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**Maħruġ mis-Socjetà tal-Poeżija – Malta Poetry Society.
Disinn tal-qoxra minn Harry Alden**

15C

SOĊJETA' TAL-POEZIJA / MALTA POETRY SOCIETY



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VICTOR FENECH

Rilke

Mulej, iss'ghoddu għadda s-sajf.
F'mixjietu kien sabiħ mill-isbah.
Mhux fil-ferh is-sbuhija, Mulej.
Is-sbuhija fil-benna u l-qawwa tal-ħsieb.

Li tkun jew li ma tkunx; l-ishah
intensità gewwiena – dak li tkun
(id-duende ta' Lorca l-innerlichkeit ta' Rilke?)
Mill-glieda ma' l-oħrajn m'għamiltx
retorika, skiet biss. Izda mill-glieda
miegħi innifsi għamilt il-poezija.
Hemmhekk raġun lil Yeats.

U issa...?

Tassew li l-weraq niexef niezel
l-uniku romantiċiżmu tal-ħarifa?
Żmien il-ħarsien lura? Tisfija u titwib?
Lili r-reminixxenzi jtappnu li l-orizzont.

Mulej, kif għoddu għadda s-sajf!
Għaliex ladarba jgħib sajf iehor bħalu qatt?

FRANCIS EBEJER

In a Manner of Love and Concern

Green whorls bounding walls on each side
the lateral interjection of trees
among the boulder-rooted, surprisingly lymph-like,
single rooms of rough stone in
between a spread of vetch
blanket-wise, blood-wise, better still
ceremonial, the purple of great happenings;
such it should be
under a sky
bellied blue with anonymous zephyrs from
cracks in cliffs and hidden passages through carob
trees; some say through open slits in
the earth where it breathes old and young young
and old this earth we stand on, this soil that
rubs our toes, you may even hear its language, what
does it say? Simple inclination of head is not
enough. Finger tip to crumbling wall wrinkling the
decayed richness of centuries, that can
fool you too.
You think you understand.
Walk with
me step by step, hushed,
breathing, tasting the dust on your lips in the warm
aureole of sun you're presently standing in; grit in
mouth, sun-hot cheeks, thyme-teased nostrils ...
Spring out and up in semi-levitation inside
the shimmer before your eyes, lightly tossed and
fussed by the promiscuous breeze as it embraces the
carob's thick masculine branches, licks its way
through each tiny, chequered sense of light and shade.
Like the breeze, divine and taste the juice deep inside
the ancient bark; then you will hear the
language again
in the ancient dust, stock still in one
moment of Malta -
This you will understand and in the surrender of

your limbs, all the planted genes in your
body rise and quiver to its sibillance as to
the harsh melody of tearing *griegal*
or rumbustious *majjistrat*... lifts to your
face upon the promontory in the apex of the mammal
landscape this land heaving the fertile rites all its own,
earth hormones and chromosomes of ritual and
sacrifice – strength through sacrifice –
the bleeding, the watering in red of animal, the greedy
sumptuous fissures and myriad pin-heads of flower, the
offspring and the begotten their legacy its own
heritage :... where does it end, this language?
Listen well and brightly,
through pastel haze; the song and the
singers, hear both...
as far as Haġar Qim and Mnajdra the piper plays his
tune; in his way of centuries the melody continues
as it was... up and through the oracular holes,
from temple to temple (on the hill, brethren, a
temple) to dried grass stalks, roots, pinning
the gecko's legs on the sun-warmed slab to your
right or to your left, as with the green lizard...
pat the piper's back, stay in his shadow, his tune,
with your feet and his, weave the dust
rumple the grass, scale
the stones a million suns have fashioned to the
likeness of your dreams since your beginning in
a distant cell ripened in sun, reddened in soil...
Inside the thick bark it desires
nothing less than all the real, central, secret
beating, rhythmic, pounding, amoeba centre of you...
Love's language has no end, filters through, in
Marsaskala, Marsaxlokk, and Xlendi and
Żurrieq, the *dġbajjes* and the *luzzi* swing in
the eternal shimmer, the lamppost on the
quay a yellow bright eye...
... in Kuncizzjoni and Mtahleb and
Bahrija the crested archways, the erectile
crosses, devotional, deaths and births, matrimonial,

the week's rest, ceremonial, above interlocked
 feasts of land and rock and sweat and joy and all the
 tumbling, churning years, the sun-cracked years . . .
 And then, it is often related, furtively now,
 odd dissonance, in new unaccustomed temper,
 the breeze, such as we could make of it, wires out to
 other places, other forms, other shapes,
 copy-cat buildings, toadstools, excrescences, and is
 rendered unfamiliar through new, unhealed scars on
 the face of the land you trod once in all the
 joy of its language . . .
 wounds, will they scar?
 the language harshens or becomes unintelligible, you
 listen but get nothing.
 Will it love you
 will it love you
 now?

FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The First Annual General Meeting of the Malta Poetry Society/Soċjeta tal-Poezija was held on February 21 at the British Council and practically coincided with the first birthday of the Society which was founded at a public meeting held at the same venue on February 16, 1971.

The object of the Society is 'to foster in every way the study, appreciation and enjoyment of poetry' - an object it upheld in its first year of existence with a range of activities which included public lectures, recitals by visiting readers, a number of Wine & Poetry gatherings and the publication of 'Poezija'.

At the end of the meeting the Council for the coming year was elected. *Chairman:* His Honour Prof. J.J. Cremona; *Vice-Chairman:* Mr. Norman Sutcliffe; *Hon. Treasurer:* Col. G.M. Rossiter (Ret'd); *Hon. Secretary:* Miss Marlene Saliba; *Members:* Mrs. Mary Cockson-Jones, Mr. George Cassola, Mr. Victor Fenech. All those interested in the Society are asked to get in touch with Miss Saliba at 25 Zinnia Street, Santa Lucia.

ANTHONY PRECA

Poem

in the lost property section
the fatherly officer
gently smiled at the museum piece
 in black
and shook his head
in a
 no-it-can't-be-yours-
 there-are-these-balloons-inside-
 you-see
attitude
but she arched her very correct back
admonishingly
and with a
 we're-all-human
nod
 left
taking her bag
 her balloons
 and his innocence
along

Sad Sunday of a Soldier's Death

all the words on earth tumbled one over the other
in an effort to get out to the sun one last time
together
but they only stuck in his throat
and he did not say anything
just before he died
he decided to shut his eyes
and lie back on the ground
but gentle death saved him the trouble
he fell back and earth filled his arse
and later
his ears

DANIEL MASSA

Metro

b'ghajnejja jinqalbu jghoddu s-sulari tal-metropoli
sthajjiltek xaghrek lejn is-sema u jien
nitkaxkar l-isfel minn folla tisghol in-nugrufun
go wiċċi go vagun la tpejjipx
ma niżnix la tixhdux haġa b'oħra fis-siegha
ta' l-ghaġla fil-metro
mrassas minn nisa bla bla bi protesta
xuxithom imniżżla b'sabta
idejhom ċirku u fin-nofs jien nitwerreċ
infittex destinazzjoni kuntrarja
mara b'xagħrha lejn is-sema fil-metro
u n-nol jagħfas is-sewda quddiemi
tkanta l-kult ta' tifel u biċċa w ninfomana
trid toghdos f'banjijiet keshin
ghax mghadhiex taqra pom u l-ġingrija
tirfisli għarqubi
ma skoss jifirxu dirghajhom lejn imħabbi katakali
f'nisġa ta' harir l-iljieli ta' mħabba
nqum u nitlaq
u x-xebba tiskandalja sidirha
fil-jiem meta xeddet warditha
nqum u nitlaq qahba ta' kult barrani jien
miexi lura tul turgien jaħarbu s-snin
ingerrex tal-bejt fuq il-wajers
nisraq il-frieh għadhom laham zoqquhom
ghax hawn ma jibnux bejtiet u l-passa m'ghaddietx
qalu n-nisa mhix se tgħaddi
u x-xbieki nifrixhom f'bosk Akteon
nistad ix-xebba tgholli xagħrha lejn is-sema
sidirha ma tieghi nostoma tinhasel go bir irġuliti
jalla l-harruba li firxet dlielha ma ruħi taħsilni
iż-ziffa li ttaqqal is-siġar tat-tamar tehliisni
in-nida tgħammidni
mat-tifla qabla ssaffi l-uliedi minn xema twelidhom
u huma nofs raqda fid-dell ta' min habbni
jomoghdu ir-ras tal-pepprin taħt siġra ż-Żurrieq
u n-nisa fil-metro jagħmlu l-qrun
tghajjinhomx

DANIEL MASSA

Underground

eyes clambering the night-sky of the metropolis
in the distance your hair tossed in air and I
swept down by a crowd coughing soot
in my face to a No-Smoking compartment
I shall not commit adultery bear false witness
in the rush hour
circled by women burned their bra
hair slammed down in protest
their hands a circle and I cross-eyed
move in a contrary direction
to the girl with hair tossed in air in the underground
and the negress opposite
sings the cult of a child and a half
and the nymph telling cold baths on her fingers
now she can't afford porn and the blonde
stings my heel with a jolt
spreading their arms towards my ritual love
weaving in silk their nights of love
I rise and go
and the girl feels her breasts
in the days of her flowers
I rise and go a whore to a foreign cult
up and down escalators running the years
scaring sparrows off angle-irons
robbing nestlings just born feed them
here they build no nests and migration is late
the women say they'll come no more
and I must spread my nets in the forest
taming the girl with hair tossed in air
shielding her bathing in the forests of my youth
May the carob branching in my soul cleanse me
the wind blowing heavy in the palm-trees free me
dew baptise me
with the girl cleansing my sons from the wax of their birth
and they half asleep in the shadow of her who loves me
sucking the head of poppies under a tree at Zurrieq
and the women in the underground though they're envious
let them be

BERYL MUSCAT

Grandmother

Across the faded years you make your statement
Sitting among the reapers on the hill;
The sun, a fat man's laugh in a blue casement,
Runs down to strike sentinel elms that still
Guard the unruly green. I know the flirt
Counting the buttons on your bodice frill
With a sly finger, reaching in his shirt
For eggs laid in the corn to sway your will.

I have contrived a home among strange men
In a strange land, not for my progeny
But for the warrant of a scythe made then,
Such as it was, and is – an offertory
In kind, shape and degree that is the stock
And root of kin, those accidents of fate
That place the lamp about the stair, the clock
Across the hall, the eye upon the gate.

We've not shared much – a battered *Boisselot*
That kindled to a cracked note here and there
(Like you, after a stout or two); that glow
Thrown off by love that would unbraid the hair.

Where was it we began to mould to one?
Somewhere between those wildflower offerings
Made then, and this *Dawra Durella** spun
Off in the foreign tongue my baby sings.
So even now we may still make-believe,
And reaching out catch those we love behind
With those unborn beloved yet to weave
Patterns of love, like us, from straws that bind.

**Dawra Durella* – A Maltese children's game of Ring-a-ring-of-roses.

EDWARD ELLUL

Einsteinesque

I hurried from my sitting-room
into my bedroom to fetch something.
Goodness, what am I looking for!
In those seemingly few steps
I was a changed person:
this man in the bedroom
remembers nothing of the urgent quest
of that other man out there
who was presently in my sitting-room.
Then how deep did I travel into oblivion
in search of what golden fleece?
What fantastic measuring tape
will show me how far it is
from my sitting-room to my bedroom
— how many light-years?

Let There Be Light

Am I, all said and done,
rather this ONE and not that ONE
— a natural child of Physics
or a respectable son of Philosophy?
Is my soul burning at second hand
in the kerosene lamp?
On the failure of electricity
I struck a match
and lo, there was a light in my brain
whose creative fancy lit the lamp.
As it begins to tingle
I dare not touch my forehead
lest I feel the hot metal.

MARIO AZZOPARDI

Jekk il-fjuri għadhom ma tbilux

l-ghana tagħhom kristalizzat fil-blat
u llum jtitlissen biss
ghax imiss it-tieni żmien t'ekliissi kohol
tistaqsix tistax tidhol fl-ort tal-ghana
jekk il-fjuri ta' fuq moħħok
għadhom ma tbilux mill-aħħar
magħmudija tiegħek
titkellimx:

u ersaq bla ħoss ħa tisma'
l-ghana tal-verġni tal-qedem
maqful go l-gherien.

Shalom

kunċert ta' elettriku maqful f'widnejja – bla ħoss
u alla mbissem direttur mutu.
mili ta' muntanji mitwija bħall-imkatar fil-but
kilometri ta' xmajjar marsusa f'ponn idejna
meded twal ta' foresti lela dijadema fuq rasna
u bjuda.

ħares għad-disinn taż-żodjak
ħares għad-disinn ta' l-istilel f'kunċert
ghana tal-kult ta' posidon taht l-ilma
arpi l-qwies ta' sagittarju ċentawr tal-bellus
u aktar bjuda
shalom.

MARIO AZZOPARDI

If the flowers have not withered

their song is crystallised in rock
and today it is only uttered
because of the second coming of the blue eclipse
do not ask whether you could enter the garden of song
if the flowers on your brow
have not withered yet
since your last baptism
do not speak:

and tread softly to hear
the ancient song of the virgins who lived long ago
entombed in the rock.

Shalom

an electric concert imprisoned in my ears – noiselessly
and god a dumb director, smiling.
miles of mountains folded and pocketed like handkerchiefs
kilometers of river-water grasped tightly in our hands
long stretches of lilac forests like tiaras on our heads
and whiteness.

look for the zodiac sign
look for the pattern of stars in symphony
hear the songs of poseidon's cult underwater
and the harping arrows of the velvety centaur
and more whiteness
shalom.



WALLACE PH. GULIA

*Mignun Bl-Imhabba**

Il-bieraħ fl-uffiċċju,
giet f'idejja karta,
miktuba l-isbaħ għoxrin sena qabel,
musfara, m'arrta, mraqqa,
bil-karti tara minnhom
imsewwija!

Qazzitni, ngħid li hu,
biss il-ħtieġa tagħha għaraft
u f'qalbi iżżejthom ħajr
lil dawk li qabli din il-karta għożżew,
biex meta tkun teħtieġ tinstab u tfiehem
dak li l-kliem miktub kien jgħid ...

U għadda ħsieb minn rasi:
Min jaf kull maħluq
kif jidher quddiem Alla
bl-irvina tal-annati tqal ta' fuqu?!

Bħal Dak jara fina
mhux biss it-tiċrit li żmien
għal żmien it-tobba sewwew fina;
mhux biss il-gilda mkemm xa;
il-ħaddejn sofor maħruha mir-roża taż-żgħożija;
il-qżi żijiet ta' taħt il-gilda
tagħlaq bħal qafas, demm u dgħif u vini ...
jara wkoll bħal f'mera
id-dell tal-ħsebijiet, tat-tixniq tagħna!

Li kieku ma jafx x'ħalaq
jista' qatt jiflahna
ħajja
mqar waqt?

**Struck by the dirtiness of some papers preserved among his records for over twenty years, the poet reflects on how hideous the creature must appear to the Creator who can discern not only the physical changes wrought by time but also the moral and mental tensions to which he is subject. He concludes that creation could have been an act of passionate love akin to madness, but hardly the consequence of a calculated process of hedonistic pleasure on the part of the Creator.*

Kif jista' jkun li biex jithenna bina
ħalaqna,
kif qaluna meta kollox iżgħar kien
mhux biss fi s-snin, iżd' iktar w iktar
fil-fehmiet imħassba tal-filosfi...?

Biss kienu qalu wkoll li għax kien ħabbna!
Hekk, jista' jkun.
Hafna,
tafhom int ukoll, jekk qbist l-għoxrin,
bl-imħabba gġennu!

27.v.'71

*Blue Eyed Wonder!**

(Lil Gabrielle)

"Kollox fid-dinja għandu l-għageb tiegħu"
qaluli dalgħodu l-għajnejn kbar u koħol
ta' binti ċ-ċekjkna; meta go qasrija sabet
kaxxa mħarrbta tas-sigaretti:
u tghidx x'ma għamlux għajnejha
meta fetħitha u l-fidda sabitilha
li tqartas is-sigaretti –
Għaliya dak il-ħin,
għalkemm is-siġar tal-ward ifewħu kienu
u jarmu l-il wien lil hawn lil hemm,
u gmiel fuq gmiel madwari kien qed jixxerred,
l-għajnejn il-koħol kbar qegħdin ji staghgħbu
kienu l-isbah gmiel tad-dinja,
u kollox rajt b'nuċċali għid
u fhimt li f'kollox għandi nfittex
il-gmiel, is-sewwa, t-tajjeb,
bħal tarbija ċekjkna qegħda tara d-dinja
għall-ewwel darba!

29.viii.'64

* *The poet dedicates this poem to his little daughter Gabrielle, whom he sees playing wild-eyed with a discarded cigarette box. To the poet nothing on earth can be as beautiful as Gabrielle's enquiring eyes. That moment he understands that life should be a search for all that is beautiful, true and good – like a child seeing the world for the first time!*

JOHN CREMONA

Calypso

As summer ripened in the mind, Ulysses
watched exuberant bunches of black grapes,
tendrils loose, reach down to the flagstoned floor,
figs sweat, plums bleed and halved red watermelons
laugh with black teeth at their reflection in
the flaming moon. This was no time for flight
with all things ripening to a seasonal
fruition. As he stood upon the shore,
measuring in his mind the distance from
this island to his Ithaca, Calypso
measured the shorter distance from her warm
lips to his shaded brow and shining mouth.

The Mermaids

Voiceless, our childhood mermaids
assimilate the fish-scale
lighting of noontide water.

Ample-breasted, coral-mouthed,
satin-loined, they loiter,
assailed by thoughts of oarsmen

in the vulnerable siesta hour
when the painted boats catch fire
and burn flameless to perdition.

Tin Drums

Tin drums rusting on my childhood fence
against a tortoiseshell sky.

The prickly pears and I
scaled rubble-walls like Saracens

or with a fierce sun on our glossy faces
scanned a horizon-bound infinity.

My father's house smelled of antiquity,
large and thick-walled with many hiding places.

I was learning too many things,
in the open, for a boy of my age;
at night, I lay down in a cage
with bars of simulated happenings.

The Answers

Interrogate

tomorrow

(a cold wind
in the marrow).

The answers to
your questions

dissolve in

murky water

and things that

do not matter

harden into

stone bastions.

CALYPSO was published in *Workshop 13* (Workshop Publications, London), THE MERMAIDS in *English 106* (Oxford University Press), TIN DRUMS in *Outposts 81* (Outposts Publications) and THE ANSWERS in *Expression One 25* (London).

MARJANU VELLA

Ċaġhka

Ghalhekk waqfitli l-kelma!

Għax issa kollox ha suriet għariba
u s-shab fuq rasi qed jitkawgħex wahdu
taħt għafsa t'ugighat, bla demm u griehi,
bla karba wahda.

Għax issa mill-ispazju qed nistenna
mhux nies neżlin mill-qamar (issa drajna!);
nistenna qed iż-żwiemel hfiel tar-riefnu
f'apokalissi.

Hajta hajta qed tinqata'
minn għajnejja t-tila sbejha;
qed titbiegħed 'l hinn, fil-beraħ,
għajta mbikkma, għajta-sejha.

Għaliex il-bidla,
għaliex imkien
ma nara bniedem,
ma nisma' kliem...?

Il-kelma waqfet fuq xofftejja w saret
ċaġhka mimlija ramel jikwi nar:
nistenna s'ghada; f'habta ma цаġhk' oħra
is-samm jobżoq minn sidru hodon xrar.

(Sliema, 26 ta' Lulju, 1971)

MARJANU VELLA

Pebble

So that is why the word has halted!

For everything now has taken a strange shape
and the clouds above my head are squirming
in pain, blood-less and wound-less,
not one complaint.

For I expect to see from space no men
descending from the moon (old hat!);
I await the swift horses of the wind
in an apocalypse.

One by one the threads of the pretty canvas
Come away from my eyes;
in space beyond, echoes distantly
a sad cry, a calling-cry.

Why this change,
Why can I nowhere
see a man,
hear a word...?

The word has halted at my lips to become
a pebble full of red-hot sand;
I shall wait till tomorrow; clashing with another pebble
the rock will spit out copious fire from its breast.

(trans. Norbert Ellul Vincenti)

MARJANU VELLA

Bidla

"Ġmielek f'ghajnejk,
fis-sura ta' genbejk,
fil-lehha taħraq ta' xofftejk imriegħda,
fil-heffa-berqa ta' riglejtk indaf."

– Hekk tidwi ġo widnejja
il-ghanja mill-widien
fejn nħaġ u mogħż kont nirgha
u ġawħar ta' ġidien.

Diwi li jinki
u jifni lir-ruħ:
ħluq qed jittewbu
mejta bil-ġuħ.

Nitwieżen fuqi nnifsi w nerga' nisma'
il-ghanja li jien stess irridha tmut;
jaġħfas dwar qalbi b'saħħa ta' ġgant iswed
l-azzar mislut fi ħjut.

'ma nara 'l hinn mill-wileġ
id-damma ta' l-ilwien;
u jaasal bla ma nifħmu
f'ilsien għarib il-kliem:

"Ġmielek f'ghajnejk, Marija;
ħarstek għejjun ta' nar...
issa mġħadekx tiftakar
kollox bħal ġħadda w tar."

Kienet tarja il-ħarruba,
issa xjaħet, issa ltwiet...
għaliex jinbidel f'kruha dak li dari
kien jimla qlubna b'seher ta' ħlewriet?

(Sliema, 1 ta' Settembru, 1971)

MARJANU VELLA

Change

'Your beauty is in your eyes,
in the curve of your thighs,
in the burning quiver of your trembling lips,
in the lightning-swiftness of your pure feet.'

—Thus echoes in my ear
the song of the valleys
where sheep and goats I grazed
and dearest kids.

An echoing that teases
and mortifies the spirit:
mouths yawn
famished to death.

Supporting myself somehow, I hear again
the song that I myself wish dead;
about my heart, with the force of a black giant,
press shredded threads of steel.

But far across the meadow I behold
the chain of colours;
and uncomprehended come to me
words in a strange tongue:

'Your beauty is in your eyes, Mary;
your eyes are fountains of fire
now you remember no more,
everything is gone and flown.'

Ripe was the carob tree,
now it is old and wizened . . .
why is it that that which used to brim our hearts with sweetness
is now turned to ugliness?

(trans. Norbert Ellul Vincenti)

MARY COCKSON-JONES

The Refreshment room

Out of the rain and the cold, between journey and journey,
I sought the refreshment room at the end of the platform,
With chilled hands, numb fingers, body shivering from draughts
Blown through the carriage door-jamb, feet on fire from the
hot-pipes

That blistered the floor-boards under the plush-covered seats.

Welcome the light through the windows, heartening the voices
and sounds

Of beer glasses clinking, the chink and chatter of tea-cups.

Here would be food, a hot drink and comparative comfort;

I could be quiet . . .

No more restless motion through tunnel and cutting.

Sharp clattering over viaducts, the drunkenness of the diesel;

I could sit still . . .

In a steamy warmth from the urn and the damp coats drying,

People ate hot hamburgers crowned with inevitable onion,

And the rich fish with his worshipful company of chips.

I warmed my hands round my cup, whose sweet thin brew

And the familiar ham sandwich comforted me –

I and my fellow-travellers finding a communal respite

Between journey and journey.

Outside on the blustering platform, rain-shining in darkness,

Others stood solitary alongside their baggage,

Or forlornly in groups, forcing penultimate conversation,

Wishing the train would come.

Over the frosted panes I could see a profile,

Its trilby rakishly tilted above an upturned coat collar,

And lips pressed close to a wisp of hair curled

On a woman's forehead, desperately defying the rain.

Going our separate ways,

We shared the solace of light and the courage of company

Before the inexorable train roared into the station,

Waiting impatiently to carry us one stage further

Away from this mutual illusion of a common home

Between journey and journey.

REVIEWS:

MULTI-COLOURED IMAGERY

[MALTA – THE NEW POETRY, *an anthology of modern Maltese verse with an introduction by Francis Ebejer. The eight poets: Mario Azzopardi, Victor Fenech, Oliver Friggieri, Joe Friggieri, Daniel Massa, Achille Mizzi, Lillian Sciberras, Kenneth Wain. A 'Klabb Kotba Maltin' special edition, Malta, 1971.*]

The strongest impression left by this book is, I think, a visual one; it is of a massive cloudburst of multi-coloured imagery that drenches the reader caught unawares.

At times the richness and diversity of the images seem so overpowering that you feel inclined to put the book down, but a closer look reveals the distinctly varied characteristics of each poet, and this makes it a fascinating collection of poetic styles as well. And the deliberately provocative nature of many of the poems tempts one to engage in a dialogue with the poet over individual pieces; they cry out for the warm rub of discussion and dissection, but in a general review this is not possible.

Perhaps one reason for such a bombardment of the senses is the fact that much of the work has been released on a very free rein, which is both its strength and its weakness. It is with a great sense of liberation that a writer finds he can not only duck-dive into but actually part the waters of words for his purposes. And this exhilaration runs through the book in a way that gladdens the heart.

But at the same time the limitations of free verse lie with those very freedoms that make it all so joyful; if it can be called a verse medium at all, it is a very slippery one to control ideas in. The visual images are easy enough to grasp, but many of the poems, by design, are formless; they have no beginning and no end; the thoughts seeking expression are so involuted that they fail to connect with the reader and so lose all value upon the page; in the case of Mario Azzopardi punctuation has been discarded along with form, to be replaced by a running emotional line (or 'sore' perhaps would be the closer word) that only ends when the emotion itself is spent. I do not know how effective this technique is; it is violent certainly. But in the end the reader is left curiously uninvolved.

There are of course many and good reasons why it is sometimes impossible for the poet to be articulate, and Fr. Serracino-Inglott gave a compassionate review of these in the first issue of *Poezija*. Some of them genuinely torment the local as well as the international poet (though it is odd that black Africa's newly-emerging writers strike one as being staggeringly articulate).

But so long as language is the vehicle of poetry there is a case for discipline; language is bound by rules for the vital purpose of assimilating ideas easily; and these, however barren their philosophy, are filtered through set forms for an even more fundamental reason – the need to communicate them. And it may be that when the poet becomes too exasperated by these disciplines (or limitations, as he may see them) then it is time to cast about for new art forms.

By the same token there should always be a case for clarity of thought; many of the ideas in this book can only be absorbed by saying 'yes, I know what he is trying to say'. And when you come across a perfectly-formed pearl of insight your excitement is too often marred by finding it hidden under a mass of verbiage.

Though not all the writers are guilty in this respect. Oliver Friggieri, amongst others, has taken pains to hack his spiritual gleanings into shape, and it shows. And because of it, these are the poems you remember – though I would say that more care in translating would have gilded his work even more.

It is perhaps unfair to criticize the diffuseness of ideas and language usage from the right-hand page only. It may be that the original poems are much tighter, and translating presents many problems. I would guess that the originals are in fact strong enough to stand up to more careful editing and economy of presentation.

So perhaps reassurance is the key-word; reassurance that there is no shame in writing to be understood in simple language, neither in stepping back and taking a long critical look from the reader's point of view; even perhaps in urging the poet to have the courage to stand against reaching out too quickly for his pen.

I hope that somebody will at a later date analyse the surprising dearth of humour in the book; that is, I should say, another and perhaps more interesting story.

BERYL MUSCAT

DUN KARM AND THE CRITICS

Paul Xuereb's recent lecture on the personality of Dun Karm at the British Institute has sparked off a raging controversy in the local newspapers as to the literary value of most of Dun Karm's poetry. The lecturer achieved his desired effect — that of shaking the national poet's ardent admirers out of their attitude of uncritical adulation.

In his revaluation, Paul Xuereb took a closer look than most critics at those poems generally acclaimed as the poet's best, but came to some rather curious conclusions of his own. For instance, he curtly dismissed Dun Karm's fitful flights of mysticism in *Il-Monument* as banalities and went on to demonstrate half-heartedly that *Il-Jien u Lilbinn Minnu* is artificial. In his analysis of the shorter poems like *Alla Mbux Hekk* and *Rmied*, Paul Xuereb showed deeper insight and penetration. His interpretation of the latter poem, though not wholly acceptable, is nevertheless original and plausible. *Rmied*, according to Paul Xuereb, reveals the inner conflict, unknown to the poet himself, between the poet and the man within him caused by the presence of a beautiful woman in the church on Ash Wednesday.

On the whole, Dr. Xuereb deserves credit for having focussed our attention on a hitherto neglected aspect of Dun Karm's poetry, namely, his pervasive feminine imagery as seen in the poems *Xenqet ir-Raba* and *in-Nissiega*. However, he seems to exaggerate its importance in relation to the bulk of Dun Karm's poetical output and shows a tendency to read more into the lines than the poet originally intended.

It is rather surprising that in evaluating the personality of the poet as revealed in his works, Paul Xuereb has chosen to ignore Dun Karm's Italian works, two of which, *Il Ruscelletto* and *Agricoltura*, are among the finest the poet wrote. One would have thought that these poems, written in the poet's early formative years, are an indispensable record of the poet's many-sided genius.

At the end of his lecture, in answer to a question from a member of the audience, Paul Xuereb admitted that his quarrel lay not so much with the poet himself and his generally acclaimed works, as with the bad influence in general which Dun Karm has exerted over his followers. In all fairness to the poet it should be stated that the sins of the children must not be visited upon the father.

Much of the controversy about Dun Karm in the papers stems from a basic misconception of the label 'National Poet'. Dun Karm is the national poet because no other poet before him expressed so well the inarticulate feelings, beliefs and aspirations of the Maltese of his generation who were painfully moving towards self-awareness at a time when the Maltese language was associated in the minds of many with the kitchen. The label itself need not imply that Dun Karm is the greatest poet we have had or will ever have.

Oliver Friggieri's interesting survey of the feminine image in Dun Karm's poetry, published in the latest edition of *Il-Polz*, is marred by a fatuous introductory statement that Dun Karm was no D.H. Lawrence or Cesare Pavese and by an eagerness to saddle Dun Karm with an Oedipus complex. A careful reading of Dun Karm's poems will show that there is nothing unnatural in his quasi-religious love for his mother and the moving poem *A Mio Padre Morto* is evidence enough of his regard and affection for his father. I wish to conclude by quoting Eliot's advice to the critic: 'The critic, one would suppose, if he is to justify his existence, should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks - tares to which we are all subject - and compose his difference with as many of his fellows as possible in the common pursuit of true judgment'.

PETER VASSALLO

Test stampat l-M.U.P.