of the same terminology as the 1976 essay "Usi politici giusti e sbagliati della letteratura." In 1972 Calvino writes that "tutti i parametri, le categorie, le antitesi che erano serviti per immaginare e classificare e progettare il mondo sono in discussione: e non solo quelli più legati ad attribuzioni di valori storiche: il razionale e il mitico, il lavorare e l'esistere, il maschile e il femminile, ma pure i poli di topologie ancor più elementare: l'affermare e il negare, l'alto e il basso, il vivente e la cosa" (Calvino, *Una pietra sopra*, 319).

³⁶ Bonsaver suggests that Calvino's move to Paris seemed to make his detachment from the Italian literary milieu explicit (Bonsaver, "Il Menabò," 86).

la destrutturazione dell'opera letteraria poteva aprire la via a una nuova valutazione e una nuova strutturazione. Cosa ne è venuto fuori? Niente [...] Il nuovo radicalismo degli studenti del Sessantotto è stata caratterizzata in Italia da un rifiuto della letteratura. (Calvino, *Una pietra sopra*, 348).

In this essay Calvino argues that, in the absence of engagement through literature, the role of the intellectual changed, so that the new duties comprised involvement in newspaper and television debates, in order to “occupare lo spazio vacante d'un discorso politico intelligibile” (Calvino, *Una pietra sopra*, 349). The theoretical position espoused in his later essay is certainly borne out by Calvino's writings of the period. Belpoliti suggests that the fantastical nature of Calvino's 1972 novel *Le città invisibili* represents an attempt to flee and indeed to counter-balance the gravity of the student uprisings, the strategy of tension and terrorism of the *anni di piombo*.³⁷ Calvino published no novels during the central years of the 1970s, when terrorism and the strategy of tension were at their peak, but he did continue to write fiction, in the form of the Palomar stories. Signor Palomar appeared in August 1975 in *Corriere della sera* and readers followed his travels in Mexico and Japan for three years, in seventeen *articoli-racconti*, and then Palomar re-appeared in *La Repubblica* in 1980. Belpoliti suggests that these travel tales, like the earlier *Città invisibili*, represent “una via di fuga dal vicolo cieco della realtà presente.”³⁸ The crucial divide between literature and journalism is crystallized by Calvino's decision to expunge all socio-cultural references from the Palomar stories when he turned them into a book in 1983 suggesting that fiction does not engage with the socio-political climate.³⁹ Calvino used his journalism to dialogue with his era, often publishing on the front page of *Corriere della sera*. The pessimism which Burns sees as characterizing Calvino's journalistic writing in the 1970s counters the lightness which Belpoliti suggests defines *Le città invisibili*.⁴⁰

³⁷ Belpoliti, *Settanta*, 110. The *anni di piombo* refers to the violence that characterized the 1970s, carried out by left and right wing paramilitary groups. Elements within government, the secret services and the armed forces supported right-wing terrorism, which aimed to engender fear and so provoke authoritarian rule, known as the “strategy of tension.” For a detailed analysis, see Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 348-405.

³⁸ Belpoliti, *Settanta*, 153. Belpoliti goes on to observe that Manganelli's travel literature and fantastical writing of the era represent a similar urge to escape reality.

³⁹ Belpoliti analyses Palomar's metamorphosis as he moves from *Corriere della sera* to *La Repubblica* to book format (*Settanta*, 208-209).

⁴⁰ Belpoliti, *Settanta*, 110; Burns, *Fragments*, 43. Burns suggests that in Calvino's pessimistic view of the world around him, he regards not individuals but the hidden strategists and systems which support them as dangerous, and he dwells in particular upon the Piazza Fontana bomb and the failure to satisfactorily attribute blame.

Like Calvino, Pasolini chose journalism as the most effective means of engaging with society. Pasolini had written newspaper articles from the 1950s onwards, but became more heavily involved in journalism from 1973 onwards, becoming a regular and notable contributor to mainstream newspapers, in particular to *Corriere della sera*. Pasolini's articles were not confined to the *terza pagina* but also graced the front pages.⁴¹ Through his journalism, Pasolini stressed that intellectuals (and especially writers) had a crucial role to play in society. In 1974, Pasolini insisted that unlike in the 1960s, "oggi ci sono delle ragioni per un impegno totale."⁴² He asserted that intellectuals had a duty to dialogue with and so influence society, pointing to the privileged viewpoint of the writer. In an article for *Corriere della sera* in November 1974, Pasolini writes that:

io so perché sono un intellettuale, uno scrittore, che cerca di seguire tutto ciò che succede, di conoscere tutto ciò che se ne scrive, di immaginare tutto ciò che non si sa o che si tace, che coordina fatti anche lontani, che mette insieme i pezzi disorganizzati e frammentari di un intero coerente quadro politico, che ristabilisce la logica là dove sembrano regnare l'arbitrarietà, la follia e il mistero.⁴³

Pasolini's desire to engage with society appears as strong as in the 1960s, however, as Burns points out, by the 1970s Pasolini represents a lone voice rather than one voice in a chorus of many (Burns, *Fragments*, 42).

Sciascia and Pasolini

Although Pasolini is a lone voice calling for traditional *impegno* to be channelled through journalistic writing, he is not alone in using writing as a means of engaging in dialogue with society, as a medium which may influence the reader and so perhaps have an impact on the contemporary world. In his

⁴¹ Pasolini's newspaper articles are collected in *Scritti Corsari* (Milan: Garzanti, 1975) and *Lettere Luterane* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976). Burns offers an interesting analysis of Pasolini's newspaper articles of the 1970s in relation to the *impegno* debate (Burns, *Fragments*, 40-43).

⁴² Pasolini's article "Gli intellettuali nel '68: manicheismo e ortodossia della 'Rivoluzione dell'indomani'" appeared in *Dramma* (March 1974), and is reproduced in *Scritti corsari*, 35-37.

⁴³ Pasolini's article was published as "Che cos'è questo golpe?" in *Corriere della Sera*, 14 November 1974, and is reproduced as "14 November 1974. Il romanzo delle stragi," in *Scritti corsari*, 111-17 (112).

1979 collection of diary entries Sciascia reflects on the path he and Pasolini chose in the course of the 1970s, writing:

Io ero – e lo dico senza vantarmene, dolorosamente - la sola persona in Italia con cui lui potesse veramente parlare. Negli ultimi anni abbiamo pensato le stesse cose, detto le stesse cose, sofferto e pagato per le stesse cose. Eppure non siamo riusciti a parlarci, a dialogare.⁴⁴

Sciascia's observation is telling in two ways. On the one hand it asserts a sense of continuity between Pasolini's and Sciascia's belief in the importance of writing and their concerns about contemporary society, while on the other it also underscores a fundamental difference between the paths that the two men chose. Both the continuity and divergence becomes apparent if we consider Pasolini's "L'articolo delle lucciole" and Sciascia's 1971 novel *Il contesto*.⁴⁵ Both texts espouse the notion that true power is wielded by unseen forces, and so the individual must be alert and aware in order to challenge the status quo. However whereas Pasolini chooses journalism as the most effective means of dialoguing with society, having abandoned fiction in the preceding decade, Sciascia chooses literature as a channel of communication with his reader. Thus whilst Sciascia and Pasolini may appear to engage with similar topics during the 1970s, I would suggest that a more valid comparison may be drawn between Pasolini's post-war belief in the value of writing and Sciascia's writings from 1975 onwards; texts which are in fact often overlooked by critics of Sciascia's writing. Sciascia's commitment, like that of Tabucchi, may be seen as a re-emergence of the post-war faith in literature, at a time when the main architects of *impegno* were no longer looking to literature as a means of engaging with society. By the mid 1970s Calvino's writing had forked into journalistic pieces which engaged with the socio-political climate and fiction which sought to escape reality; Pasolini had forsaken literature in favour of the cinema and also chose journalism as the most effective means of engagement; and Vittorini was no longer alive (he died in 1966).

Impegno to socio-political engagement

Valid comparisons may be drawn between the post-war faith in literature as a means of engaging with society and the ways in which Sciascia and Tabucchi

⁴⁴ Leonardo Sciascia, *Nero su nero*, in *II*, 601-846 (774).

⁴⁵ Pasolini's article was originally published as "Il vuoto del potere in Italia" in *Corriere della Sera* on 1 February 1975, and is reproduced in *Scritti corsari*, 160-68. Sciascia's novel appears in *II*, 1-96.

view reading and writing as important means of influencing the contemporary world. However it is important not to confuse post-war *impegno* with the later, very different manifestations of committed literature evident in Sciascia's and Tabucchi's texts; engaged writing which takes account of (in separate and individual ways) the challenges posed to literary engagement during the 1950s and 1960s. Tabucchi certainly rejects the term *impegno*, viewing it as anachronistic. In a 1997 interview with Bernard Comment, Tabucchi defines *impegno* as a "termine assolutamente inopportuno, che io non ho mai utilizzato, e che in Italia provoca disgusto immediato, per via della sua associazione con l'idea comunista."⁴⁶ Sciascia, on the other hand, embraces the title of *impegnato*, although close examination of his notion of *impegno* reveals some interesting discrepancies between his beliefs and the programme of the post-war writers. Sciascia certainly shares the post-war writers' belief that literature should seek to communicate a truth between the writer and the reader. In a 1978 interview Sciascia explains that:

io mi sento impegnato soprattutto con me stesso, per me stesso. E con altri me stesso, cioè i miei lettori. Credo che i lettori stiano bene con me, i miei libri, proprio perché si sentono alla pari. Il lettore è per me come il prossimo del Vangelo. Lo amo come me stesso perché è un altro me stesso. È questo il nocciolo dell'impegno, del mio impegno: non è possibile mentire a se stessi. Io posso sbagliarmi, posso non capire. Mentire, mai. Che senso avrebbe mentire per ingannare me stesso?⁴⁷

The sense of the writer and reader being "alla pari" evokes Calvino's discussion of the "immediatezza di comunicazione tra lo scrittore e il suo pubblico" in the post-war period, outlined in his 1964 preface to *Il sentiero dei nidi di ragno*.

In common with the neorealist writers, Sciascia (1921-1989) grew up under fascism and found the experience shaped his ethical outlook, and his desire, as a writer, to engage with his socio-political world. However as a Sicilian, Sciascia's experience of fascism and of the war was very different in two important ways. In the first instance, although Sciascia attended anti-fascist meetings from 1938 onwards, he was not involved in the Resistance.⁴⁸ The Resistance was a wholly northern phenomenon, and so the post-war desire to

⁴⁶ The interview forms part of Tabucchi's text *La gastrite di Platone* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1998), 52.

⁴⁷ The interview with *Grazia* in September 1978 is reproduced in *La palma va a nord*, ed. Valter Vecellio (Milan: Gammalibri, 1982), 68-69.

⁴⁸ Sciascia recounts that he attended anti-fascist meetings in Marcelle Padovani and Leonardo Sciascia, *La Sicilia come metafora: Intervista di Marcelle Padovani* (Milan: Mondadori, 1979), 123.

use the partisan experience as a blueprint for future society was alien to Sciascia.⁴⁹ Indeed, Sciascia was scathing about the neorealist literature which sought to map out such a programme, explaining in a 1978 interview that such a project “mi è parso subito falso.”⁵⁰ Although fascism was a shaping influence on Sciascia, his development was also influenced by other factors, and so the experience of fascism was contextualized in a wider system of abuses. Sciascia observes that as a Sicilian,

ho passato i primi vent’anni della mia vita dentro una società doppiamente non libera, doppiamente non razionale. Una società-non società, in effetti. La Sicilia di cui Pirandello ha dato la più vera e profonda rappresentazione. E il fascismo.⁵¹

If the fascism which ruled Italy from 1922-1943 represents only one manifestation of a wider system of abuses, then Sciascia, unlike the neorealist writers, is not focused on the rebuilding of a society in the aftermath of the fascism which ended with the war. Sciascia’s engagement is far more wide-reaching, looking to combat any system of abuses which threatens to become the new fascism. For Sciascia, fascism remains a living threat rather than a historical evil. In a 1979 interview with Marcelle Padovani, Sciascia outlines both the importance of fascism in shaping his engagement and his concept of fascism as an enduring menace:

Non dubito affatto che quest’impegno deriva dalla mia condizione familiare, che ha saputo suscitare in me un istinto di classe; e poi dall’esperienza del fascismo, che è stata dura e “sofferta,” come si usa dire, e che mi ha fatto capire come il fascismo non potesse realizzarsi che contro di me, contro i miei interessi e quelli di tutti coloro che mi assomigliavano. Credo che, se sono diventato un certo tipo di scrittore, lo devo alla passione antifascista. La mia sensibilità al fascismo continua a essere assai forte, lo riconosco ovunque e in ogni luogo, persino quando riveste i panni dell’antifascismo, e resto sensibile all’eternamente possibile fascismo italiano. Il fascismo non è morto. Convinto di questo, sento una gran voglia di combattere, di impegnarmi di più, di essere sempre più deciso e intransigente, di mantenere un atteggiamento sempre polemico nei riguardi di qualsiasi potere. (Padovani, *La Sicilia come metafora*, 85)

Since the neorealist writers were focused upon the resurrection of a new society, based on a roughly communist blueprint as an antidote to fascism, then

⁴⁹ Vittorini, one of the great architects of *impegno* and neorealism, was also Sicilian; however he left the island and moved to the north of Italy in the 1920s.

⁵⁰ Sciascia’s description of neorealism appeared in *Mondo operaio* in December 1978 and is reproduced in Vecellio, *La palma va a nord*, 135.

⁵¹ Leonardo Sciascia, cited in the *Cronologia*, in *I*, il-lxxx (li).

the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 and the waning of revolutionary zeal in the wake of the economic boom seriously challenged and undermined their project. Sciascia's project, however, was unfettered by either of these events. As Sciascia sought to challenge all regimes which sought to instigate abuses, he was not ideologically bound to defend to the *PCI*. As Sciascia's texts did not promulgate a classless society based on the Resistance, the complacency of the working classes did not force him to question his literary engagement. As part of a younger generation, Tabucchi (1943-) did not have to struggle with the issues of the boom or of the increasing disillusionment with communism. By the time Tabucchi published his first novel in 1975, the *Democrazia Cristiana* (*DC*) and the *PCI* were perhaps equally discredited, equally unable to offer solutions to the civil unrest and the terrorism which plagued Italy during the *anni di piombo*.⁵² From the ashes of the communist vision, Tabucchi was able to voice a challenge to both, indeed all, sides of the Italian political spectrum.

Sciascia and Tabucchi adopt very different methodologies to deal with the challenges posed to committed literature by the literary developments of the 1960s. Despite such differences, crucially both of them find ways to incorporate the problematization of truth and of language into their engagement with society, and use the discourses of intertextuality to strengthen rather than weaken their dialogue with the reader. The issues which reduced the engagement of the post-war architects of *impegno* to cinders provide material for the very different forms of committed literature which Sciascia and Tabucchi develop in their writing.

The Tabucchi/Eco debate

Sciascia's particularity as a writer using literature to engage with society in the 1970s is brought into relief through a comparison of his work and Pasolini's stance, and through Sciascia's own commentary on Pasolini's death. The particularity of Tabucchi's belief in literature as a means of engaging with society is underscored through a polemic between Tabucchi and Umberto Eco in 1997, in which Tabucchi seeks to establish the function of the intellectual in the post-war era. Eco and Tabucchi are grouped together by Luperini in his assessment of the generation of writers whom he claims eschew the role of writer-intellectual, yet their exchange in 1997 clearly marks out the differences between Tabucchi and Eco (Luperini, *Controtempo*, 176). In "Il primo dovere degli intellettuali: Stare zitti quando non servono a niente," which appeared in

⁵² Tabucchi's first novel was *Piazza d'Italia* (Milan: Bompiani, 1975). Subsequent page references refer to the 1998 Feltrinelli edition. Ginsborg analyses the political crisis and compromises during the *anni di piombo* in *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 348-405.

L'Espresso on 24 April 1997, Eco suggests that the role of the intellectual is very limited. Tabucchi's vehement response to Eco's essay underlines a huge divergence between the positions of two of the most prominent intellectuals of their time. In his reply, "Un fiammifero Minerva," Tabucchi takes issue with two claims made by Eco: that in the case of a fire, an intellectual can do nothing but call the fire brigade; and that faced with an intransigent Mayor who refuses to offer asylum to four Albanians, protest on the part of the intellectual is fruitless and so the intellectual should focus on writing a book that will educate the Mayor's grandchildren, in order to create a better future.⁵³ Tabucchi very deliberately states that by "intellectual" he includes writers and poets, and that they have a much greater role in society than that prescribed by Eco (*La gastrite*, 16). Tabucchi refutes Eco's first notion of a fire, stating that in the event of a fire, a fireman may extinguish the blaze and investigators may establish the cause, but if doubts and discrepancies emerge from the inquest, then the intellectual's role comes to the fore (*La gastrite*, 40). The function of the intellectual is to ask questions; not so much "'creare' delle crisi, ma *mettere in crisi*" (*La gastrite*, 32, italics in text). This sense of the immediacy of the writer's role is reiterated in Tabucchi's refusal to accept that his function lies solely in writing schoolbooks to educate future generations, in his contestation of Eco's notion that "gli intellettuali sono utili alla società, ma solo nei tempi lunghi" (*La gastrite*, 26). Tabucchi insists that

il compito dell'intellettuale (ma vorrei insistere, quello dell'artista), è proprio questo, [...] rimproverare a Platone di non aver inventato il rimedio per la gastrite. È questa la sua 'funzione' (e, specifico, funzione *sporadica*). (*La gastrite*, 28-29, italics in text)

Thus, rather than aim solely at long-term goals, Tabucchi asserts that

voglio vivere nel mio oggi e nel mio ora; nell'Attuale. Voglio essere sincronico col mio Tempo, col mio mondo, con la realtà che la Natura (o il Caso, o Qualcosaltro) mi ha concesso di vivere in questo preciso momento del Tempo. L'idea di essere diacronico per i nipotini di tutti i sindaci d'Italia per quando arriveranno all'età della ragione non mi seduce affatto. (*La gastrite*, 41)

The polemic between Eco and Tabucchi clearly marks out Tabucchi's notion of committed writing as unique amongst his peers.

⁵³ Tabucchi's essay initially appeared in *Micromega* (May 1997), and was then used as the basis for *La gastrite di Platone*, which also includes an interview with Bernard Comment and two letters written from prison by Adriano Sofri, to whom "Un fiammifero Minerva" is addressed.