

Book Review: **Tajr tal-Karti. Antologija ta' Poeziji**

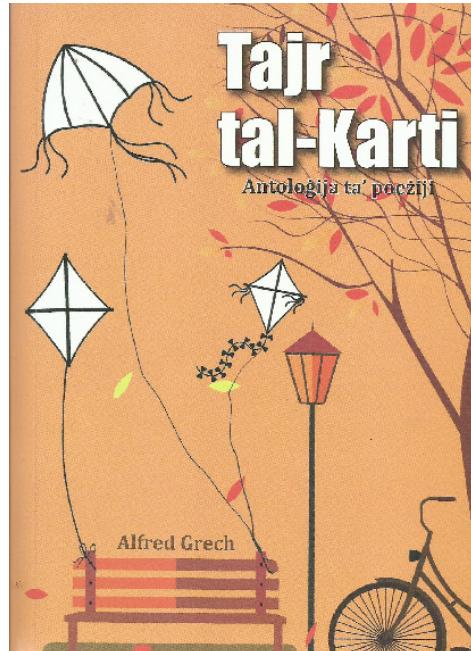
Alfred Grech
A & M Printing, 2022, 226 p.

REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

During the last decade or so, Gozitan lawyer and poet Alfred Grech has published a number of anthologies of poetry which have gradually established him as one of the island's main contemporary poets, and one of the most prolific.

Tajr tal-Karti which can be loosely translated either as 'Paper Kites' or even 'Birds of Paper' – depending on whether one decides to focus on the kites on the front cover or the hovering bird on the back cover – is the fifth anthology of poems that Alfred Grech is giving us. As he writes in the book's introduction, these poems can easily be considered as a diary that reflects the different moods and feelings of the poet on an almost daily basis. The poems feature different themes and are written in different styles. The poet feels at ease both when he used the so-called 'vers mahlul' (free verse) free of both rhyme and verse, as well as when he used the traditional quartette. Most of the poems have an autobiographical slant; even though the reader may understand nothing, he or she is still able to appreciate the way Grech transforms feelings into words or short phrases. Above all, a sense of constant search is felt throughout the entire anthology. Grech seems to be constantly addressed 'the other'; this other could be a lover from days gone past or a one who disappointed him. On the other hand, it can also be perceived as the yin that is in contrast with the yang that represents him.

Various poems in the anthology address this 'other' which constantly receives his reprimands, his words of anguish, his wish to converse or his adamant will to be heard and appreciated. In 'Meta leħnek lanqas jasal', (When your voice cannot be heard) he experiences the sour distance that divides him from his interlocutor. The feeling of solitude due to this indifference is reflected in 'U int ħallejtni hawn' (And you left me here). Solitude and loneliness, the search for the broken pieces and a drive to make himself whole again are themes that characterise this continuous urge of his to find harmony or at least,



inner peace. He becomes angry as he observes an unjust and unauthentic world (F'did-dinja/In this world), and he emerges as the poet whose spirit knows no bounds. Grech sees the world as an illusory place where everything passes (Xejn mhu għal dejjem/ Nothing is eternal) and uses words as 'bużżeeqa' (balloon) and 'efimeru' (ephemeral) to make his argument in favour of a fleeting and unsatisfactory existence. In what may at first seem as a contradictory statement, his spirit, which earlier on perceived itself as boundless, rejoices in the recognition of a horizon and a land shore: without them, uncertainty may prevail (Imnalla hemm int/ Thanks to you).

What I like about Alfred Grech's poetry is that when the need arises, he does not think twice to become self-critical; words come easy to him and he uses them to his greatest advantage to incarnate through them his deepest feelings without going back to revise them or seek any sense of perfection. Tajr tal-Karti speaks to every reader in a distinct manner and can be appreciated by one and all.