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# NEW DIRECTIONS IN MALTESE POETRY

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Io mi son un che, quando  
amor mi spira, noto, ed a quel modo  
ch'ei ditta dentro, vo significando.  
(Dante to Bonagiunta Orbicciani)

The title "New Directions in Maltese Poetry" leaves little room for satisfaction. A more accurate one, perhaps, would be: "New The-matics, Verse-Forms and Styles adopted by artists who use the Maltese Language as a verbal medium". I do not believe there is such a thing as *Maltese* poetry any more than there is English, Russian or Italian, though "language" is regularly exploited in the technical draft of writ-ten poetry. There is, in fact, only Poetry, one, universal and transcending the barriers of race and language. Poets are themselves the "mediums" that "plug us into" (or "tune us in" to) this aspect of the Universal Truth. Only because poets, as different from painters, sculptors, mu-sicians, dancers, and other artists, use words as their means of self-expression does the element of language(s) become an issue.

This rationale could, on the other hand, deviate us from our pre-sent objective. We may, however, pause on one of the burning questions it raises: Should poetry be submitted to the scholastic curriculum? Writ-ten poetry is primarily intended a) to be, b) to be enjoyed, c) to enrich our mortal existence inasmuch as poets help us, semi-articulate humans, to discern within us latent feelings and emotions of which we are only remotely conscious and which could very well be our link with the Universal Truth. "Poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom" as Robert Frost observes. But because, we feel, since childhood, a need to dissect in order to comprehend (and by comprehending, hopefully to love and appreciate) pedagogical institutions have found it useful to study — in the most clinical fashion — the form and the matter in order to dis-cover in their "metaphysical" intersection the truth of the "spirit". With-in this context, the terms employed in the title may be somewhat to-lerated as "technical" and their conciseness with its intolerable pitfalls, justified.

This article also runs the gauntlet between the desire to com-ment on poems written by Maltese authors since the mid-sixties and the need for a sociological reading of the fundamental changes which have re-shaped Maltese society in these last decades and which, despite all "linear" programming both in political and literary manifestos, have led

to divergent positions. A summary look at the preceding decades and at the schools of thought prevailing in them is also useful. Insofar as verses are a reflexion of the society which produces them, this exercise is by necessity "allotropical".

In other national literatures the anthropological factor needs much less elaboration. the sociological background is abundantly known through the regular reports and statistics provided by social scientists.<sup>1</sup> It may, or may not, be paradoxical that the peripheral sidestream demands a closer examination of its banks than the mainstream for a better evaluation. This task is made evident in all serious introductions to Maltese verse.

### THE SOCIO-LINGUISTIC FACTOR

The chief source of the sheer complexity related to the radical change in the world of Maltese letters which occurred in the last few decades was the "paradigm shift", a term we shall borrow from modern sociologists, brought about by the substitution of Italian by English in the bilingual syndrome that perennially bedevilled the Maltese.

For many decades after the British took over the Islands, the English language was, in spite of official efforts, merely tolerated like a tough sorner; Italian remained on long lease in the highest institutions with Maltese at times a peaceful, though inferior, cohabitant, at others a restive competitor.

In the 19th century, Maltese-language literature co-existed peacefully with Italian-language literature. It either played the role of a dialect literature (such as Milanese or Romanesque<sup>2</sup> vis-à-vis Italian) in the shadow of the towering Italian literature. Alternately it fulfilled the role of the literature of a dialect struggling to become a language in its own right in order to increase the intrinsically related chances of a people aspiring to become a nation belonging with, rather than belonging to, the neighbouring Italian nation within the Latin cultural sphere.

So long as Dun Karm (1871-1961) wrote his verses in Italian, he was implicitly acknowledging Malta as an appendix to the Italian nation

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1. Gunnar Hägglund (Fillic, Stockholm), in *Sociological Sketches Malta 1972* (Sums Ltd., Union Press, 1972), says: "The undetermined attitude to sociology in Malta so far has its historical explanation. The British had all the social experts at hand, when they liked, while the Maltese upper-class studied theology, law and medicine. A few years ago only a handful of students chose social science at the University, while, to give an example, in Stockholm University close to two thousand students were enrolled in the Department of Sociology alone".
  2. Vide Carlo Porta (1775-1821), *Meneghin biroeau di ex-monegh* and *Lament del Marchionn di gamb avert*, and Giuseppe Giacchino Belli (1791-1863), *La povera moje*, *Er civico de corata* for Milanese and Romanesque literature respectively.

which had only recently transformed Italy from a "geographical expression" into a more respectable unity. When in 1912 Dun Karm switched to writing in Maltese he was deliberately announcing to the literary community, and the population in general, that he considered Maltese his *native tongue*, not merely a dialect but a national *language*.

For this he was swiftly and severely punished by the powerful pro-Italian<sup>3</sup> clique in the Valletta Curia who in 1921 accused him of a heinous misdemeanour<sup>4</sup> and persuaded the Apostolic Visitor, Cardinal La Fontaine to dismiss him from his teaching post at the Seminary. The trauma this canard caused in Dun Karm the man (he informs us in his writings that he felt very near to the grave) did not adversely affect the mental orientation of Dun Karm the poet.

Dun Karm continued writing Maltese-language literature as an "exoteric version" of Italian literature. This version was accessible to the populace which found Italian literature proper an "esoteric" code intelligible only to the restricted classes of the *professionisti*, a great number of whom saw in their intelligence of it a "gnostic" badge to their membership in the Italian *patria* and a recognizable bond with their "brothers across the sea". This bond was subsequently exploited for political ends by Fascists both in Italy and in Malta.

Indeed a perfect syncromesh was provided by the semantic and lexical proximity of Maltese to Italian and by the verse-forms borrowed from the Italian tradition.<sup>5</sup> Even Semitic Maltese words have moved semantically away from Arabic towards Italian and have become like Semitic bottles containing Romance wine. In a sense Dun Karm was merely translating himself. Admittedly, in some cases this was a remarkable achievement but what with his tremendous mastery of both languages

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3. "Pro-Italian" here means in favour of Italian as Malta's official language with the inherent invitation to the Maltese to join the resurgent Italian motherland. Advocates of this group today protest that they took this position in order to combat the influence of English and its implementation as Official Language, since the Maltese could never really and fully master it, thus remaining inferior to their English overlords. However, assuming this was true, why did they not rally the Maltese by admitting Maltese as the *other* Official language, thus really combatting the "foisting" of English on a Semitic-Romance-language speaking Latin people? Today we feel thankful this was not the case, since English has become an international language, while Italian is more or less confined to Italy.
  4. No such trauma was experienced by poet W.H. Auden when his private life was exposed, probably because, in his case, the discovery had merely exposed the truth.
  5. Dun Karm is wrongly entered in *The Penguin Companion to Literature* under the sub-title *Oriental*, Vol IV, p. 297. This error is due mainly to the fact that Dun Karm was publicised in the Anglo-Saxon world by A.J. Arberry, a celebrated Arabist. It is also due to the paucity of knowledge about the nature of Maltese Literature abroad. Evidently the Council of Europe's sole publication (Laurent Ropa's *Suite Poétique Maltaise*, 1970) is far from sufficient.

and the fact that Dun Karm proceeded in the romantic fashion whereby the "poetic jargon" only slightly deviated from the normal *langue*, the shift took place with as few jolts as in the case of Nineteenth Century poets like Gan-Anton Vassallo<sup>6</sup> and Dwardu Cachia.

### MALTESE ROMANTICISM

Thus started the Maltese Neo-Romantic (or "Second" Romantic) period. Dun Karm sang the Ideal Malta, praised the beauty of her landscape, the comeliness of her dasses, the bounty of its orchards (remiscences of G.A. Vassallo), the glory and magnificence of her past, particularly underlining her heroic role in the defence of Christendom from the Ottoman Empire, the greatness of her heroes (placing in one breath such divergent figures as Dun Mikiel Xerri and Mikiel Anton Vassalli on similar pedestals), inviting her children to appreciate and honour her as an old motherland deserving of nationhood. A whole entourage of fledgling poets, such as Gorg Pisani, Gużè Chetcuti, Anton Buttigieg, Karmenu Vassallo (despite his idiosyncratic thematic), George Zammit, Gużè Delia, Frans Camilleri and others congregated around Dun Karm, dutifully repeating their master's voice. Rużar Briffa, a highly individualistic lyrical poet was perhaps the only exception.

The reasons why Dun Karm, though fully aware of modern Italian literature,<sup>7</sup> continued writing in the Romantic fashion were various.

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6. Gan-Anton Vassallo (1817-1868) occupied the Chair of Italian in the University of Malta. He was imbued with the spirit of the Italian *esuli* in Malta, and was a Romantic who thought poetry should be an expression of and very close to the genuine feelings and tongue of the people. In the light of this, his epic *Il-Gifen Torq* is nowadays considered as an allegory of Colonial Nineteenth Century Malta. From this he went on to be an "all-Maltese" (as opposed to Maltese-Italian) patriot. His *Tifhira lil Malta* served as the semi-official national hymn until it was substituted by Dun Karm's *Innu Malti*. Vassallo can be collocated within the Italian Romantic phenomenon which in its culminating decades (1815-c.1840) combined elements of a double origin. Some elements were characteristic of the philosophical, religious and political reaction to Illuminism and the French Revolution, and embraced the revaluation of mediaeval values and a *strong patriotic-national sentiment* as opposed to the cosmopolitanism of the previous century. Other elements reflected the spirit of "the century of light" and advocated a form on "popular literature".
  7. This is evinced in Dun Karm's surviving *tesine*, wherein occurs, *inter alia*, an explication of Pirandellian thought. Dun Karm was however more intent on explaining Ugo Foscolo, whose "I Sepolcri" he so beautifully translated. In his preface to *L-Oqbra* (1936) he first explains the Romantic motives in the *carme* which could be emulated in the Maltese context and ends by saying explicitly: "*barra mir-raġunijiet li semmejt hawfuq, kien hemm din ukoll, li nħaddem u nuri dawn is-setghat mostura tal-ilsien malti bil-qlib ta' poezija li sabuha iebesha wkoll poeti ta' ġnus oħra ... ta' ilsna mrawma sewwa u mogħnija b'letteratura mill-aqwa*".

Mainly however he was conscious, perhaps painfully, of the time and space gap between Malta and contemporary Europe.

In any event, Dun Karm ushered in this "Neo-Romanticism" at a time when the tendency in Italy to sever all links with tradition, thus heralding the movement for greater freedom of expression and originality, was being strongly felt. The desire for novelty among the innovative poets can be perceived in these stanzas by Domenico Gnoli:

Giace anemica la Musa  
 sul giaciglio de' vecchi metri:  
 e noi, giovani, apriamo i vetri,  
 rinnoviamo l'aria chiusa!

.....  
 O padri, voi foste voi,  
 Sia benedetta la vostra  
 memoria. A noi figli or la nostra  
 vita: noi vogliamo esser noi!

The revolt against tradition in Italy, as elsewhere, considered all traditional verse-structure as *passè* and gave birth to the *vers libre*<sup>8</sup> which attempted to be more intense in thought and feeling, gradually losing all links with syntax and logic and eventually arriving at the controversial *poesia ermetica*<sup>9</sup> of Giuseppe Ungaretti.

This revolt was not only distant from, but alien to the Maltese context. The crisis antecedent to the First World War and the ravages the conflict itself brought to Europe were slightly felt, if at all, in Malta. The real crisis in Malta was still that of national identity as reflected in the protracted Language Question. The ground was still fertile for the Romantic poet. Indeed his role of patriot and nationalist was still very real and necessary.

What World War I did to Europe, World War II, which caught our Islands unawares, did to Malta, leaving many problems still unsolved, chief among them the Language-Identity dilemma. The Language Question had been officially settled in 1934, but its side-effects and implications lingered on, affecting all classes of Maltese society in their outlook on life and in their everyday activities. The problem, however, was glossed over by harsh realities and pressing circumstances. The question whether Malta must be considered as a Trieste of the South

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8. The name and the theory of the *vers libre* were justified by French poet Gustave Kahn (1859-1936) in his preface to *Palais nomades* (1887). In Italy *vers libre* was theorized and practised by Domenico Gnoli (1836-1915) followed by Gabriele D'Annunzio, Enrico Thovez, Sergio Corazzini, Aldo Palazzeschi, Vittorio Lochi.

9. Giuseppe Ungaretti, Eugenio Montale, Salvatore Quasimodo were the first "hermetic" poets. The *poesia ermetica* aims at being pure, evocative, "quintessential", and therefore resorts to an extreme analogism. From its scarce accessibility to the public its "hermetic" name was derived.

as in the conception of the Irredentists<sup>10</sup> was violently wiped out by the first Italian bombardment. The great majority of the population went over to Britain's side and clamoured for a reprisal in the form of an air attack on Rome; all links with Italian culture were looked upon with contempt. Perhaps in the quest of matching the absurdity of war inflicted upon them by their former "brothers", the Maltese hurled back the absurdity that even Dante was not, after all, the *sommo poeta* he was hitherto held to be!

Appraising adequately the social upheaval brought about by the War would take up the entire pages of this publication. Suffice it to say that among the ruins of this battered country were sown the seeds of a very different generation, waking from old, time-honoured illusions and traditions and which prepared the way to a new Nation. The links with the past had become so tenuous that only the strictest of die-hards could hope for a reversal of social trends among the up-and-coming generation. Yet the rupture could not be so sudden or its effects as immediately visible as the re-construction of new buildings in place of the ruins.

In his novel V, which Anthony Burgess<sup>11</sup> describes as "a remarkable epic fantasy", Thomas Pynchon gave this fictitious appraisal of Maltese verse written during World War II:

In the poetry which came out of Malta's second Great Siege ... certain images recurred, major among them Valletta of the Knights ... It was certainly wish-fulfilment ... a vision of La Vallette patrolling the streets during blackout ... a sonnet about a dogfight (Spitfire v ME-109) taking a knights' duel for the sustained image. Retreat into a time when personal combat was more equal, when warfare could at least be gilded with an illusion of honour. But, beyond this, could it not be a true absence of time? ... When the bombs fell, or at work, when it's as if time were suspended. As if we all laboured and sheltered in a timeless Purgatory.

"The other great image is of something I can only call slow apocalypse ... back to the real world the bombs were leaving us ... Free verse: why not? Poetry had to be as hasty and rough as eating, sleep or sex. Jury-rigged and not as graceful as it might have been. But it did the job: put the truth on record. "Truth" I mean in the sense of attainable accuracy. No metaphysics. Poetry is not communication with angels or with the "subconscious". It is communication with the guts, genitals and five portals of sense. Nothing more.

Gužè Chetcuti's volume *Melita Invicta* (1945), containing verses written in war-time is alone sufficient to support the veracity of the first element of the alleged dialectic. The second "image" did not exist

10. Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938), foremost among the exponents of *L'Irredentismo*, had called Malta: "*una ferita da guarire*".

11. Anthony Burgess, *The Novel Now*, London, 1974.

in historical reality. If Robert Rauschenberg's remark ("I consider myself successful only when I do something that resembles the lack of order I sense") is valid, that image should have existed. In the chaos wrought by the War, if there was something everybody sensed was "the lack of order". Or so it seems to us now, though perhaps it seemed otherwise to Maltese poets then in their prime. The Neo-Romantic movement had not yet lost its momentum.

The first image referred to by Pynchon still prevailed, and the fact that its presence excluded that of the second image proves at the same time that it was still valid and relevant. Pynchon was anticipating the birth of the "new" poetry in Maltese by about 20 years.<sup>12</sup> The reason for this time-lag is, to my mind, that the poets who were later to reflect "the lack of order they sensed" were in their impressionable years either during the war or in its aftermath when Malta was visibly struggling to emerge from the debris.

### THE ADVENT OF MODERNISM

When this next crop of writers came on the scene, the revolving stage had long been put into motion, and the scenery was quite new. The movers were: a) the mobility of the population<sup>13</sup> in the wake of the *blitz* which broke down the segregation between the *puliti* ("city-dwellers") and the *ghafsin* or *raħlin* (village or country-town dwellers); b) the total disenchantment with the Italian language delivered by Mussolini's *Savoia-Marchettis* and his more awesome allies; c) the resultant attraction to everything British, particularly the language; d) the related emphasis on emulating the Anglo-Saxon educational system with a heightened diffusion and knowledge of English; e) the related wider knowledge of English and American literature made available at the main bookshops and consequently a greater acquaintance with European fiction in translation; f) the tremendous improvement in cable radio brought about by the introduction of the sound-recording system, followed by the advent of the local reception of Italian television in the mid-fifties.

12. Vide Victor Fenech, "Milied ta' tfuliti" in *Antenni* (Union Press, 1968). The dedication of the poem, *b'tifkira ta' ommi li wenssitni fil-jiem tat-taqbid*, is already indicative. Note the obvious memory-image of the war in the first line: *Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht!* Why should a Maltese poet sing the stillness and holiness of the Night in German? It is obviously more than the wish to repeat the hymn in its original verses.

13. Prior to World War II it was not uncommon for dwellers of outlying villages never "to go down" to Valletta and the cities of the Southern area in a whole lifetime, which might also go quite far to explain the existence of different "dialects" cropping up every two short miles of the densely populated territory — a phenomenon which is now drying out fast. On the other hand, the dispersion of the city refugees helped the diffusion of culture and the leveling of class differences.

The children of the holocaustic late thirties and early forties, born in a) and b) and bred in c), came of age with d), e) and f). Having on top of all this experienced the chaotic religio-political conflict of the early sixties, they were ripe enough to straddle the psychological storm that had been unleashed on the erstwhile dormant Maltese ethos and confront the ensuing paradigm shift with enough intellectual strength. Moreover they eventually made it their language and their guideline for a new outlook (*Weltanschauung*) on life in their native island.

The result of the irreversible break-away from tradition was a spate of volumes and anthologies of prose and poetry which took the less informed unawares and resuscitated public interest in Maltese literature. Perhaps inevitably it brought a head-on collision with the older elements among the pre-war men of letters, who had either been stunned or even, in some cases, stunted by the havoc wrought in the moral and civil spheres and above all, in the erstwhile unchallenged sets of values and Catholic way of life, both on the popular and on the more refined levels of religion.

Already in 1948 Prof. Gužè Aquilina had lamented that in Maltese poetry written till that date in *Il-Muża Maltija*:<sup>14</sup> only the Italian influence was felt and that all Maltese poets were traditionalists. Aquilina went on to say:

The technical experiments carried out by G.M. Hopkins, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot and other modern poets have at least served to uncover new rhythmic powers in the English language and imagery taken from contemporary life. And this is what I wish to see in the Maltese language because I believe that the poetic powers of our language have not yet been completely uncovered.

There still are in the Maltese tongue hidden voices,  
 There still are sighs unheard,  
 There still are winds undisturbed,  
 There still are pearls uncultured,  
 There still are quarries uncut,  
 There still are gold, silver and other metals unpurified.

In his paper "Maltese Poetry 1960-1970",<sup>15</sup> Prof. P. Serracino-Inglott answered: "We can say that the desire expressed by Prof. Aquilina 22 years ago is now being fulfilled." In this I somehow hear noises of polite reproach for Aquilina's less than warm reception of the new poets.<sup>16</sup>

The late sixties and very early seventies were a battleground for the two "schools"; the ripples of the riots of 1968 on the continent added to the turmoil inside the "intellectual" crucible.

14. Aquilina, G. (ed.) *Il-Muża Maltija* (Malta, 1948), pp. xxi-xxiii.

15. *Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, Vol. V, No. 1, (1972).

16. The only modern poet who received a welcome introduction from Prof. Aquilina was Achille Mizzi (*vide: L-Għar, ta' Enimmi*).



One direct clash came about in December 1968. Dr. Oliver Frigieri, Mr. Albert Marshall and the present author were entrusted by the *Moviment Qawmien Letterarju* to select literary material for the first Arts Festival to be held at the Manoel Theatre. The prose and poetry pieces, selected with the object of presenting a historical perspective of Maltese literature from Peter Caxaro down to our days, were forwarded to the State Censor and certified for public presentation. The Manoel Theatre Management Committee, on what seemed to be the insistence of Dr. V.M. Pellegrini, seems to have placed itself above the censor.<sup>17</sup> The incident is amply described in Dr. Daniel Massa's "Contemporary Maltese Literature — An Interim Report":

"The Establishment tried to censor five items because members of the group had dealt with (a) sex outside marriage (Lino Spiteri),<sup>18</sup> (b) humbug and patriotism (Victor Fenech and Mario Azzopardi), (c) hypocrisy of the establishment (J.J. Camilleri), (d) religious doubt (Daniel Massa). The Establishment not surprisingly thought that in form and matter the *Kwartett-Antenni* group showed manifest contempt of accepted mores, and one member of the Manoel Theatre Management Committee described them as 'rebellious, unscrupulous, Law-shattering boobies'.

"Be it as it may," the Report continues, "this well-knit group registered the disenchantment that there was in the air, in the lengthy controversy that followed recording that institutions of the past must be experienced as abandoned if Malta were ever to renounce a philosophy of mediocrity that clung to the mythical security of the past. The writers were 'no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation'. Yet this lack of security and/or homogeneity as well as the alleged decay in religious faith and performance may itself have been an impulse in the birth of our new literature."<sup>19</sup>

For the record, the Manoel Theatre was picketed by Police Officers while plainclothes policemen checked on the behaviour of the literati inside.

It is important to remember that the new Movement came into being shortly after the Independence of 1964. Whatever may be said about that Event, Maltese writers felt that the attainment of Political Independence naturally put an end to all Romantic aspirations that had aimed at it.

They also believed that now Malta "had come of age" she must be examined "clinically" and without "romantic" emotion: from this evolved a love/hate relationship which in its "maturity" was to match the "ripeness" of the Nation herself.

The official end of colonialism meant that Malta could join the

17. See also *il-polz*, March 1969, No. 9, editorial.

18. Lino Spiteri's contribution was "*Anatomija*".

19. *Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, Vol. VI, No. 4, (1977), p. 264.

“cosmopolitan club” even if on a debutant ticket. Hence the literary experiments in search of new forms. It was the struggle to get free from the colonial mentality which had induced the Maltese into thinking themselves inferior beings living in a tardy enclave. The poets rejected that position and sought to be free to choose contemporary models. Due to the paradigm shift indicated above they sought these models from the Anglo-American mainstream. After all a similar exercise had been done also by Cesare Pavese *et al* through their translations of American literature. Pavese’s American “experience” helped him introduce new blood into modern Italian literature. To the Maltese poets, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and others meant the freedom to criticize the Establishment and beat new tracks. In colonial times the impossibility of this was exemplified, on a banal level, by the fact that even Zola was censured, let alone the more “modern” writers.

In “Maltese Poetry 1960-1970”, Prof. Serracino-Inglott asserts that “The breakdown of isolationism has led not only to the new realization of the distinctive character of a nation moulded by the cross-fertilization of many cultures of which its ‘mixed’ language is the clear reflexion but also to the breakdown of the old social order. With this, *Malta entered the general crisis of Western civilization* of which the Mediterranean was the cradle and is becoming once more a crucible. The ‘open’ forms of modern poetry are the expression of this situation in which the established, rigidly regulated patterns of existence are being disorganized and disintegrated, in an anxious search, both fearful and hopeful, of new or renewed ways of life”.<sup>20</sup>

The foregoing is perhaps the most succinct explication of the new Maltese poetry that emerged in publications like *Kwartett* (1966), *L-Għar tal-Enimmi* (1967), *Dħahen fl-Imħuħ* (1967), *Antenri* (1968), *Analiżi 70* (1970), *Mas-Sejħa tat-Tnabar* (1971), *Dwal fil-Persjani* (1972) and the rest.

Looking back in sobriety (as opposed to the “anger” prevailing at the time) one discernable error committed by some polemicists was to upbraid Dun Karm for being tardy in relation to his continental and Anglo-Saxon contemporaries. In the heat of the argument it was overlooked that Dun Karm was being true to his own times which were — in the Maltese context — themselves retrograde owing to Malta’s status as a Crown Colony with very dim hopes of ever achieving autonomy. But again, Dun Karm was essentially taken as a symbol, a banner bearer.

It was his seemingly indestructible following which was the real target — those who could not understand what T.E. Hulme had said about the end of the Romantic movement: “The first reason lies in the nature of any convention or tradition in art. A particular convention

20. Serracino-Inglott, P. *op.cit.*

or attitude in art has a strict analogy to the phenomena of organic life. It grows old and decays. It has a definite period of life and must die. All the possible tunes get played on it and then it is exhausted... A literature of wonder must have an end as inevitably as a strange land loses its strangeness when one lives in it."<sup>21</sup>

The language of paradox<sup>22</sup> was indigestible to the older generations and the "randomness"<sup>23</sup> in the new poems shocked all those who were unfamiliar with the art of T.S. Eliot and the precepts of Ezra Pound.<sup>24</sup>

Mr. Joseph Vella in "Il-Poezija Maltija: dak li jinbidel u dak li jibqa" <sup>25</sup> mentions the Taoist philosophy and the two forces of *yin* and *yang* but stops short of applying them explicitly to the Maltese poetry situation. One is perhaps permitted to take off from there and make good use of these splendid Chinese terms.

The *yin* is the feminine element, yielding and soft, concerned with the colour and texture of life its style is careful and exquisite, the *yang* is the masculine element, forceful and harsh, its style less scrupulous, coarse and aggressive.

The reading public accustomed to the *yin* poets of the Dun Karm school was shocked by the *yang* young poets of the *Moviment Qawmien Letterarju* of the late sixties.

One can now safely say, however, that while the public has become less squeamish if not immune to shock, the *yang* people themselves are not so young today and possibly an element of *yin* is creeping in their more recent works to temper their "aggressiveness" without diminishing the dynamics.

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21. *Speculations* (1924). The quotation is from "Romanticism and Classicism", written in 1913 or 1914.

22. Few of us are prepared to accept the statement that the language of poetry is the language of paradox". Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn: Studies in the structure of poetry*, (1947).

23. "The paradoxical pursuit of randomness in the arts — a consequence of doctrinaire anti-formalism — is now carried on with every resource of ingenuity by very intelligent men. To early modernists the subjection of personality and the attack on false orders were one and the same process; the logicians of neo-modernism have not only accepted the position but developed it into an attack on order, perhaps not successfully, but with energy". Frank Kermode, *Continuities*, (1966).

24. Ezra Pound's *Literary Essays* is a great help to the understanding of modern literary taste.

25. *Hyphen*. Vol. III No. 1, p. 16.