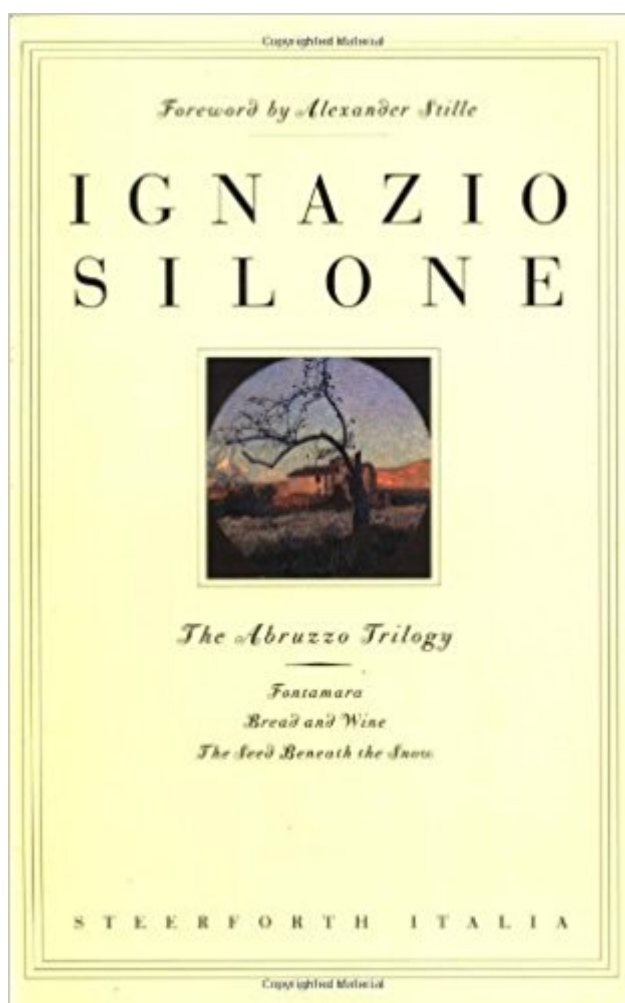


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The Abruzzo Trilogy: Fontamara, Bread And Wine, The Seed Beneath The Snow (v. 1-3)



Synopsis

The impoverished, desolate mountain regions of the Abruzzo during Mussolini's reign provide the backdrop for the three greatest novels by Ignazio Silone, one of the twentieth century's most important writers. In *Fontamara*, *Bread and Wine*, and *The Seed Beneath the Snow* - presented together for the first time in English to mark the centenary of the author's birth - Silone narrates the struggles of the *cafoni*, the farmers and peasants of his native Abruzzo, against poverty, natural disasters, and totalitarianism. The first novel in the series, *Fontamara*, is a political fable that portrays the bitter trials of the villagers of Pescina as they battle with landowners who have appropriated their only source of water. First published from his exile in Zurich in 1933, and banned in his own country, the novel was translated into twenty languages and won Silone instant international literary fame. Silone's masterpiece, *Bread and Wine*, introduces the semi-autobiographical character Pietro Spina, an anti-Fascist revolutionary who returns to his homeland after fifteen years in exile. He seeks refuge among the Abruzzo peasants by posing as the priest Don Paolo Spada. Pietro's story continues in *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, Silone's personal favorite in the trilogy. Pietro Spina flees again and, with the police in close pursuit, is taken in by his grandmother Donna Maria Vincenza. Though comfortably settled in Italian bourgeois society, she jeopardizes her own life in order to protect him.

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Customer Reviews

"More than 30 years after his death, it is high time that English-language readers rediscovered this

valiant writer and his works." — The Wall Street Journal

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Italian

This massive work by Ignazio Silone aka Secondino Tranquilli is actually three novels set in the rural and mountainous region of the Abruzzo where much of the population of farm peasants (calfoni) lived in continuous poverty for centuries and from where many of the Italian immigrants to the U.S., Canada and elsewhere came. The first book of the trilogy, "Fontamara", is the story of a particular village of calfoni and how its residents continuously suffer from exploitation not just by the landed gentry of the area but also by the new Fascist government that preaches egalitarianism but practices a rapacious state corporatism. When a champion of the poor rises out of frustration in their defense, he is quickly isolated and brought down, sometimes with the collaboration of the people he is trying to help. "Bread and Wine" is the second part of the book, taking place some years after "Fontamara" and centered on the return of a native son, Pietro Spina, who has been living in political exile outside the country. Spina returns with hope of provoking political resistance to the increasingly oppressive national government led by Mussolini (but always referred to as "the leader".) Spina's arrival coincides with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia which brings new misery to the calfoni. Constantly moving through the Abruzzi landscape, but with little success to show for his organizing efforts, Spina eventually must flee (into Book Three). The last part of the trilogy, "The Seed Beneath the Snow", is the author's subtle denunciation of the stifling, corrupt and treacherous social structure of petit bourgeois living in the region's villages and small towns. Hypocrisy and conformism by the relatively privileged and dumb acceptance and inbred defeatism by the peasants, are the norm and force the fugitive Pietro Spina to look in other directions for personal salvation. Ultimately, it is basic friendship and personal sacrifice that brings him peace. What makes these three novels quite wonderful, are their underlying honesty and the eventual humanity that shines through at the end. The conversations between the richly drawn characters drive the book forward. Overall, a unique and fulfilling reading experience that gives you a great deal to think about.

For my Italian class I was reading the trilogy in Italian. I used the English translation (excellent by the way) to check my understanding after I had read the original. These stories were written before and after the rise of Fascism and World War II and explain the political turmoil well. The main character is very complex and not particularly sympathetic, but well worth the time spent in reading.

This trilogy describes Italian life for real people in the Abruzzi during the fascist years. With telling details of everyday life, you get the feeling of the sorrows and difficulties of life in Italy that underlie the Italian approach to life.

Wonderful pieces of Italian literature. Ignazio is one of Italy's finest writers.

this major work deserves to be better known. it depicts the struggles of the people of Italy for human survival, under terrible circumstances.

This edition arrived in 2000, and finally combined in English (translation by Eric Mosbacher but revised by Ignazio's wife Darina, and for the first two novels, in their revised Italian versions) to present the full trilogy, Silone's most famous works. Alexander Stille includes as the introduction, in a piece not credited here but which appeared in earlier in *The New Yorker*, when "il caso Silone" emerged. Some revisionist historians claimed to have found documentation of the author's collaboration with the Fascist regime, tangled with the death at the hands of that regime of Silone's brother. There have been strong arguments made by both defenders and critics; Stille suggests some key plot elements in the second part of the trilogy may reflect Silone's guilt. But leaving that to critics and interpreters, these three novels remain as a testament to Silone's knack for getting down how the "cafoni" (laborers) felt and talked and endured. Full of biblical allusions, enriched by the conversations of the everyday people, this translation flows well, and I imagine in the original the dialogues have a lot of verve and wit. That enables readers nearly a century after Fascism to continue to turn to these novels for insight about not only totalitarian but Christian and socialist values. Silone fought long and hard for liberty, and he like Pietro Spina his prickly protagonist (not all that easy to like as the pages accumulate; he tends to alienate some of his intimates) became disenchanted with the Stalinist party line of the Italian communists. These parallels make this narrative all the more interesting, and the lively repartee and debates on issues, to me, comprise the best parts of this epic. However, after the choral voices of the defiant village in *Fontamara*, and the disguise of Pietro as the priest Don Pedro in *Bread and Wine*, the flight of Pietro to his native turf in *the Seed Beneath the Snow* does slow the pace markedly. The first two installments whir by quickly. The last takes its time, and although social issues continue, it feels less a character study and more a novel of ideas by the end. Each conclusion of these three dense novels ends rapidly, with drama. A diligent reader may find a reward for perseverance into a heady, but rewarding saga.

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