

# NEWH HYPHEN

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A Journal of Melitensia and the Humanities

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**The Order of St. John 1793-1797:**

**Impending Collapse**

**of a Glorious Heritage**

**The despatches of Antonio Miari, Venetian  
Minister in Malta**

Victor Mallia-Milanes

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**in Business Management**

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# *Hyphen*

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# THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN 1793 - 1797: IMPENDING COLLAPSE OF A GLORIOUS HERITAGE

The despatches of Antonio Miari,  
Venetian Minister in Malta

Victor Mallia-Milanes

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By the time Fra Antonio Miari had assumed the office of *Huomo della Repubblica* in Malta, the Order's fate lay less in the hands of Grandmaster De Rohan and his State Council than in those of the directors of national policy in France. Within the narrow span of four days (19-22 September 1792), the publication of the venomous *loi spoliateur*, which nationalised all the Knights' possessions in France, the abolition of the French Monarchy and the proclamation of the Republic, provoked within the Order an acute sense of isolation and impending disaster. On 22 October of the same year the National Convention abolished the Institution in France. This essay does not set out to provide a general survey of the original events which led to the final collapse of the Order of St. John. These are now widely known.<sup>1</sup> Its concern is with an intelligent, perceptive and intriguing firsthand account of the final four years of De Rohan's magistracy by Antonio Miari, a 38-year-old contemporary observer from Belluno and the Grandmaster's Secretary for Italian Affairs, gripped as he was by the *terreur de l'avenir* which the upheaval of the French Revolution generated within his Order.<sup>2</sup>

1. For general surveys of the history of Malta and the Order of St. John during the French Revolutionary period, F.W. Ryan, *The House of the Temple: A Study of Malta and its Knights in the French Revolution* (London 1930); F. Panzavecchia, *L'ultimo periodo della storia di Malta sotto il governo dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano* (Malta 1835); M. Miège, *Histoire de Malte* (Paris 1840), vol.II 267-480; vol.III, 1-13; R. Cavaliero, *The Last of the Crusaders; The Knights of St. John and Malta in the eighteenth century* (London 1960), 181-242.
2. Miari's despatches to the Doge are in A[rchivio di] S[tato] V[enice], *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, Filza lettere dell'Agente Veneto in Malta da 27 marzo 1793 sino 30 marzo 1797 da Ven[erando] Fra Antonio Miari. His despatches to the Venetian Magistracy of Trade are in ASV, C[inque] S[avi alla] M[ercanzia], *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76.

A "learned scholar" and "distinguished diplomat", Antonio Miari was appointed Resident Minister for Venice at the Grandmaster's Court in Malta on 1 February 1793, to deal with political, social and economic matters in the interests of Venice, its merchants and its subjects residing in the island.<sup>3</sup> It is in this latter capacity that he traversed what is perhaps the most crucial period in the history of the Order, in a regular correspondence which he kept with the Doge and the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia* from March 1793 to March 1797. Though this collection of letters provides few startling revelations, it augments what is generally known through a fulness of detail and affords some fascinating sidelights on the history of the years they cover. Its author makes a clear effort to diagnose the reception and processing of the basically catastrophic character of the crisis within the Order. Moreover, in an unremitting pursuit of an appraisal of the economic and social state of the island, which partly sidetracks his main political concern, Miari provides an excellent review of Veneto-Maltese relations in the 1790s. These were indeed courageous letters which told some hard truths which needed telling.

#### A STATE OF ISOLATION

The Order's strength and vitality had long lain with its past, and the history of its struggle to justify the reason for its existence throughout the ages had been underscored by a protracted academic debate, whose validity rested exclusively on the inviolability of custom and tradition.<sup>4</sup> It had never been in the Order's nature, nor in its capacity,

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3. "Onde tutto impegnarmi al rispettabilissimo servizio della Serenità Vostra, sia invigilando ai suoi essenziali politici riguardi à questa parte, sia agli interessi d'ogni genere, non meno che ai vantaggi dei sudditi Veneti, come altresì alla conservazione non solo, ma all'aumento ancora se sia possibile della reciproca amicizia e buona intelligenza tra la Serenità Vostra e questa Sacra Religione." ASV, *Senato, Segreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 21 March 1793. See also ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 21 March 1793; *ibid.*, Copia di lettera scritta da S[ua] A[ltezza E[minentissima] al Doge di Venezia in data de 22 Marzo 1793; "Questo Signor Cavaliere Comendator Miari," the Inquisitor of Malta reported to the Vatican Secretary of State, "ricevè dalla sua Repubblica di Venezia le Lettere Credenziali, colle quali viene dichiarato Ministro degli Affari in quest'Isola, e che immediatamente si portò a presentare all'Eminentissimo Gran Maestro. La mattina seguente venne formalmente a darne a me parte, ed in seguito praticò un tal atto con tutti i Ministri dell'altre Corti qui residenti". Archives of the Inquisitor] M[alta], *Corrispondenza* 102, f.62, 21 March 1793. For a brief note on Miari's career, H.P. Scicluna, "Notes on the Admiralty House, Valletta", *Archivum Melitense* IX,2 (1933), 71. From June 1795 to June 1798, Miari lived in a commodious palace in South Street, Valletta, known later as Admiralty House, now housing the National Museum of Fine Arts. *Ibid.*, 60; V.F. Denaro, *The Houses in Valletta* (Malta 1967), 106.

4. The international organisation of the Order has been described as "already out of date in political terms by the thirteenth" century. J. Riley-Smith,

nor even in its will, to adapt to a new environment, as the years under review illustrate with great lucidity.

On the international spectrum, the French Revolution marked for the Order a definite break with its past, and confirmed with irrefutable logic the Institution's irrelevance to the present. In these circumstances, the Order's conscious sense of isolation was both 'a state of mind' and 'an objective condition'. The loss of its principal protector in the institution of the French Monarchy shattered its system of political allegiance and dependence, upon which the entire structure of its political and social status was built. The abrupt termination of its flow of *responsiones* from France, Germany and Northern Italy, and its diminished revenues from Spain, Portugal and those parts of Italy which were still unconquered by the French armies, depleted its treasury in Valletta beyond all hope of recovery. By the end of 1795 the loss "was estimated to have amounted to 471,784 Maltese scudi"; and this did not include "the loss on the Antonine estates, on which the Order as far as the year 1792 must have incurred an outlay of a full million of scudi". The Order's revenues had fallen to approximately one-fourth.<sup>5</sup> Above all, the Order was ill-prepared and ill-equipped for its final blow. The economic comfort it had enjoyed from the strategic positional value of its headquarters in Malta had been seriously shaken by the shift in international relations, rather than by the debatable economic decline of the Mediterranean; its naval power and importance had been considerably weakened by technological advances, Anglo-French trade rivalries in the Levant and the rise of the Barbary States. It could not, on the one hand, take refuge behind its inveterate statutes by faithfully observing for an indefinite period of time a strict neutrality in the midst of so turbulent a crisis without Great-Power protection. Nor, on the other hand, could it afford to take sides formally and actively participate in the coalition against France, without incurring exorbitant expenses.

On the domestic level, an exuberance of deep, undisciplined temperamental contrasts sharpened the main issues at stake. A month after the execution of Louis XVI, Mgr. Julius Carpegna, Inquisitor General and Apostolic Delegate in Malta, wrote to the Cardinal Secretary of State in Rome:<sup>6</sup>

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*The Knights of St. John in Jerusalem and Cyprus c.1050-1310* (London 1967), 475-476.

5. W.H. Thornton, *Memoir on the Finances of Malta ...* (Malta 1836), 25-26; ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 30 March 1797; Panzavecchia, 317-318, 330; J. Bosredon de Ransijat's accounts in AOM 6406; AOM 274, ff.257v-258v, *Relazione dei Commissari deputati per esaminare le spese pubbliche*, 9 December 1795; L.de Boisgelin, *Ancient and Modern Malta* (London 1805), vol.1, 296-326; W. Hardman; *A History of Malta during the period of the French and British occupation 1798-1815*, ed. J. Holland Rose (London 1909), 547-549.
6. AIM, *Corrispondenza* 102, ff.60v-61r, 23 February 1793.

Yesterday morning, in the main square of Valletta, forty French Knights formed a mutinous assembly. Their design was to proceed to the house of M. Como (sic), the French Minister, remove the Royal Arms and transfer them to the auberge of the [French] Langue; and this for the reason, that since M. Como (sic), Minister of the King, could not continue in his office (the King having expired) without offering allegiance to the new Constitution, thereby rendering himself unworthy of retaining the Royal Insigna. On being informed of the incident, the Maestro Scudiero of His Eminence the Grand Master went personally to the square and by force of persuasion managed to disperse the assembly and to make each one return to his home. In the afternoon the heads of this party were arrested by this Government.

Another incident occurred the preceeding night in one of these cities, known as Senglea or l'Isola. Six or eight *martingao*, i.e., captains of French vessels, encountered a patrol; and on being asked their identity by the latter, the former answered they were *La Ronda*. On being further pressed as to which *ronda* it was, they seemed confused and to avoid being surprised, they put their hands on their swords. The soldiers, however, immediately pointed arquebuses at them and constrained them to give up and accept arrest. It is not known as yet which resolution will be taken by this Government.

#### A 'VERITABLE PICTURE'

In his early correspondence, Antonio Miari claimed to portray "a veritable picture" of the prevailing tension on the island. But he also did far more. He offered a valuable conspectus of the political, social and economic context of the Order's crisis, though he said little of the existing conditions of the indigenous population. The island, he claimed, was geared to such a state of "valid and imposing defence" as on the eve of "a formal siege".

I have never felt convinced that this Island has ever been seriously threatened by the French Republic; but presently it seems extravagant merely to entertain the idea.<sup>7</sup>

The excessive concentration on the massive amount of work that was entailed, and the crippling economic setbacks that were encountered in order to realise the solid defence programme, envisaged against any possible aggression, would, thought Miari, inevitably make the Order experience "the consequences of an evil by far greater than those of a war which the French would ever hope to wage by their arms."<sup>8</sup> Measures taken to offset this predicament, such as the attempt to ne-

7. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 21 March 1793.

8. *Ibid.*

gotiate a loan of 400,000 Maltese scudi,<sup>9</sup> or the open invitation to all Knights to come to the rescue of the Order "with spontaneous succours" in proportion to their means,<sup>10</sup> would only alleviate the situation temporarily. The Order, he predicted, would before long have to resort to more drastic measures, such as the imposition of a general tax upon its European possessions, which, however unpleasant to the already impoverished Knights and other members of the Order, was the only reliable means of augmenting its income; only such a tax could be calculated with a definite degree of certainty.<sup>11</sup> These measures, in Miari's view, "would very likely constitute our dying breath".<sup>12</sup>

Miari searches beneath the surface for the roots of a greater evil. To solve the economic and financial crises, which he defined as "the direst straits", it was necessary, he thought, to combat a wide range of abuses, thefts, embezzlements and a "ridiculous and prejudicial sense of priorities". However, as so often happens in political psychology, when one comes to implimenting austere reforms, one is faced with insurmountable obstacles from all quarters. "Evil," he said, "cherishes its own obstinate protectors and perpetrators." The preponderance of French Knights and their intrigues against the stability of their languishing Institution obfuscated the search of a workable solution.<sup>13</sup>

9. AOM 274, f.223v, Supplica dell'Ordine al S. Pontefice relativa all'imprestito di 400,000 scudi maltesi, 5 July 1793; Panzavecchia, 321-322.
10. "Somma penuria di denaro nell'Orario Pubblico, per cui si è dovuto apprire un'imprestito di 400 mila scudi di questa moneta, e invitare tutti li Religiosi a sovvenire la loro Madre Comune con dei spontanei soccorsi, proporzionati alle forze d'ogn'uno." ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 11 April 1793.
11. "Sarà forse indispensabile venire ad un' aumento di risponsioni delle Commende dell'Ordine ed altri estremi partiti". *Ibid.*; "La perdita fatta da questa Religione di tutte le sue Commende esistenti nelle tre Lingue di Francia, avendo cagionato una notabilissima mancanza di rendite al Commun Tesoro, hà dato à progettarsi in un Consiglio Ordinario, che fù convocato, ne' scorsi giorni, di duplicarsi le corrisposte delle Commende esistenti nelle altre Lingue; onde riparare in qualche maniera la sudetta mancanza. Ed essendo stato approvato simil progetto, sono stati nominati i Commissarij, per formare gli opportuni piani, a quindi riferirli al Consiglio Compito, dal quale si devono approvare, perché possono eseguirsi." AIM, *Corrispondenza* 102, ff.61-62, 7 March 1793. "Benchè qui facciassi da questa Religione ogni possibile sforzo per restringere le sue spese ed equilibrarle al suo introito, molto considerabilmente diminuito dopo la rivoluzione di Francia, pure si teme, che non potrà giungere al desiderato equilibrio senza cercare d'accrescere nel tempo stesso le sue rendite. Il solo certo e calcolabile accrescimento può essere quello di aumentare le imposizioni e li diritti a favore della Religione sulli stessi suoi Beni e proprietà: ma questo mezzo, benchè il più sicuro è il più duro ancora per tutti gli individui dell'Ordine; quasi tutti già aggravati moltissimo per li pesi locali e per l'imposizioni de' rispetti sovrani. Quindi non si verrà à questo espediente, che al più tardi possibile, e quando realmente non si potrà più fare a meno". ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 25 February 1796.
12. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 11 April 1793.
13. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 21 March 1793.

We have no motive to trust neither their bounteousness, nor their intention, nor their judgement, since their head is an extremely exalted person.

No decree of the National Convention, he confessed, however economically debilitating, would succeed in extinguishing the Order. Rather, it was the perfidious and violent internal dissension that pervaded the entire body politic of the Order which would ultimately destroy it — that inherent incapacity to put up a spirited resistance to confront the enemy without with a will power and concerted action within. The Order was French dominated. The major naval and military positions, the principal administrative and judicial organs of State were either occupied or controlled by members of the French Langues. The fate of the Order lay almost exclusively in French hands. Every useful project of reform and economy “was rejected by that [French] party whose only end in life was annihilation and despair”. Miari trusted in the remote eventuality that a final catastrophe, “always dangerous and often fatal”, would force unity upon them.<sup>14</sup>

#### RELATIONS WITH THE VATICAN

De Rohan's caution and circumspection, characteristic of his politics during the period immediately following the *loi spoliateur*, contrasted sharply with his approach to what he was made to believe was necessary reform. This dichotomy was especially evident in his relations with the Vatican. In 1793 the Order had just narrowly survived a serious dispute with the Papacy. For quite some time, outstanding differences had existed between the Government of De Rohan and the Holy See over the extent and exercise of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The question would not have unduly worried either party, had not the Court of Naples claimed the right to interfere through its ‘alto dominio’. Commendatore Grimaldi, on behalf the Neapolitan Court, charged the Grand-

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14. “Si dovrebbe credere che conosciuto il male fosse facile il rimedio: pure non è così; le Nazioni componenti l'Ordine di Malta erano da tanto tempo così poco assuefatte a riunirsi e ad agire in concerto, che ancora non ne trovano la via. Io spero non di meno che l'estremo pericolo ci unirà tutti, il che è il solo mezzo di far argine ad una truppa di falsi fratelli, che ad altro non pensano che a fare un bottino di tutto. Essi cercano ancora compromettere il Governo con delle misure esorbitanti verso la Francia, volendo solo il disordine, in cui unicamente sperano. Tutto quello ch'è prudenza, moderazione, misurata politica è posto da essi in ridicolo e sbandito dai loro consigli, nè vale tal volta, per non fare delle spese enormi, e malcombinare il dire non v'è denaro, ch'essi costi che costi tirano inanzi.” *Ibid.* On the extent to which the Order and Malta were under French influence, J. Godechot, “La France et Malte au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle”, *Revue historique* CCVI (1951), 67-79; M. Chaillan, “Le commerce de Malte avec Marseille et la France”, *Memoires de l'Institut historique de Provence* (1935), 173-199; A. Hoppen, *The Fortification of Malta by the Order of St. John 1530-1798* (Edinburgh 1979), 156-167.

master, the four Grand Crosses (who made up the commission appointed by the State Council to settle the dispute amicably with Rome), the Inquisitor and the Bishop with the execution of 'fourteen articles' concerning the ecclesiastical differences. The Royal Court of Naples was determined to regulate the administration of the curias of the Inquisitor and the Bishop of Malta, to assimilate the diocesan curia with that of the Sicilian bishops and make it completely dependent on the Sicilian Crown. "A claim," observed Miari, "which had always been repudiated by the Order."<sup>15</sup>

De Rohan's reaction exceeded the limits that would have probably been tolerated previously. The driving power behind De Rohan's attitude was his *uditore* Muscat, whom Miari refrained from mentioning by name. He referred to him as "un sol soggetto" who was well-known to Tomaso Condulmer, the Venetian *Capitano delle Navi*, for the antipathy he had always nourished towards Venetians.<sup>16</sup> The influence and prestige which Muscat appears to have enjoyed at the Grandmaster's Court, due to his advanced ideas and enlightened notions of absolute sovereignty and authority, prompted De Rohan to set up a reform ordinance to regulate the position of the Church in relation to the State. This ordinance, clever by the mechanics of eighteenth century despotism but fateful in its consequences, would have loosened the ties of the diocesan church with Rome and prevented the automatic execution in Malta of papal orders without prior approval through the State Council.<sup>17</sup>

It is ironic that the fatal stab to the Order had almost been dealt by its own "supremo superiore". Pius VI's fury and resentment had almost realised what the French revolutionaries had so far failed to achieve — the complete and immediate extinction of the Order.

The Pope has been furious in such measure against us, or rather against our Head, that he seriously threatened to mete out to us the treatment which his immediate Predecessor had reserved for the Jesuits. In essence it amounts to an assertion of our inexistence.<sup>18</sup>

The Pope's argument was simple. If the Order, itself a privileged institution, was not prepared to tolerate any further ecclesiastical privileges, it would be dissolved.<sup>19</sup>

All the pontifical wrath [continues Miari] would have descended upon the man, had the Grand Master not intervened on his be-

15. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 11 April 1793.

16. "Per l'indisposizione ancora, che molto inguistamente avea contro li sud-diti Veneti". *Ibid*.

17. Panzavecchia, 270-280.

18. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 30 April [1793]. The Society of Jesus was suppressed by Pope Clement XIV's Bull *Dominus ac Redemptor*, published on 16 August 1773.

19. Panzavecchia, 281.

half beyond the call of his duty, to the effect that he advanced in his office.<sup>20</sup>

Muscat, the "unworthy Minister", as the Roman Curia called him,<sup>21</sup> and who was later to defend "the exemptions and privileges of the Maltese Nation" against Napoleon's usurpation in June 1798,<sup>22</sup> was in the end dismissed. Miari opined that De Rohan would live to regret the "tanta bontà e condiscendenza" he had shown Muscat, for although the "new law" had had to be withdrawn, the *uditore's* aspirations and ambitions bequeathed the ailing De Rohan "the indignation of the Pope" and the "profound displeasure of His Sicilian Majesty". The traditional intercession, on behalf of the Order, of the highly influential French monarch in international disputes like this, was a thing of the past.<sup>23</sup> Was it perhaps a move to regain the intransigent Pope's lost sympathy that in 1796 De Rohan offered Pius VI refuge and hospitality in fortified Malta, when the ominous threat for the partition of the Papal States emerged with the arrival of the French armies at Bologna?<sup>24</sup>

20. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 30 April [1793].

21. Panzavecchia, 281.

22. Ryan, 307; Panzavecchia, 470-471.

23. "Tutti gli riscontri sono che si trattava realmente della nostra non esistenza. Pare impossibile, che un' Uomo illuminato com'è il Gran Maestro abbia voluto mettersi a questo repentaglio per conto di qualche ecclesiastica giurisdizione, che si vorrebbe riformare. Fortunatamente, ch'egli era sembra rinvenuto dal sistema che lui sopra tutti portava alla perdizione, dando luogo alla verità ha veduto che siamo così piccoli che non possiamo contrastare col Papa, che oltre ad essere una Potenza rispettabilissima per noi, è poi ancora il nostro Supremo Superiore: che le circostanze non sono più quelle de tempi passati, quando avevamo degli appoggi fortissimi quasi a nostra disposizione ...; Ha abbandonato dunque le novità che voleva introdurre, se non contro i positivi e reali diritti della Chiesa, almeno contro i privilegi della stessa, e contro le antiche consuetudini che vanta ...". ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 30 April [1793].

24. "Sono certo", wrote Miari, "che Vostra Serenità non ignora essere stato proposto seriamente al Papa di trasferirsi in Malta in caso di grave pericolo suo e della Chiesa, da cui è pur troppo minacciato." ASV, *Senato, Segreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 29 September 1796. In 1796 the Pope made two requests to De Rohan: the first for the supply of "10,000 fucili ò in prestito semplicemente ò anche in vendita secondo più sia a grado dell'Eminentissimo Gran Maestro". The reason is given thus: "Costretto il Sommo Pontefice di fornirsi di una sufficiente forza armata, con la quale garantire il suo Stato da quelle ostilità che può giustamente tenere dalle armi Francesi calate nell'Italia dopo che si è interrotta ogni negoziazione di Pace tra di lui e la Nazione sudetta, e non avendo ne' suoi Arsenali tutta la quantità d'armi corrispondente al bisogno." The Pope's second request was that in order to keep "sicurezza e tranquillità de suoi sudditi," he was determined "di allontanare da suoi Stati tutti li condannati in vita nelle sue galere, come quelli che in caso di ostili incursioni possono essere perniciosissimi perché disposti sempre a tentare insorgimenti favorevoli ai nemici, sulla fiducia di esimersi così da quella pena che giustamente soffrono per i loro delitti. Desidera il Santo Padre di trasmettere tali condannati in Malta, luogo in cui possono più facilmente, che in ogn' altro essere custoditi, e

The isolationism, which by April 1793 had developed into a predominant feature of the Order of St. John, was therefore due as much to foreign forces, over which De Rohan had no direct control, as to his vanity and wild, secular political ambitions. Deprived, as the Order now was, of any serious protection, the disastrous consequences of the unnecessary dispute over ecclesiastical jurisdiction grew in dimension. It further weakened the Order's position and psychologically semi-disowned De Rohan in Rome and Naples. The cold, relentless realism of these developments determined the direction the Order's politics were to take during the next four years.

#### IN SEARCH OF AN ALLY . . .

In his letter of 25 February 1796, Miari wrote thus:<sup>25</sup>

All that is here attributed to the Religion, such as its spirit imbued with zeal, energy and inventiveness, does not concern itself except with such means, more or less efficient, durable, and even almost instantaneously effective, by which the Religion, since it finds itself in exceptionally trying circumstances, may profit withal.

This is immediately followed by a reference to "the projects lately attempted".<sup>26</sup> The principal difficulty lay not in identifying the problem but in arriving at any decision to resolve it. The final years of De Rohan's magistracy were years of painful readjustment through abortive attempts to restructure a different set of political relationships and embark on domestic socio-economic ventures, in the vain hope of finding an answer to the many complex problems challenging the basis of the Order's existence and threatening the relative prosperity of the principality of Malta. Requests for patronage, disguised under different shapes and forms, were made by De Rohan with an almost urbane tone of resignation. These ranged from a political agreement with Britain and an economic treaty with the United States of America to a vague alliance with Catherine II's Russia. This was curious policy, completely at odds with the Order's traditional, conservative doctrine. The attempts failed. The inconsistency and imbalance shown by De Rohan and his State Councillors in taking important decisions accounted for their failure. These decisions were hardly ever based on pragmatic analysis of what was truly advantageous and what was not. Neither were they flexible or realistic enough. Their approach was as unsettled as De Rohan's 'programme of action' was unsettling. On certain occasions, he displayed mastery, tact, boldness and unrestraint; on others, he foiled all expectations.

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ripresi, per l'impossibilità nella quale sono di fugire." AIM, *Corrispondenza* 102, ff.285-286, 29 October 1796. For the Grandmaster's reaction to the two requests, *ibid.*, ff.287-288, 30 October 1796.

25. ASV, *Senato, Secreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 29 February 1796.

26. *Ibid.*

Under the pretence of a strict adherence to its traditional statutory neutrality, the Order's position in relation to France was kept cautiously ambiguous. De Rohan made no formal declaration of policy until October 1793. News of the King's execution had arrived in Malta as late as 25 February, whereas Naples did not declare war on France until September of that year. The Grandmaster would not commit himself until the Court of Naples had defined its own position clearly.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, the case concerning the French *Homme du Roi* in Malta exposed the ambivalence of De Rohan's stand. Seytres-Caumont, whom Inquisitor Carpegna described as "a Knight of strict and righteous principles",<sup>28</sup> had been since 1778 Louis XVI's Resident Minister in Malta. After the execution of the monarch, De Rohan unhesitatingly reconfirmed him in that office and authorised him to continue to have the legitimate French arms over his official residence.<sup>29</sup> That was bold and vociferous. When Naples then declared war on France, and the Minister, in accordance with the terms of the donation-deed of 1530,<sup>30</sup>

27. AOM 274, f.217, Lettera del Bali Francene con la quale annunzia la morte di Luigi XVI, Re di Francia, 8 February 1793; AOM 276, f.4, Il Gran Maestro partecipa al Consiglio la morte di Luigi XVI, 25 February 1793; Panzavecchia, 309. "Coll'ultimo ordinario è giunta a questo Gran Maestro una lettera di Monsieur, fratello dell'infelice Luigi XVI, con cui gli partecipa l'assunta Reggenza del Regno di Francia in occasione della Minoretà di Luigi XVII, ed invitandolo a dare delle pubbliche e solcite prove dell'attaccamento dell'Ordine alla Corona di Francia ed ai suoi Re. Questa notificazione, che si è saputa dal Pubblico, ha cagionato una sensazione e consolazione grandissima nell'animo della maggior parte, ma che pur non riflette al vero stato et alle circostanze dell'Ordine. Il Governo però temendo di compromettersi ha differito la sua risposta sin tanto che non siano meglio conosciuti li sistemi dell'altre Potenze; massimamente delle nostre Protettrici alle quali, permettendolo la nostra situazione, per ogni lodevole motivo dobbiamo cercar di uniformarsi ...; qui si continua a parlare di dichiarazione di guerra, ed ora anzi più che mai; ma è un fatto che ci manca non solo il denaro necessario per farle, ma ancora per prolungare la nostra propria sussistenza." ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 25 April 1793.

28. AIM, *Corrispondenza* 102, f.93v, 19 September 1793.

29. Ryan, 220, 221.

30. The French Knights, observed Miari, "si lusingano presentemente, che la Spagna entrerà in Guerra con la nuova Repubblica, che per conseguenza li noti intimi rapporti obbligherà il Re di Napoli ad imitarla; ed eccoci in Guerra ancor noi; perché per li patti dell'Infeudazione dell'Imperatore Carlo V di quest'Isola alla Religione noi non possiamo ricevere in porto gli inimici della Corona di Sicilia." ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 21 March 1793. "Quell'intimazione a M.r Machau, Ministro Francese in Napoli per parte di Sua Maestà Siciliana, e ministerialmente significata a tutti li Ministri Esteri colà residenti, che sarà stata senza meno significata a Vostra Serenità, lo è stata ancora a questo Gran Maestro e Governo. Credo dunque dovere del mio officio sottomettere alla Serenità Vostra le misure, che qui ne sono risultate in contemplazione dei patti dell'Infeudazione fatta dall'Imperatore Carlo V. di quest'Isola alla Religione Gerosolimitana. Riguardando questo Governo la detta intimazione, come una formale dichiarazione di

could no longer enjoy in those circumstances the same representative character, De Rohan, "to endow him with a character which authorises him to stay in the island with a title of some standing", appointed him Protector of the French émigrés in Malta.<sup>31</sup> Later, in a personal communication to Caumont, the Comte de Provence approved the Minister's conduct throughout the revolutionary upheaval and, on behalf of Louis XVII, reinvested him with the same character he had had before 1789.<sup>32</sup>

This attitude anticipated De Rohan's famous manifesto of 10 October 1793.<sup>33</sup> He could now formally declare that his Order "ought not, could not, and would not, acknowledge" the "pretended French Republic".<sup>34</sup> This declaration was necessary. For, if the neighbouring Italian governments had morally given him the lead by joining the First Coalition, the presence of the British fleet in the Mediterranean had diplomatically incited him to action. It provided him with an important opportunity of demonstrating to Pitt's Ministry in London, to whom the first overtures for an alliance had been made a few months earlier,<sup>35</sup> the practical strategic value of the island's geographical position.

#### . . . ENGLAND

It was only in his letter of 27 June 1793 that Miari made a passing reference to what he preferred to call "rumours", which by then, he reckoned, should have reached Venice, attributing to the Maltese Government "the project of ceding this Island, under certain con-

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guerra, ha risoluto di non dare più ricovero in alcuno di questi porti ai Corsari e ai bastimenti di guerra della Republica Francese, e di non permettere che neppure li mercantili inalberono l'inviso Paviglione Tricolore, riguardato come il segnale della ribellione, e della riunione de' Farisei; e siccome un certo M.r Aymar scrive da Genova che porterebbesi quanto prima in Malta per rimpiazzare questo Cav.r de Caumont Incaricato Francese sino da molti anni, così su dipersi riflessi è stata presa la rischizione di non permettergli di porre piede in terra ma d'obbligarlo a partire immediatamente. Intanto il Cav.re de Caumont continua a rimanere in paese, in quanto egli è, come tutti gli altri Ministri del Corpo dell'Ordine, ne ha avuto mai altre Credenziali, che quelle di Luigi XVI nel colmo del suo potere e della sua gloria gli diede presso questo Gran Maestro, e dippiù in quanto ha tuttavia sulla porta della sua abitazione le antiche armi di Francia." *Ibid.*, 12 September 1793.

31. AIM, *Corrispondenza* 102, f.93v, 19 September 1793.

32. *Ibid.*, f.112v, 12 June 1794.

33. A.V. Laferla, *The Story of Man in Malta* (4th ed., Malta 1972), 131. The manifesto is reproduced, in translation, in Ryan, 220, and in Panzavecchia, 323-324.

34. After Ryan, 220.

35. R. Vella Bonavita, "Britain and Malta 1787-1798", *Hyphen* I, 1(1977), 3-4. This paper is a revised version of an earlier paper "Great Britain and Malta, 1789-1798: A Lost Opportunity?", which was read in the symposium on "The British in the Mediterranean", held at The National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, Saturday, 8 December 1973.

ditions, to Great Britain."<sup>36</sup> He could or would not say what these conditions were, although negotiations with the British Government had been going on since December 1792. In return for adequate British protection, De Rohan offered a wide range of important base facilities, which included "troops, seamen, munitions, stores, limited naval support and . . . a strong strategic fortress with superb harbours."<sup>37</sup>

In De Rohan's desperate search for political protection and financial assistance, England was an obvious choice. When on 1 February 1793 Britain declared war on France, her status in the Mediterranean was far from similar to the one she had enjoyed at the treaty of Utrecht, when she emerged as a Mediterranean power in possession of Gibraltar and Minorca. The base at Gibraltar was in fact the only one to remain "permanently and securely" in British hands until the first decade of the nineteenth century. Minorca was recaptured by Spain in 1781. Then, in August 1793, the French great Mediterranean naval base of Toulon revolted and was delivered by the royalists to the British. It was precisely at this juncture, in October 1793, that De Rohan issued his famous manifesto. Little did he realise that within two months that same port would have been surrendered to Bonaparte's military forces. But, then, was not this turn of events fortuitous for his purpose? Did it not strengthen, rather than weaken, the Grandmaster's objective to make Pitt's Ministry appreciate better Malta's importance? Again, when the British at last succeeded in conquering Corsica, the French *généralité*, they occupied it for only one year, 1795-96. For, when in 1796 Spain defected to the French side, and Leghorn, the supply port for Corsica and "for nearly two centuries the principal trading base for British merchants in the western Mediterranean", was seized by Bonaparte, not only were they forced to surrender their major acquisition; they had to withdraw completely from the Mediterranean until 1798. Pitt's decision to withdraw was in part psychologically fortified by almost certain knowledge that the island of Malta would remain immune from any French subversive influence.<sup>38</sup> In a rather implicit way, the manifesto had guaranteed precisely that. It also explains it. However, if criticism of De Rohan's manifesto may be justified on grounds of injudiciousness,<sup>39</sup> it should also be extended to Pitt's decision. An Anglo-Maltese alliance, such as De Rohan had envisaged, would have probably saved the British merchant not only the losses he suffered at the hands of privateers but also the "serious economic dislocation" which resulted from the withdrawal. "For over a year," according to a recent study, "no convoys operated beyond Gibraltar, and commercial organisations protested bitterly at the consequences,

36. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 27 June 1793.

37. Vella Bonavita, 6.

38. *Ibid.*, 11.

39. *Ibid.*

claiming that over 200,000 operatives in Lancashire, Yorkshire and the Midlands depended on exports to the Mediterranean for their employment."<sup>40</sup>

### ... RUSSIA

In the same letter of 27 June, Miari pointed out that while negotiations for a treaty with Britain were in progress, the design for a similar alliance "with Moscow" had been simultaneously conceived.<sup>41</sup>

By the Second Partition of Poland in 1793, nearly all that had been the Order's Grand Priory of Poland within the Volhynia was received by Russia as part of her share of the spoil. A second major consequence was the suspension of the *responsiones* due to the Order from that Priory.<sup>42</sup> De Maisonneuve's mission to Russia never having materialised,<sup>43</sup> De Rohan thought of despatching another courtesy mission to congratulate Catherine II on her new territorial acquisition. At the same time he would seek her protection and request her to sanction the privileges which the Order used to enjoy in its "ancient properties", now falling within the Czarina's jurisdiction. Catherine's self-assumed role of protectress of European nobility and the great prestige which Prince Poninski, Grand Prior of Poland and the staunchest promoter of this "new relationship", enjoyed at the Court of St. Petersburg, were positive and encouraging factors.<sup>44</sup> Both promised a successful outcome.

But there was more to the projected mission than mere diplomatic protocol. By 1793 the Order was endeavouring to promote what Miari described then as "a novel spirit of cordiality" with Russia. Its ultimate design, he wrote, was to create "new Muscovite Languages" to substitute those of Provence, Auvergne and France. This new relationship, continued Miari, was being "cultivated" and "fostered" by certain factions within the Order.<sup>45</sup> Miari felt disenchanted with this line of policy and was heartened only by knowledge of the fact that it would prove difficult for such a "design" to materialise, as, in his view, it infringed the statutes of the Order. Moreover, the State Council, which he describes as the ultimate sovereign authority in Malta, "was far from unanimous" over the issue. There was considerable internal differences of opinion as to what policy to adopt. The project would encounter, he thought, "insuperable" obstacles both in Malta and in Rome "because of the difference of Religion".<sup>46</sup>

According to the Venetian Minister,<sup>47</sup> Prince Camille de Rohan, the

40. J.R. Jones, *Britain and the World* (Fontana 1980), 272-273.

41. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 27 June 1793.

42. N.E. Saul, *Russia and the Mediterranean 1797-1807* (Chicago 1970), 35.

43. Cavaliero, 205, 207.

44. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 8 August 1793.

45. *Ibid.*, 27 June 1793.

46. *Ibid.*, 27 June, 8 August 1793.

47. *Ibid.*, 14 November 1793.

Order's ambassador in Rome and a close relative of the Grandmaster, "would have loved to go on such a mission, but could not for lack of funds."<sup>48</sup> The choice of an envoy thus fell on the Milanese count, Giulio Litta, rear-admiral of Catherine's Imperial Fleet, who, for a completely unrelated reason,<sup>49</sup> happened to be in Malta at the time. Miari held an exceptionally high opinion of him. "He is certainly the individual most suited of all," he observed; "rich, fortunate, very well known at the Courts of St. Petersburg and Warsaw, he was endowed with talent, ability and finesse."<sup>50</sup> It was in 1795, however, after the Third Partition of Poland, that De Rohan finally accredited Giulio Litta to proceed to St. Petersburg.<sup>51</sup> Litta was then in Warsaw. The year before, he had accompanied his brother Lorenzo, newly appointed Apostolic Nuncio to that city.<sup>52</sup> He arrived at Catherine's Court in October 1795.<sup>53</sup>

Circumstances were not however as propitious as they appeared to have been two years earlier. The case of the Maltese corsair Michele Borg, for example, could have possibly contributed towards straining Russo-Maltese relations.<sup>54</sup> Borg had preyed upon the Greek *tartanella* *San Giorgio* (master Panjoti Mexi) which was covered by Maltese letters-patent issued in 1788 and 1792. The merchandise belonged to Theodoro Calgnomo, a Russian "agent and subject", and was on its way to the Russian merchant, Alessandro Mexopulo, in Constantinople. Mexi, accompanied by the supercargo Antonio Catagne Crissaffili, another Russian, sought justice in Malta. Their case was lost, as rumours ran "unfairly", at the local Court of First Instance, against whose judgement they appealed to the Superior Court of Justice. Antonio Miari, as the Venetian Resident on the island, was approached by Russia's "Secretary and Interpreter" in Malta, to issue a declaration that the waters

48. *Ibid.* See Also N[atational] L[ibrary of] M[alta], Library 418, to Mayer, 27 March 1793; Cavaliero, 203.

49. Cavaliero, 206; A.P. Vella, *Malta and the Czars* (Malta 1965), 21. On Giulio Litta, G. Greppi, *Un Gentiluomo milanese guerriero-diplomatico 1763-1839 ...* (Milan 1896); G. Savastano, "Il Bali Giulio Litta Visconti Arese (1763-1839)", *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte* XXI (1963), 97-102.

50. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 14 November 1793.

51. AOM 274, f.246v, Il Bali Giulio Renato Litta nominato Ministro Plenipotenziario presso la Corte di Russia, 13 April 1795; Panzavecchia, 332-333; Ryan, 243.

52. Cavaliero, 206-207.

53. *Ibid.*, 210.

54. Panzavecchia, 332. For a general account of the relations between the Order and Russia, H. Smith, "The Order of St. John of Jerusalem: relations between Pope Pius VI and the Russian Grand Priory", *Scientia* XXVI, 2(1960), 52-73; *id.*, "Relations between the Court of St. Petersburg and the Court of the Grand Masters at Malta", *Melita Historica* III, 2(1961), 9-13; Z.de Borja, "Les relations de l'Ordre de Saint-Jean avec la Russie sous le règne de Catherine II", *Hidalguia* XXV (1957), 855-868; R.E. Cavaliero, "The affair of Ostrog: an episode in Malto-Polish relations in the eighteenth century", *Journal of the Faculty of Arts*, The Royal University of Malta, I, 2 (1958), 128-141.

of Prodano, where Borg's prize had been made, fell within the jurisdiction of the Serenissima, and that according to Veneto-Ottoman treaties all privateering in that area was illicit.<sup>55</sup>

Within this constraining state of affairs, the likelihood of an early alliance with Russia diminished rapidly. Miari's letter of 2 January 1796, concerning Litta's mission to St. Petersburg, was marked by a predominant note of despondency and disillusion. "If the object of Litta's mission went beyond the simple exchange of compliments", he confessed, "there is hardly any reason for further reporting on it."<sup>56</sup> From Litta's correspondence, dated 9 October 1795, it transpired, said Miari, that he had come across a host of "negative attitudes" at the Court of Moscow "both towards the Grandmaster and the Order itself". He had shown "little confidence of being able to draw any advantages from his mission". Among Catherine's "various motives of displeasure" towards De Rohan, Miari considered that "the most biting" criticism the Empress had levelled against the Grandmaster was that the Order had been conducting diplomatic negotiations with France without ever consulting the other Powers for advice.<sup>57</sup> The Order had never sought Russian help. Given the complex and delicate European situation, the Order should have refrained from negotiating "separately with the French Republic".<sup>58</sup> Indeed, negotiations in Russia "were conducted in a desultory fashion because Catherine had little interest at the time in Maltese affairs."<sup>59</sup> When the Empress died on 16 November 1796, De Rohan's objective had not yet been attained.

55. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 24 April 1794 and encl.

56. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 2 January 1796.

57. *Ibid.* This had also been the reaction of the Emperor Francis II's Minister Plenipotentiary to the Order, "sostenuta non senza gran calore": "che qualunque conciliativa misura, anche in questo momento, si prendesse col Direttorio, dispiacerebbe sommamente al suo Sovrano e a tutti li Principi Beligeranti Protettori dell'Ordine." *Ibid.*, 11 June 1796.

58. *Ibid.*, 2 January 1796.

59. Saul, 35. "Le lettere di Pietroburgo di quel Ministro dell'Ordine Bali Litta non annunciano grandi speranze di alcun felice successo delle di lui negoziazioni, come taluno s'era imaginato. Egli ha mandato copia d'una Nota Ministeriale, che non è stata qui neppure molto approvata. Ci si conferma, che se si otterrà la conservazione de' Beni dell'Ordine in Polonia sarà tutto quello che si potrà ottenere. Il Bali Litta ha ordine di ritirarsi subito che non avesse più alcuna speranza, che la sua dimora in Pietroburgo fosse per produrre qualche vantaggio a questa Religione. Il Bali Litta ne ha ora mai poca egli stesso cosichè tutti quelli che temevano che questa missione fosse per produrre qualche cangiamento ne' rapporti politici dell'Ordine con l'Estere Potenze saranno verisimilmente presto liberati d'ogni timore." ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 28 January 1796.

"Da Pietroburgo nulla abbiamo d'importante. Il Bali Litta è là non dico inoperoso ma senza avere sin qui conseguita niuna cosa di rimarco: anzi vi è sempre maggiore apparenza che oltre all'oggetto del complimento a quell'Imperatrice, e tutt' al più alla conservazione de' presenti Beni dell'Ordine in Polonia, come si spera, nulla s'otterrà d'avvantaggio, e tutti li concepiti pro-

## ... THE U.S.A.

In the mid-1760s Massimiliano Buzzaccarini Gonzaga, the Venetian Minister in Malta at the time, reported thus to the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*:

I found myself in a country where one is expected to pay the extreme of prices which are current in any major Capital of Europe.<sup>60</sup>

And again:

The country is tranquil since it is well provided with all kind of essentials, even though these are available at exorbitant prices, and the poor are much afflicted.<sup>61</sup>

The comparatively high cost of living was in part indicative of the economic health and general social prosperity which, fairly consistently, marked eighteenth century Malta,<sup>62</sup> only to be suddenly offset, after 1789, by the rapidly dwindling fortunes of the Order, "the largest and most important economic unit in the islands".<sup>63</sup> According to De Rohan, Malta in the early 1790s boasted a population of 150,000,<sup>64</sup> an obviously too highly inflated figure.<sup>65</sup> The deterioration in Franco-Maltese relations produced widespread unemployment.<sup>66</sup> The sharp decline in overseas trade, due mainly to the closure of traditional markets, like Barcellona,

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getti rimaranno nel loro essere nella testa de progettisti." *Ibid.*, 6 February 1796.

"Benchè da qualche mese non mi sia dato l'onore di rassegnare a Vostra Serenità alcun cenno intorno la Missione Maltese in Pietroburgo, non ho per questo tralasciato di seguirla ne' suoi andamenti, e posso renderla ben certa, che niuna cosa vi è di nuovo, che interessare possa li pubblici riguardi, e che se non ritornerà totalmente priva d'effetto, questo sarà così leggiero ed insignificante, che alcun Gabinetto non avrà ad allarmarsene". *Ibid.*, 28 May 1796.

"Niun rapporto politico poi mi si presenta ora di dover fare a Vostra Serenità, poichè credo che la Serenità Vostra sarà senza meno meglio informata della situazione di quest' Ordine in Francia, di quello che qui si sia. Perciò che riguarda lo stesso in Pietroburgo, stante l'esaltamento a quel trono del nuovo Czar Paolo Primo, il Bali Litta, già da molto tempo e più volte richiamato, dovrà trattenervisi, poichè vi si trova, per complementare il nuovo imperatore a nome di quest' Ordine, indi partirsene, essendo diggià quì ognuno persuaso, che nulla vi si concluderà mai, che sia veramente per essere di vantaggio e decoro a questa Religione". *Ibid.*, 16 February 1797.

60. ASV, CSM, *prima serie*, busta 601, 21 April 1766.

61. *Ibid.*, 26 January 1767.

62. See A. Luttrell, "Eighteenth Century Malta: Prosperity and Problems", *Hyphen* III, 2(1982), 37-51; B.W. Blouet, "The Maltese Economy", *Contemporary Review* (January 1964) 71-72.

63. B.W. Blouet, *The Story of Malta* (London 1967), 123-124.

64. P. Cassar, *Early Relations between Malta and the United States of America* (Malta 1976), 6.

65. Blouet (1967), 89-92, 93ff. *passim*; Luttrell, 41-42; Hardman, 539ff.

66. Cassar, 7.

had ruined the merchant class;<sup>67</sup> the catastrophic hailstorms of 1790 wreaked irreparable havoc to the peasants' lot; cotton trade, which was the island's major industry, steadily declined. Before 1789, cotton thread exports to Barcellona alone, for example, used to earn an average income of £500,000. Between 1792-96 import trade in general had become almost negligible.<sup>68</sup>

To solve this acute problem, De Rohan in 1794 had tried to negotiate "a treaty of union and alliance" with the United States of America.<sup>69</sup> This was his third abortive attempt to find an ally. He sought a grant of lands in America, peripheral to the sea or to a navigable river, which the Maltese would have been encouraged "to clear ... cultivate ... and settle thereon."<sup>70</sup> It was a wise incentive for the heavy mass of unemployed to migrate in search of better opportunities. In return, the Order offered the United States what it had only recently offered Britain — all those facilities and services enjoyed by friendly States at the port of Malta. From United States Ambassador James Monroe's correspondence to Monsieur Cibon, the Order's Ambassador Extraordinary in Paris, it appears that American authorities were not against these proposals.<sup>71</sup> It was agreed that a commission of inquiry would be despatched to Malta to report to Congress. On 17 December 1796 De Rohan felt the need to appoint William England United States Consul in Malta. For reasons yet obscure, however, negotiations seem to have been abruptly terminated. The commission of inquiry never arrived, nor did the projected alliance ever materialise.<sup>72</sup> Unfortunately, there is no reference to these negotiations in Miari's correspondence, although one would have expected such a design to be of great concern to the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*.

Rising prices, unemployment, social tensions and the discomfiture of vain hopes of an immediate solution sparked popular disturbances. Miari makes a direct reference to this state of unrest in Malta:<sup>73</sup>

67. Panzavecchia, 291-292.

68. *Ibid.*, 338; Hardman, 535; Thornton, 35. See also J. Debono, "The Cotton Trade of Malta 1750-1800", *Archivum: Journal of Maltese Historical Research* I(1981), 94-125.

69. Cassar, 5-9; E.E. Hume, "A Proposed Alliance between the Order of Malta and the United States, 1794", *William and Mary College Quarterly*, 2nd series, XVI(1936), 222-233.

70. Cassar, 7; "Would the United States consent to grant, in full right, to the Order of Malta some lands in America, in such quantity as may be agreed on between the two governments, placing such lands under the immediate protection and safeguard of the American loyalty?" Order's ambassador in Paris, Monsieur Cibon, to James Monroe, U.S. ambassador in Paris. Hume, 226.

71. Cassar, 8. See M. Wood, *The Importance of Malta considered in the years 1796 and 1798* (London 1803).

72. Cassar, 9; Panzavecchia, 339.

73. ASV, *Senato, Segreta, filza 9, Dispacci Malta*, 6 September 1796.

For several days in these parts certain disturbances have been noticed and some fears entertained, caused by certain inflammatory bills, which have been affixed even upon the doors of the Magisterial Palace.

The situation was accentuated by De Rohan's attitude of "indolence" and "indifference", which Miari attributed to senility (the Prince was 71) and to a condition of worsening health (he had been struck by paralysis in 1791 and never fully recovered since then). This state of affairs, observes Miari, would "before long" encourage a serious upheaval. Some suggested that the Court of Naples be asked to despatch a contingent of troops in order to overawe the potential rebels by a display of force: "under the pretext of protecting us, not from known enemies (since we have no need of that) but rather from those who are covert." Miari was more optimistic. "I candidly believe there is no need for this, nor do I see things so pessimistically, as some do."<sup>74</sup>

#### A LOST OPPORTUNITY?

On 31 July 1796 the Spanish Prime Minister, Emanuel Godoy, the youthful Prince of Peace, wrote to De Rohan, in connection with what he called "repeated requests" made by Sultan Selim III to His Catholic Majesty to prevail upon the Grandmaster to conclude a peace treaty or truce with the Ottoman Porte.<sup>75</sup> The treaty or truce envisaged by the Turks, explained Godoy, would be based on three principles: that it would remain operative so long as Spain and the Porte remained at peace, that prisoners and slaves would be exchanged, and that free trade relations would be established and freedom of navigation mutually guaranteed.<sup>76</sup>

The Porte's efforts to cultivate cordial relations with Malta lay in the logic of two recent developments. First, following the peace of Jassey, which ended the Russo-Turkish War of 1782-92, the intelligent Turkish ruler embarked on a grandiose scheme of modernising the structure of his empire. Within this framework, efforts were made in 1793 for the first time to establish Turkish embassies and permanently

74. *Ibid.*

75. "Mi affretto a partecipare a Vostra Serenità ch'ultimamente è pervenuta a questo Eminentissimo Gran Maestro una lettera del Principe della Pace, Primo Ministro di Sua Maestà Cattolica, con cui a nome del suo Sovrano li significa, che la Porta Ottomana ha fatto replicate e molte vive istanze presso il medesimo suo Sovrano per mezzo de' di lui diversi Ministri, perché si costituisca Mediatore della Pace, o almeno una Tregua fra essa Porta Ottomana e l'Ordine di Malta: che Sua Maestà Cattolica ne ha assunto l'impegno"; *Ibid.*, 22 September 1796; AOM 275, f.24, Lettera del Principe della Pace ... che partecipa al Gran Maestro le premure fatte al Re dalla Porta per stabilire una tregua tra la medesima e l'Ordine, 31 July 1796. Godoy's letter is reproduced in Panzavecchia, 340-342.

76. *Ibid.*

station Ottoman diplomats "in most of the major capitals of Europe — in many ways a more striking break with the Ottoman past even than the military reforms."<sup>77</sup> The Sultan's overtures to the Order conformed nicely to this novel practice. Secondly, in the early months of 1796, there was serious talk among influential quarters in Malta of reviving the corso in the Levant, in the hope of restoring what had "truly been in the past a veritable source of wealth", from which would be drawn "quite appreciable riches" to the harassment of Turkish commerce and shipping.<sup>78</sup> In fact, some 117,000 scudi are known to have been earned from prizes won during 1796, compared to the average annual income of 65,629 scudi derived from the same source during the decade 1787-1797.<sup>79</sup> Would isolated Malta find in Russia, with whom negotiations for a bilateral agreement were still in progress, the necessary emotional response that would admirably suit such an enterprise? What if the Knights of St. John and Maltese corsairs, heavily depressed by the current political and economic circumstances, be ultimately absorbed (perhaps unwittingly) in the massive designs of the Porte's most formidable enemy, intent on securing advantageous commercial positions beyond its southern frontier? Although by 1796 diplomatic relations between St. Petersburg and Constantinople began to display the semblance of being promoted and sustained, the Porte appears to have perceived the advantage of an early agreement with Malta — it would weaken at one blow all hopes of reviving the nefarious organised privateering in the Levant. The timing was all important. In fact, to avoid obvious delay, Godoy had suggested, in his letter to De Rohan, that the question of whether to include the Barbary Regencies in the treaty need not be then considered as it was irrelevant to the main issue. He knew very well that the scope of Malta's corsairing industry, to which the native economy was geared, had been drastically reduced to occasional punitive expeditions to these coasts.<sup>80</sup>

Selim's cause found some solid advocacy in the island. His proposals were hailed by a few enlightened spirits who solicited De Rohan for fundamental reforms on the same lines. One leading advocate of this cause was the 32-year-old Maltese intellectual and political activist,

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77. M.S. Anderson, *The Eastern Question 1774-1923: A Study in International Relations* (London 1966), 23; S.J. Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey* (Cambridge 1976), vol. I, *Empire of the Gazis: The Rise and Decline of the Ottoman Empire 1280-1808*, 266.

78. ASV, *Senato, Segreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 25 February 1796.

79. Luttrell, 45.

80. Panzavecchia, 341. "Li Corsari Maltesi si tengono fermamente nel diritto di predare li Barbereschi in servizio di chiunque si sieno, non avendo li Barbereschi alcun riguardo per li Maltesi che fossero in servizio di qualche Nazione Neutrale." ASV, *Senato, Segreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 18 August 1796.

Michele Antonio Vassallo.<sup>81</sup> Considering the Order's overwhelmingly regimented restrictions on trade movements with the Levant a severe hindrance to the island's economic development, he showed extraordinary vigour to convince the Government of the urgency of such reform. With clear Physiocratic overtones, he clamoured for the establishment of free trade between his country and the Ottoman Empire,<sup>82</sup> which, particularly at times of crippling trade depression, would facilitate the exchange of goods and turn the port of Malta into a safe commercial depot for Levantine goods.

De Rohan declined to take a unilateral decision. Constitutionally he could not. The enlightened Prince had earlier in his magistracy shown some inclination towards a similar political direction, as Vilhena had shown before him at the beginning of the century.<sup>83</sup> Godoy's letter, incorporating Selim's proposals had first to be submitted to the Council of State and, if carried, to the Council of the Order, as the whole question directly involved key changes in the statutes. The State Council voted against the truce, definitely and absolutely, on the grounds that the construction of such a treaty would have held up to ridicule the Order's *raison d'être*. The State Council, says Miari,<sup>84</sup>

had then effectively opined that it had to decline absolutely such a treaty, mainly that even the truce in itself, not constituting a necessity for the Order, would ever be against our Constitution and would be in breach of the good faith invested in us by the Italian Catholic Princes and their interests.

There was nothing it would do to budge the dead weight of custom and tradition, so far away was the Institution from the idea of progressive reform.

It was ironic that the only true redeeming hand of peace and reconciliation had been extended to the Order by none other than its sworn enemy, the Turk. It was even more pathetically ironic that the State Council resolutely turned down the only project that would have probably guaranteed a thriving trade and would have consequently

81. On Vassallo, who is more popularly known as Vassalli, A. Cremona, *Vassalli and his Times* (Malta 1940).

82. Ryan, 255; Panzavecchia, 340-342; G.A. Vassallo, *Storia di Malta* (Malta 1890), 611; A. Mifsud, *Knights Hospitallers of the Venerable Tongue of England in Malta* (Malta 1916), 257; Cremona, 23-33.

83. For Vilhena's projected truce with Turkey, AOM 267, ff.198-199v, *Relazione dei Commissari deputati sopra la proposta del Gran Vizir*, 19 April 1723; R.A. de Vertot, *Histoire de Chevaliers de Rhodes, et aujour'd'hui les Chevaliers de Malte* (Paris 1726), vol.IV, 237-238; Boisgelin, vol.II, 234-235; Ryan, 76-77; Cavaliero (1960), 114-116.

84. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 29 September 1796; AOM 278, ff.82-84, *Relazione dei Commissari deputati per esaminare il contenuto della lettera del Principe de la Paz, Primo Ministro di Spagna*; AOM 275, ff.25v-26, *Lettera del Gran Maestro ... al Primo Ministro di Spagna in risposta alla sua del 31 luglio 1796*, 29 September 1796.

postponed its inevitable extinction. Overwhelmed by an innate prejudice against the very concept of change, the Order by the late 1790s had become powerless to resist its own inertia. Its tragically obsessive attachment to its statutes, which could have been fairly easily repealed or reformed by a competent authority, has been rightly called "an unpardonable fatuity."<sup>85</sup>

#### VENETO-MALTESE RELATIONS

The relationship between Antonio Miari and Antonio Poussielgues, the Venetian consul in Malta, seems to have been generally based on an attitude of mutual trust and magnanimity. On assuming office, the Minister promised the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia* that he would willingly extend to the consul all his assistance and would gladly conduct Poussielgues's activity to a better end if necessary. Miari held a high opinion of Poussielgues. This contrasted in a very striking manner with the view which Massimiliano Buzzaccarini Gonzaga had entertained of the man in the 1760s when Poussielgues was appointed Venetian consul.<sup>86</sup> Buzzaccarini Gonzaga described him as being unable to give "his complete attention to the aid of [Venetian] subjects, being a man of a hundred interests, each of which he regarded as more important than anything else". The only help which he then readily offered Venetian captains was motivated by the remuneration he thought he would derive from it.<sup>87</sup> Shortly afterwards, Buzzaccarini Gonzaga again refers to the "little or no service" the consul was willing to offer Venetian subjects, and to his "negligence".<sup>88</sup> The passage of more than a quarter of a century is likely to have changed the man's attitude towards his consular duties. For in 1793 Miari confessed to the *Cinque Savi*: "for the love of truth I must confirm that with his great zeal and dedication, his faith and the many abilities he possesses which are necessary in his position, he did hardly ever require my assistance" or advice, except occasionally in matters of a non-mercantile or a non-consular nature.<sup>89</sup>

With the sole exception of the case of Giacomo Tiozzo, whose ship had been confiscated for the previous two years, and which the Minister described as "too complicated to explain in one letter," everything else which concerned the interests of the Republic, its merchants and its subjects in Malta in the early 1790s proceeded smoothly and methodically, with great fairness and attention under the efficient

85. Panzavecchia, 342.

86. Poussielgues was appointed Venetian Consul on 22 March 1766 by Grand-master Pinto. AOM 569, f.194v; V. Malfia-Milanes, "Malta and Venice in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Consular Relations", *Studi Veneziani* XVII-XVIII (1975-76), 316-319.

87. ASV, CSM, *prima serie*, busta 601, 8 June 1767.

88. *Ibid.*, 8 June, 12 September 1767.

89. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 21 March 1793.

management of Poussielgues and the vice-consul.<sup>90</sup> In 1793, for example, Miari requested De Rohan to proceed against a certain Maltese corsair, Giuseppe Galea, after having been formally instructed to do so by the Venetian *Procuratore Generale* Angelo Memo.<sup>91</sup> The year before, Galea and his lieutenant, who, Miari contended, "has been the guiltiest of all," had preyed upon some Venetian subjects in the waters of Prodano, despoiling them of 600 *tellari*. On grounds of having allegedly committed "worse crimes against the friendly and generous hospitality, with which they had been greeted, against public interests and the Law of Nations," and against the interests of his own *armateurs*, Galea was to undergo trial. His lieutenant had not yet been seized by the secular arm as he had sought asylum in church.<sup>92</sup> De Rohan promised Miari that the Maltese Courts "would proceed further against corsair Galea until reparation was complete and the Most Serene Republic declared itself satisfied with it."<sup>93</sup> On another occasion the Grandmaster, without waiting for Miari's submissions, took legal action against a second Maltese corsair for having committed various irregularities "in the bay and waters of Zante"<sup>94</sup>

The overall picture of Veneto-Maltese relations, which emerges from Miari's correspondence, is generally one of cordiality and mutual co-operation. Maltese corsairs, who had been in the past the root of all serious trouble between the two States, were now no longer creating "inconveniences". The Minister attributed this partly to "the most positive directives" issued by the Maltese Government to Maltese privateers, and partly to "the severest penalties" for those who infringed the law.<sup>95</sup> The ordinances regulating the *corso* were clear. So was De Rohan's disposition to readily justify the measures the Venetian authorities would take against illicit Maltese privateering in the Levant.

If Maltese corsairs [wrote Miari] dared for some reason show themselves in the waters of the Venetian Republic, or present themselves in any of its ports ... without any positive or visible need, or if they were unfortunate enough to find themselves thrust there without their fault, the Grand Master desired that, with regards to the first, the Republic would absolutely take whatever steps it considered necessary by way of compensation; with regards to the second, the Public Representatives should

90. "Altri affari mercantili non vi sono pendenti, il tutto procedendo con plausibile metodo ed attenta esattezza di questi Console e Vice-Console Nazionali". *Ibid.*, 21 March 1793; "Gli altri affari mercantili e marittimi procedono qui con quel credito ch'è dovuto alla Veneta Nazione, e con que' riguardi di questo Governo, che la Repubblica è in diritto d'esigere da lui. in riflesso di quell'amicizia e parzialità di cui l'onora." *Ibid.*, 24 April 1794.

91. ASV, *Senato, Segreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 21 March 1793.

92. ASV, CSM, *Diversorum*, busta 403, fascicolo 76, 30 April [1793].

93. *Ibid.*, 25 April 1793.

94. *Ibid.*, 21 March 1793.

95. *Ibid.*, 30 April [1793].

limit themselves to furnishing the bare essentials for their sustenance but without letting them gain any advantageous position.<sup>96</sup>

There is only one reference in Miari's correspondence to Veneto-Maltese trade during this period. The first months of Miari's ministry in Malta were marked by a severe shortage of grain. Having failed to secure supplies from other markets, De Rohan informed Miari, with near absolute certainty, that Venice possessed surplus quantities of that commodity, by far exceeding the amounts necessary to feed the Venetian population.<sup>97</sup> Fortunato Isouard, agent of the local *Università*, proceeded to the Adriatic city to purchase the necessary supplies that would serve the island until the next harvest. On asking the Doge to accede to De Rohan's urgent request, Miari confirmed, with near patriotic fervour, the meagre conditions in Malta, which approached starvation level.<sup>98</sup>

Personally I can assure you, in all sincerity and candour, that the islands have an extreme need of grain provisioning, which in the present circumstances cannot be obtained anywhere else, nor would they exceed two or three thousand Maltese *salme*.<sup>99</sup>

Isouard failed to make the necessary purchases.<sup>100</sup>

In a small island like Malta, covering less than 245 square kilometers in area, few, if any, could really avoid getting directly or indirectly involved in a political crisis of a scale similar to that of the 1790s — indigenous and foreign alike. The Venetians residing in Malta at the time were no exception.<sup>101</sup> During the years under survey, the Serenissima, instead of coalescing with Austria and Piedmont to resist French aggression, preferred, more out of apathy than hatred of getting entangled in European affairs, to maintain a policy of inaction, termed neutrality in ordinary diplomatic jargon. Miari was given word that no Venetians would be engaged in the regiment then being raised, or in any other similar recruitment, which would prejudice the position of

96. *Ibid.*, 25 April 1793.

97. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 17 April 1793.

98. Vassallo, 610.

99. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 17 April 1793. A Maltese *salma* was equivalent to 3½ Venetian *staia*.

100. *Ibid.*, 27 June 1793.

101. Venetian consuls were regularly instructed to see that neutrality was strictly observed by all Venetian captains and merchants in their respective consular town or port. The following are a few excerpts from Poussielgues's correspondence to the *Cinque Savi alla Mercanzia*: "Colla veneratissima dell'Ecc. Loro in data delli 18 febraro trovai la copia dell'Articolo Sesto dell'Ordinanza 1779 proibendo il traffico de armi, e munizioni immediate di Guerra colle Nazioni Belligerenti. Sarà, come devo, comunicato attuali li sudditi capitani, e mi sarà di norma in tutte le occasioni". 29 March 1788; on 24 May 1788, he refers again to the *memoriale* he had received, dated 19 April, "de Loro premure circa l'osservanza d'una perfetta neutralità nel Commercio di tutti li sudditi..."; "ho notato la determinazione dell' Ecc.mo Senato che resta vietata ai sudditi la validità d'ogni privato legno a quelli delle potenze belligeranti," 5 July 1788. ASV, CSM, *prima serie*, busta 711, *sub die*.

the Republic. Facts proved otherwise. In September 1795 a ship was chartered to transport 150 soldiers and a large number of officers to Trieste under cover of the flag of Jerusalem. Not only were Venetian "vagabonds" encouraged to enrol but those knights responsible for the recruitment tried their utmost to attract sailors enlisted on Venetian vessels. This was not a pleasant experience for Miari. He could not remain idle in the midst of an enervating situation like that, which, if left unheeded, would grow worse. He acted quickly and unhesitatingly. First he protested forcibly with the Grandmaster. Such a recruitment of foreign sailors infringed the rights of territorial sovereignty and went against the Order's principle of neutrality. Then he summoned all Venetian captains and their "wavering crews". He admonished them with the serious penalties they would incur if they decided to abandon their ship in order to enrol in a foreign regiment. These included imprisonment and despatch-in-chains to Venice at the first opportunity. This reprimand, claimed Miari, made them change their minds. So too did De Rohan. He issued a *bando generale* which prohibited from then on the recruitment of any of his Maltese subjects and the projected voyage to Trieste fell through.<sup>102</sup>

In October 1796 the Regency of Algiers made an arbitrary declaration of war on Venice. Algerine corsairs fitted out their powerful fleets and soon began to prey indiscriminately on all Venetian ships.<sup>103</sup> There were twenty Venetian captains stationed in Malta at the time.<sup>104</sup> Miari called on De Rohan to provide one of the Order's 'warships' to escort his fellow-countrymen safely back to the *Dominante*. The Grandmaster, with the backing of a unanimous vote of the State Council, acceded to his request in spite of the difficult circumstances.<sup>105</sup> Miari informed with haste all Venetian captains in Sicily, Tunis and Tripoli, who wished to avail themselves of this opportunity, either to proceed to Malta or to rendezvous in the port of Syracuse. There they would wait for the right moment to sail out in convoy under the overall direction of the *San Zaccaria*, captained by Fra Paolo Giuliano Suffren de Saint Tropez.<sup>106</sup>

102. For the whole affair, ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 24 September 1795.

103. *Ibid.*, 27 October 1796. For Algiers during the French Revolutionary years, A. Devoulx, "La Marine de la Regence d'Alger," *Revue Africaine* XIII (1869), *passim*.

104. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 1 November 1796.

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.* De Rohan had given the following instructions to Suffren: "Partirete subito, che ve lo permetterà il tempo con la Nave *San Zaccaria* per convogliare, e condurre à Corfù li Bastimenti Veneziani qui ancorati; e passando per Siracusa, Augusta, e Messina farete lo stesso con quelli Bastimenti di detta Nazione, che si troveranno nelli sopra accennati Porti, e che si vorranno prevalere della vostra scorta. Eseguita tale Commissione ritornerete in questo Canale per fare il Corso contro li Barbareschi ... In cujus rei Testimonium Bulla nostra Magistralis in cera nigra presentibus est impresa. Datum Melitae in Conventu nostro die XXVIII: Novembris 1796". *Ibid.*, encl.

They departed sometime in mid-December.<sup>107</sup>

In his letter to Doge Lodovico Manin, dated 30 March 1797, Miari submitted a plan by which Venice would contain the Dey of Algiers.<sup>108</sup> It was motivated by what he called two basic considerations. First, the Order's economic crisis had been for quite some time preventing her from accomplishing her objective, i.e., from arming her ships and sailing out in pursuit of "the enemies of the Catholic Faith". These included the Barbabesques, whose sporadic outbreaks interrupted and wreaked so much havoc to Mediterranean trade. Secondly, constrained with a serious preoccupation about her security at home, the Serenissima was incapable of despatching a considerable force in the Mediterranean to round up the Algerine pirates and privateers. The Order, suggested Miari, could be approached and requested to arm and equip fully two of her otherwise idle ships and set out on a specific mission against the Algerines, which would indirectly protect the navigation of Venetian vessels. Extra expenses incurred by the Order would be defrayed by the Republic. Miari estimated these to be roughly in the region of 1000 Zecchini a month. This project would benefit Venetian trade and navigation. It would also, according to Miari, benefit the Republic politically. If the Dey of Algiers were to complain against the vigorous forces being employed against his corsairs, the Serenissima would disclaim all responsibility for the Order's activity.

All this must be conducted with utmost secrecy, and the payment should be made (for safeguarding this discretion) either in hemp, or in wood, or in any other material which the Order may need, or, especially, in cash, if this is more convenient to Your Serenity. You should be informed that nobody knows of this project, whatever its nature, apart from the Venetian Consul, to whom I have given a passing hint.<sup>109</sup>

Miari ends his letter by asking for official instructions from Venice.

If after all, Your Serenity would be pleased as to approve of it, I would strive to ensure its success, almost formally.<sup>110</sup>

#### INTO OBLIVION

The instructions were never received. Antonio Miari's letter, dated 30 March 1797, was to be his last to the Serenissima, in his capacity as *Huomo della Repubblica*. For within less than two months, the

107. "Frattanto non posso ultimare questa mia ossequiosissima senza partecipare a Vostra Serenità che il suddetto Sig.r Ball di Soffrein (sic) al suo ritorno ha fatto li più magnifici elogi di tutti li Veneti Capitani, che ha convogliato, tanto in rapporto alla loro esattezza e subordinazione, come in rapporto alla marina perizia, che hanno nella loro rotta dimostrato." *Ibid.*, 20 January 1797.

108. *Ibid.*, 30 March 1797.

109. *Ibid.*

110. *Ibid.*

Republic of St. Mark — its territorial integrity and almost everything of value that had, through the ages, contributed to the gorgeous city's splendour, elegance and serenity, including the imposing equestrian quartet, symbol of Venetian strength, majesty and glory — was occupied and looted by Napoleon's insensitive military machine. In October, by the Treaty of Campo Formio, the remnants "of that which once was great" passed into Austrian possession.

In Malta, the progressive and enlightened Prince died on 13 July. From this point, the complete collapse of the Order of St. John was simply a matter of months, constituting a painful epilogue to a glorious heritage. The Religion, remarks Schermerhorn, "had passed the stage where tact and enlightenment and conscientious regard for the Statutes could save it, and however progressive Rohan might desire to be, his inheritance and innate sympathies were backward looking, and tenacious for the Old Régime."<sup>111</sup> The convention converting the Polish Priory into a Russian Grand Priory, with an annual revenue of 300,000 zloty, and incorporated into the Anglo-Bavarian Langue, was in the end confirmed by Catherine's son, Paul I. It was signed on 15 January, a few months before De Rohan's death, and ratified by his successor Ferdinand von Hompesch on 7 August 1797.<sup>112</sup> But by then, Venice's

111. E.W. Schermerhorn, *Malta of the Knights* (Surrey 1929), 291.

112. "Benchè io non dubiti punto, che sia pervenuta a Vostra Serenità la notizia, che dal Sig.r Ball Litta Ministro Plenipotenziario di questo Sacro e Militar Ordine in Pietroburgo sia stato spedito a questo Eminentissimo Gran Maestro espressamente un corriere portante la novità dell'erezione d'un nuovo Priorato di quest' Ordine in quell' Impero; e che io non dubiti neppure, che la Serenità Vostra non sappia, come un tale corriere è stato poi arrestato da' Francesi in Ancona, intercettandoli li Pieghi ch' erano precisamente destinati per questo Eminentissimo Gran Maestro, non di meno credo essere di mio preciso dovere il partecipare l'una e l'altra cosa a Vostra Serenità in conferma di quanto le ho in altro tempo rassegnato, cioè che non le avrei, per quanto mi fosse stato possibile, lasciato ignorare cosa alcuna colà relativa, più o meno interessante questo Sacro Ordine, e la Serenissima Politica Veneta Dominazione. L'accennato accidente mi toglie però la possibilità di poter ragguagliare esattamente la Serenità Vostra, ma solo che finora si sa, per quanto si è potuto rilevare da una lettera del sud.to Ball Litta scritta al Vend.o Ball Franccone, Ministro dell'Ordine in Napoli, scappata non so come dalle mani de Francesi, che si fosse convenuto di erigere nell'Impero di tutte le Russie un Priorato dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano in luogo e stato di quello esistente in Polonia, detto di Ostrog. ASV, *Senato, Secreta*, filza 9, *Dispacci Malta*, 16 March 1797. For the terms of the treaty, M. de Pierredon, *Exposition de l'histoire de l'Ordre Souverain de Malte au bénéfice du pavillon des lépreux* (Paris 1929), 63-64; Saul 37-38; Vella, 23-24; Hardman, 361-363; Mifsud, 229-238; Panzavecchia, 364ff. See also De Maison-neuve, *Annales historiques de l'Ordre de St. Jean de Jérusalem depuis l'année 1725 jusqu'au moment présent* (St. Petersburg 1799).

"Non si sono ancora qui avute precise notizie del risultato delle negoziazioni del Ball Litta in Pietroburgo, le quali da molto tempo saranno forse a Vostra Serenità molto chiare e manifeste. Solo da alcune lettere particolari scappate dalle percusizioni francesi, non so come, si sa che li vantaggi per

executioner had already sought authorisation from the Directory in Paris to proceed with his plans of seizing the tiny principality of Malta on his way to Egypt.<sup>113</sup> The "close relationship" with Russia, which De Rohan had envisaged and promoted and which Antonio Miari had so consistently feared and criticised, precipitated the end of the Order in Malta.

It was one of the subtlest ironies in history. On 24 May 1697 the 'Western' Czar Peter the Great, having understood the political and economic importance of securing a useful ally in the tiny island fortress in the Mediterranean, had despatched General Boris Czeremetev to Valletta to study at firsthand the naval operations of the Order and possibly negotiate a bilateral treaty against the Ottoman Porte.<sup>114</sup> A century later, almost to the day, the Czar Paul I, lover of lost causes, in his naivety and complacency, felt proud and honoured to welcome under his grand, chivalric protection, not that "angular rock which had eclipsed the glory of the Turkish crescent", but the Institution which had governed it for 268 years — now crippled, insolvent and decayed.

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l'Ordine si dicono di molta conseguenza. Alcuni vogliono che ciò non possa essere senza gran sacrifici da parte dell'Ordine, altri che sieno stati accordati unicamente per un entusiasmo del nuovo Czar a favore dell'Ordine stesso, senza che però rest' alterata la sua Costituzione, come neppure li Politici rapporti con le altre Potenze, massimamente del Mediterraneo". *Ibid.*, 30 March 1797.

113. On 26 May 1797 Bonaparte had written to the Directory: "The island of Malta is of major interest for us; ... why should not our fleet or the Spanish, before going into the Atlantic, sail to Valletta and occupy it? ... The little island is worth any price to us." J.E. Howard (ed. & trans.), *Letters and Documents of Napoleon* (London 1961), vol.I, *The Rise to Power*, 191.
114. Schermerhorn, 280ff.; Vella, 16-17; Saul, 34.

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# EŻEMPJI TA' ESTETIKA ROMANTIKA MALTIJA

Oliver Friggieri

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In-naħa li tidher l-iżjed fil-persunalità ta' artist hi l-prassi, ix-xogħol li johloq skond teknika maħsuba biex tfigisser figurativament xi kontenut. Il-kritika nafuha l-aktar bħala d-dixxiplina li tistharreg il-kontenut imbidel f'forma, jew aħjar il-forma bħala verżjoni persunali ta' kontenut. Min-naħa l-oħra, f'kull artist hemm kontenut speċifiku ieħor, li ma jiddefinixx bħala osservatur jew filosofu tal-ħajja, iżda bħala filosofu ta' l-arti. Hemm waqtiet meta titla' fil-wieċ ir-riflessjoni estetika, it-teorija li tfittex li tagħti hjiel ta' diema huma l-motivazzjonijiet li jwasslu għall-ħolqien ta' xogħol artistiku. Mehuda fid-dawl ta' l-opra ta' awtur, din it-teorija tista' tidher bħala s-sies spiritwali, idejologiku li tinbena fuqu l-opra msemmija. Fiha nnifisha, din it-teorija tista' titqies bħala espożizzjoni ta' l-awtur fuq it-tip ta' letterarjetà tiegħu. Iżda minbarra x-xeħta deskrittiva, din it-teorija sikwit ikollha fiha ż-żerriegħa ta' moviment sħiħ, ta' mentalità mxerrda f'post u fi żmien. L-istħarriġ tagħha fi hdan il-kwadru ta' l-istorja ta' l-ideat, imbagħad, iwassalha biex tingħaraf skond l-egħruq qodma li ħarget minnhom u wkoll skond il-friegħi li hi stess tkun issieħbet magħhom u varjat minnhom. Meta jissenslu flimkien, fid-diversità tagħhom, it-teoriji ta' żmini-jiet meħudin fl-ordni kronologiku tagħhom, tissawwar l-istorja tal-ħsieb estetiku, magħqud skond linja ta' żvilupp, u għani fin-nuqqas ta' qbil ta' viżjoni ma' oħra.

Fil-każ tal-poeżija Maltija, waqt li hi nieqsa ħafna l-kitba ta' dix-xeħta minħabba n-nuqqas tal-fundament kritiku tal-letteratura Maltija kollha,<sup>1</sup> riflessjoni estetika tixref 'l hawn u 'l hinn f'siltiet ta' proża u poeżija, u xi drabi f'saġġi maħsubin apposta biex jesponu fehmiel dwar il-letteratura. Biex jinħareġ minnhom korp sħiħ u organiku, il-kritiku jrid jistabilixxi l-kriterji tiegħu skond logika li hu nnifsu jista' jagħzeħ li jsegwi. Din ir-riflessjoni miġtuba — Maltija għaliex iġġarrbet minn għadd kbir ta' awturi Maltin li għal sekli sħaħ seggiew bir-reqqa l-ħsieb klassiku, umanistiku-orazjan u romantiku — hi ħaġa waħda ma' l-es-perjenza kulturali kollha ta' l-Ewropa. Ma jinstabux xejriet oriġinali jew adattamenti lokali li jitbiegħdu ħafna mill-qofol magħruf, iżda ri-

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1. Dwar dan il-punt cfr. O. Friggieri, *Storja tal-Letteratura Maltija*, I, Malta, Klabb Kotba Maltin 1979, pp. 23-28.

kostruzzjoni tagħhom tixhed li daħlu f'Malta, fi żmienhom u wara, l-aqwa prinċipji ta' l-estetika Ewropea kollha. Il-kultura Taljana tal-Maltin fethet it-twieqi għal din il-partecipazzjoni li, minnha nnifisha, sawret l-identità kulturali Maltija.

L-istess prinċipji ewlenin intlaqgħu mill-aħjar poeti Maltin. Id-differenza fil-mod kif inhuma milqugħa u mistharra għi xhieda ta' differenza fl-identità poetika ta' kull wiehied. Il-qofol, kif se jidher mill-eżempji mogħtija hawn isfel, huwa romantiku, magħgun ma' elementi eqdem li ntirtu matul tradizzjoni għanja li għal żmien twil fehmet li l-veru u s-sabiħ huma kategorici. L-importanza tal-fdal klassiku u neoklassiku tista' titqies skond kemm hu niegħes fil-kontenut romantiku ta' dawn il-Maltin il-liberalizmu tipiku ta' bosta rwieħ imqallba tas-seklu dsatx Ewropew.

#### GAN ANTON VASSALLO

Skond Vassallo "soggetto principale della letteratura sono l'Oratoria, la Storia e la Poesia. Le quali tre parti ricevono forma, colorito e vita dall'eloquenza; ne' infatti sinonimi avventati o di scolastica convenienza son essi Letteratura ed Eloquenza, ma ben filosoficamente sinonimi, dappoiche' questa è in sostanza l'anima di quella. Breve a taluni parrebbe forse l'anzidetta triplice partizione della letteratura," izda jissokta li, fil-fehma tiegħu, "sembra la più ragionata ed esatta riguardo alla letteratura propriamente detta, siccome la parola 'letteratura' nel suo senso esteso e letterale vien a comprendere ogni specie di scienze e lettere."<sup>2</sup>

Id-definizzjoni li jagħti tiegħu nnifsu hi ta' "umile cittadino, il quale non d'altro può vantarsi se non del lungo e costante amore che ha sempre nodrito per le gloriose lettere italiane." Jistqarr ukoll li kien il-Latin li nebbhu "l'amore dell'italiano e delle bellezze che gli italiani seppero mercede la loro bellissima lingua creare. Incantavami sopra ogni altra cosa il loro Parnaso, che fra quanti altri presentavano le moderne letterature è, per generale avviso, il più ricco, il più variato, il più lusinghiero."<sup>3</sup>

Min-naħa l-oħra għaraf il-fejda nazzjonali u s-setgħat espressivi tal-Malti, u ppropona li jinqeda bih fl-oqsma letterarji li setgħu jintlaħqu l-aktar mill-bieċa l-kbira tal-poplu. L-akbar importanza fi hsiebu hi mogħtija lill-poplu, bħala l-qarrej li m'għandux isib diffikultà għaliex huwa l-poplu li jrid jintlaħaq mill-awtur skond il-qagħda reali tal-poplu nnifsu: "Si faciliti al popolo, quanto mai si possa; imperò esso è impaziente, ritroso, ne' in riguardo a educazione qualunque, è trattabile che a carezze. Parlando al popolo, bene va essa ogni eleganza sacrificata

2. *Prolusione al corso di letteratura italiana nella R. Università degli studi, Malta, E. Laferla 1864, p. 18.*

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

alla generale intelligenza.”<sup>4</sup>

Flinkien mal-hteġa elementari ta' l-artista li jfisser ruġu u li jikkomunika l-qagħda ġewwiġna tiegħu, kien hemm ukoll ix-xejra popolarizzanti u demokratika tal-letteratura Taljana ta' dak iż-żmien, il-frott ta' l-idealitajiet illuministiċi li r-romantiċiżmu beda jissublima, iwessa' fl-ghanijiet u jgholli fil-kawżi. Vassallo hu favur it-thaddim hieles u naturali tal-lingwa anki fil-qasam kollu kemm hu kreativ. Fisser ruġu bil-qawwa kontra wħud mill-filologi Maltin li ma ridux li l-ilsien lokali jadatta ruġu skond il-htigiet u l-użi soċjali. Stqarr li kien kuntrarju għall-koltivazzjoni filologika tal-lingwa u favur li tinkiteb “com'è generalmente parlata nelle città dell'isola, con tutti quei barbarismi, senza de' quali essa diverrebbe poco men che nulla, od insufficiente, almeno ad esprimere i nostri concetti in riguardo ai costumi, ai bisogni, alle più delle novità, al galateo, a tutto, in una parola, quello che in complesso forma la nostra attualità civile.”<sup>5</sup>

Ir-romantiċiżmu għalliem li l-awtur għandu jkun lehen il-kotra, u li l-kotra hija d-dokument ewlieni li minnu l-awtur jislet il-verżjoni tiegħu ta' l-eżistenza f'post u fi żmien partikulari. Hu u jkteb letterarjament, Vassallo kellu l-ghan didattiku: “far cosa gradita ai concittadini,”<sup>6</sup> u ħares lejn il-Malti bħala l-ghodda xierqa għat-tagħlim popolari. Is-sentiment tal-poplu hu l-qofol tal-poetika ħafifa tiegħu; hu l-poplu li jġieghlu jkteb, jitnebbah minnu, u b'effett ta' dan ma jinteressaħx il-ġieħ ta' l-akkademji. L-attwalità tal-kontenut u l-utilità li toħroġ minnu huma ż-żewġ sisien li jsejjes fuqhom il-viżjoni letterarja kollha:

Del popolo io son, ed a lui peggio  
d'amore do nel poco, dove arriva,  
la penna cui mi die' povero ingegno,  
onde fatti e costumi gli descriva.

Non plauso d'accademia mi fa gola,  
non la scienza superba; sol m'aggrada  
quanto al popolo servir possa di scola.

Seria o giocosa la parola cada,  
greca o latina, vo' una cosa sola;  
che sparsa in vano ella giammai non vada.<sup>7</sup>

Meta jqis il-“letterarie bellezze italiane”, ma jtkellimx biss dwar “semplice ornamento e diletto inservienti, ma in quanto all'a pubblica utilità contribuiscono”. Bl-gharfien tal-graġja letterarja ta' nazzjon, min-

4. Lettera al Prof. Dott. Stefano Zerafa, “L'Ordine”, 28/6/1861, p.3.

5. *A chi legge, Hrejjef u ċajt bil-Malti*, Malta, Tip. Industriale G. Muscat 1895, p. 3.

6. *Mogħdija taż-żmien fil-lsien Malti*, Malta, Stamp. Cumbo 1843, p. 5.

7. *Persone politissime a disdegno, Hrejjef u ċajt bil-Malti* cit., p. 7.

barra t-tagħlim, jitnissel ukoll effett morali li ma jistax jitnissel mill-gharfien tal-grajja politika. Il-letteratura trodd l-utili u l-pjaċevoli. Il-pjaċir ukoll hu għamla ta' ksib siewi. Jekk mill-letteratura generali ma jinħariġx xi ġid individwali jew b'riżq is-soċjetà, kull letteratura ma tkunx haġa oħra għajr "un ingombro intellettuale".<sup>8</sup> L-aggornament kulturali tiegħu, imħawwel fil-kurrenti tal-ħsieb romantiku, joħroġ sħiħ u fid-deher f'din is-silta: "Non loda l'arte presente, ne' diremmo quasi, tollera che sieno le lettere coltivate unicamente come fine; chiede bensì, ne' senza ragione, che coltivate sien esse come un efficace mezzo di migliore sviluppo e perfezionamento alle scienze, imperocché queste, o almeno la loro manifestazione, si' teorica che pratica, senza le belle lettere riescono d'ordinario imperfette, i concetti senza forza, le stesse vivezze senza diletto (...) Ufficio principale della letteratura si è di fare che bene ed ordinatamente svolga i suoi raziocinii la scienza quando teorizza e deduce, e che parimente nella più opportuna evidenza si manifesti essa quando viene applicata."<sup>9</sup>

#### DUN KARM

Il-poezija hi sejha divina li lill-poeta "terfghu 'l fuq lejn dehriet ta' gmiel u ta' mhabba li ma bħalhom."<sup>10</sup> Min-natura tiegħu l-poeta hu "straniero a tutti, ignoto al suo paese,"<sup>11</sup> hu individwu solitarju, iddestinat biex iġixx qalb pubbliku biered u aljenat, maqtuġh mill-vaġuri ewlenin.<sup>12</sup> Bħalla bniedem "imsaħħar",<sup>13</sup> il-poeta jgħaddi haġja estatika, u "jekk tiġi siegħa li jkun tassew poeta, ma jikktibx dak li jrid hu."<sup>14</sup> Min-habba li l-versi tiegħu għandhom joħroġu mir-ruħ "in momenti di viva ispirazione,"<sup>15</sup> il-poeta jgarrab "il forte, il prepotente bisogno di esternarsi."<sup>16</sup> Il-ħuġġieġa tan-nebha tixgħel u taqbad, "u meta tikbes tixgħel, u meta tixgħel taħkem, u tħaddan lill-poeta."<sup>17</sup> F'qagħda bħal din jintilef u iġgħaddi minn waqtiet ta' interjorità profonda u 'l fuq mil-livell uman, u jintuwixxi bil-ferħ li hu dak li hu.<sup>18</sup>

Il-punt tat-tluq ta' din l-esperjenza estetika hu malinkoniku, u b'effett tinholoq poezija "magħsura minn ġo qlub imnikkta u bħal we-

8. *Prolusione* cit., pp. 3, 17, 20.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 17, 20-22.

10. *F'jum il-ġieħ ta' Dun Karm*, "Lehen 'il-Malti", XV, CLXXVI-CLXXVIII, 1945 p. 115.

11. *Grazie del tuo sorriso* v.6.

12. *Foglie d'alloro*, Malta, Alessandro A. Farrugia 1896, pp. 4-6.

13. *Dell u dija*, v. 98.

14. Ittra lil G. Aquilina, 10/9/1935, Bibljoteka ta' l-Università ta' Malta, "Melitensia", ms. 214.

15. Ittra lil L. Ropa, 17/1/1934, Bibljoteka ta' l-Università ta' Malta, "Melitensia", ms. 252.

16. *Foglie d'alloro* cit., p. 3.

17. *Dell u dija*, vv. 66-70.

18. *Non omnis moriar*, vv. 25-32; *Dell u dija*, vv. 99-100.

raq niexef imxerrda 'l hawn u 'l hinn fil-kotba morda."<sup>19</sup>

Lil hinn mill-kwadru ta' l-awtobijografija persunali, il-poezija ssib ġustifikazzjoni fundamentali bis-saħħa ta' l-iżvolġiment ta' programm demokratiku ta' tagħlim morali u ċivili, u għalhekk għandha tgħallim mingħajr ma ddejjjaq,<sup>20</sup> tiġbed u tħajjar lill-bniedem għall-verità.<sup>21</sup> Din l-arti għandha qawwa mill-akbar fil-formazzjoni tal-karattru: "titfa' ż-żrieragh ta' l-aħjar u l-oħla sentimenti, u hekk fit-tifel thejji s-sura taż-żagħżuġh irżin u qalbieni u fiż-żagħżuġh thejji s-sura tar-raġel qawwi fil-fehmiet tiegħu, haħbib tas-sewwa, għadu ta' kull eġhmil li jgħajjeb, li jtebba'. Il-poezija tirbaħ bil-ġmiel, trabbi bil-ħlewwa."<sup>22</sup> Il-karattru tat-tfal jifforma, ruħu bl-eżempji nodfa u konvinċenti tar-religjon u tal-ġrajjet kbar; dawn it-tnejn għandhom importanza mill-akbar fil-poezija, l-arti li tiċcelebra l-misteri tat-twemmin u r-rebħiet ta' l-istorja.<sup>23</sup> L-impenn istruttiv għandu jtellja fil-wiċċ lill-bniedem fil-ħajja persunali, familjari u soċjali tiegħu,<sup>24</sup> u b'dan il-mod il-kittieb ikun ta' fejda għaċ-ċittadini, kemm fil-qasam religjuż, u kemm fil-ħajja morali, ċivili u politika.<sup>25</sup>

Il-karattru tal-poezija jidbiddel skond il-ħamrija li jitrabba fiha u jikber u jvarja minn żmien għal ieħor. L-okkażjonijiet għal kreazzjonijiet poetiċi godda jtnisslu minn ċirkustanzi u ġrajjet godda,<sup>26</sup> u l-opri diversi jinbnew qajl qajl "in anni diversi e in circostanze ora liete, ora tristi."<sup>27</sup> Ma jista' qatt jonqos il-kuntatt mill-qrib bejn l-arti u l-ħajja, għaliex il-poezija hi ħajja, għandu jkollha fejda soċjali, hi ħaga "li hi ħajjtna" u "li hi aħna."<sup>28</sup> Hi xogħol li jissawwar bil-ħsieb u bis-sentiment, iżda l-arti kollha tagħha tingabar f'dan: fit-tliet mill-ġdid ta' dik it-tematika u ta' dak il-kontenut sentimentali bil-mod l-iżjed xieraq u ġust għan-natura ta' kulħadd, għaliex "la poesia è l'arte del popolo."<sup>29</sup>

Bejn poplu u poeta hemm bosta qbil naturali, imqar jekk fil-konċezzjoni ta' Dun Karm il-poeta għandu xehħa jibqa' dejjem il-bniedem li jgħix u jikkomponi fis-solitudni; hu mmifsu, ma dānkollu, jistqarr li l-forom tal-poezija popolari tiddlu fil-forom varji tal-poezija ta' l-arti matul il-mixja twila u bla waqfien ta' l-evoluzzjoni letterarja, għaliex

19. Ward, vv. 12-15; cfr. ukoll *Dell u dija*, vv. 1-12.

20. *X'nixtiequ*, "Il-Malti", Sett. 1941, p. 58.

21. *Il-ħsieb u l-kelma*, "Il-Malti", Marzu 1939, p. 3.

22. *Il-poezija Maltija fl-iskejjel aħjar minn kull waħda oħra*, "Il-Malti", Marzu 1930, p. 3.

23. *Il-poezija Maltija fl-iskejjel aħjar minn kull waħda oħra*, "Il-Malti", Ġunju 1930, pp. 33, 34, 36.

24. *Għal-letteratura Maltija*, "Il-Malti", Sett. 1931, p. 73.

25. *F'jum il-ġieħ ta' Dun Karm*, loc. cit., p. 117.

26. *Foglie d'alloro* cit., p. 4.

27. *Un po' di prologo*, *Viola*, Bibljoteka ta' l-Università ta' Malta, "Melitensia", ms. 206.

28. *Il-ghanja Maltija — lill-poeti Maltin li telghin*, "Il-Malti", Ġunju 1930, p. 48.

29. *Un amico... caro*, "La Palestra del Seminarista", I, vol. III, 1901, pp. 55-56.

"il-poplu hu l-poeta li johloq."<sup>30</sup> Is-semplicità, in-naturalezza, il-heffa fil-għażla lessikali li jagħtu lil-poeżija l-hila li tkun wirt demokratiku li jista' jintlaħaq minn kulhadd u li ma jehtiegx l-użu tad-dizzjunarju, it-tiftixa kollha reġqa ta' dak kollu li m'hux diffiċli jew mudlam fit-tifsira, it-twarrib ta' kostruzzjonijiet imħawda u indiretti u ta' perijodi mkissrin: dawn huma whud mill-elementi ewlenin li bihom il-poeżija tista' taqdi lil-poplu u tliha kif jixraq.<sup>31</sup>

Minhabba li hi l-espressjoni solenni ta' l-esperjenza popolari, il-poeżija titbiddel f'awtobiografija tan-nazzjon.<sup>32</sup> L-egħjun ta' l-ispirazzjoni tal-poeżija nazzjonali, jissokta Dun Karm, huma t-taqbid għall-helsien mill-jasar, ir-rebhiet miksuba, l-għażla tas-sistema xierqa fit-tmexxija tal-pajjiż, il-ligijiet, ix-xogħol, il-kummerċ, il-ftehim mal-graba u mal-barrani; jekk tiżvolgi ruħha fi hdan il-kwadru tematiku msemmi, il-poeżija tissokta dejjem iżżomm rabta mill-qrib mal-grajja tal-patrija.<sup>33</sup>

Il-fama immortali hija l-glorja li tintradd lil min, matul il-ħajja tiegħu, ikun iċċelebra l-qlubija u l-kobor ta' l-istorja nazzjonali u tal-patrijotti tagħha, u waqt li jkun widdeb u għalliem lil-poplu kontra n-nuqqas ta' sensibiltà u l-bruda, ikun bena wkoll mafkar dejjem lil-eroj.<sup>34</sup>

#### ANTON BUTTIGIEG

Il-għażla bejn l-ideali u r-reali tiswa biex wieħed jagħżel ukoll minn xulxin iż-żewġ modi ewlenin kif il-poeti jsawru l-poetika tagħhom. Hemm min hu preskrittiv u preċettistiku, juri kif jifhem li għandha tinkiteb, x'funzjonijiet jehtieg iktollha, u hemm min hu deskrittiv, ifisser kif inhi bħala entità magħmula diġà. L-ewwel imġiba hi aprioristika, jew inkella tipprexxindi mill-qagħda attwali u tħares lejn il-fenomeni poeżija fl-astrazzjoni tiegħu; it-tieni waħda tinbena *post factum*, jew fl-istess hin mal-kitba tal-versi. F'dan it-tieni sens, il-poetika tiegħu sura ta' apprezzament tal-poeżija ta' l-awtur innifsu, tfettaħ dak li jidher marsus fil-kitba kreattiva, tiġġustifika dak li jkun qiegħed isir. Din il-verżjoni tiegħi, ftit jew wisq, hi tiġbid taż-żewġ xejriet ewlenin u kontra xulxin tal-grajja tal-kritika, it-tradizzjoni bħala preskrittiva u l-moderna bħala deskrittiva.

Eżempji Maltin taż-żewġ xejriet jistgħu jinstabu fil-poetika ta' Dun Karm u f'dik ta' Buttigieg. Bħala poeta li hu mmexxi mill-poeżija aktar bħala esperjenza umana milli bħala sintesi ta' esperjenza umana u esperjenza letterarja, f'Buttigieg taħkem il-hin kollu x-xejra deskrittiva. Huma, minhabba f'hekk, ftit hafna l-waqtiet ta' din il-valutazzjoni

30. *Is-sunett*, "Il-Malti", Marzu 1936, p. 11.

31. *Un amico... caro*, loc. cit., p. 55.

32. *Il-letteratura tagħna*, "Il-Malti", Diċ. 1937, p. 103; *X'inhi Letteratura? Għalfejn tiswa?*, "Il-Malti", Ġunju 1938, p. 33.

33. *Il-letteratura tagħna*, loc. cit., p. 103.

34. *Dun Mikieł Xerri*, "Il-Malti", Sett. 1937, p. 72.

aposteriori, u huma haġa waħda mal-poeżija stess. Il-biċċa l-kbira tar-rivelazzjonijiet, fil-fatt, joħroġu mill-versi, u huma interpretazzjoni metaforika, lil hinn mill-konċettwalizmu u mit-tejorizzazzjoni tal-kritiku fil-poeta.

Għad li Buttigieg innifsu jaqsam il-poeżija tiegħu f'erba' taqsimiet (tan-natura, patrijottika, jew soċjali, ċajtiera, mediterraneja),<sup>35</sup> il-qofol tan-nebha tiegħu jinsab fid-dinja tan-natura fejn tista' titgħanna l-"għanja lis-Sbuhija, Sultana tal-ħolqien";<sup>36</sup> m'hux l-mgħiba ta' min jaħrab iżda d-devozzjoni ta' min isib: "Min imur lejn in-natura... jkun qed imur lejn il-gmiel, il-perfezzjoni u l-armonija tal-ġnien li Alla ħalaq lill-bniedem biex iġix fih, u jerga' lura mogħni bin-nebha u bil-ġibda lejn il-gmiel, il-perfezzjoni u l-armonija fil-ħajja. Għaliġi l-kwiekeb, is-sema, il-baħar u s-siġar m'humex haġa mejta imma kiejjaq li daqs l-aġġisafar ikellmu direttament lil qalbi."<sup>37</sup> Minn din it-tigriba fiziko-spiritwali joħroġ il-ferħ,<sup>38</sup> stat li joħroġ mill-poeżija mwahħda mat-tigrib imnissel fil-bniedem mill-ambjent naturali.<sup>39</sup>

Il-ferħ u t-tbatija huma partijiet integrali tat-tigrib poetiku. It-tbatija tal-poeta, "mimlija b'xenqiet mhux mitmuma",<sup>40</sup> tinkiteb f'waqtiet ta' mistrieħ,<sup>41</sup> għad li l-poeżija hi dejjem frott it-tbatija, bħalma hi t-tarbiya umana għall-omm, u bħall-omm il-poeta jhobb lil min iħobb vrusu u jistkerrah lil min jobghodhom.<sup>42</sup> Bħal fil-każ tal-familja, il-poeżiji bħala aħwa jridu jzommu l-istess identità u rabta bejniethom.<sup>43</sup> L-effett hu farag li jbidel it-tbatija f'hena u jsawwar l-illużjoni,<sup>44</sup> u jiswa l-aktar fiż-zminijiet diffiċli tal-ħajja għaliex il-ħidma umana ma tiswa xejn mingħajr element ta' poeżija.<sup>45</sup>

Id-dinjità poetika ġejja mill-fatt li s-sigriet tan-natura hu rivelat lill-poeta, bħala kiejjaq rari,<sup>46</sup> u bħala l-persunaġġ privileġġjat fil-ħolqien

35. *Qalbi bħall-biċċa tghanni*, "Il-Polz", 21, Jannar-Gunju 1972, pp. 10-11.

36. *Il-għanja ta' żghożiti*, vv. 3-4.

37. *Qalbi bħall-biċċa tghanni*, loc. cit., p. 10.

38. *Il-għanja ta' żghożiti*, vv. 19 u 22; *Ħinijiet ta' poeżija*, vv. 7-10.

39. *Il-ġnien tal-Blata-l-Bajda*, vv.9-14; *Bombli għana*, vv. 18-39. *Ħinijiet ta' poeżija*, vv. 1-12; *Lill-muza ta' żghożiti*, vv. 1-56.

40. *Qalbi bħall-biċċa tghanni*, loc. cit., p. 10.

41. *Nimu Cremona*, "Il-Malti", Marzu-Gunju 1972, p. 15, *Il-ġnien tal-Blata-l-Bajda*, vv. 9-11.

42. *Sew bħal omm...*, vv. 1-12. Il-fehma li l-poeżija hi dejjem frott it-tbatija hi karattru ewlieni li juri l-qofol romantiku tal-poetika ta' Buttigieg u oħrajn. Minn D'Alembert ta' *Eloge de Sacy* sa Leopardi ta' *Zibaldone* u bosta kitbiet oħra sa Shelley ta' *Ode to a Skylark* sa Karmenu Vassallo f'Malta, din id-dehra tal-poeżija bħala sentimentali u malinkonika, f'kontrappożizzjoni mal-poeżija immaginativa, oġġettiva u mimlija ekwilibriju ta' "l-antiki", i.e. il-klassiċi, kellha sahha mill-akbar biex tissokta tiddetermina x-xehta awtobijografika u djarjistika tal-lehma romantika.

43. *Il-għanja ta' żghożiti*, vv. 25-28.

44. *Dalwaqt jisbaħ...*, vv. 31-34, 60-66; *Il-kebbies tal-fanali*, vv. 10-19.

45. *Qalbi bħall-biċċa tghanni*, loc. cit., p. 12.

46. *Lill-kampanella*, vv. 14-16.

li hu mogħni bis-sens ta' l-eternità.<sup>47</sup> Gejja wkoll mill-konċezzjoni religjuża tal-poezija;<sup>48</sup> "Ahna l-poeti bħal kanarin fil-gagga t'Alla, huwa jitmagna u jiehu gost jismagna nsaffru, meta mmutu jpoġġi min-flokna kanarin iehor fil-gagga tiegħu;"<sup>49</sup> għad li x-xewqa ta' l-immortalità storika hi preżenti wkoll,<sup>50</sup> il-poeta Kristjan jara fl-opra tiegħu l-aqwa depożitu li jibqa' jikkarakterizzah wara l-mewt.<sup>51</sup>

#### KARMENU VASSALLO

Il-ħsibijiet estetici ta' Vassallo huma marbutin hafna ma' l-estetika klassika, u l-iżjed max-xeħta pedagogika tagħha. Mill-bqija, din hi xejra komuni għall-biċċa l-kbira ta' l-awturi lokali, fosthom saħansitra wħud ta' llum. Kollox jixhed assimilazzjoni tat-tradizzjoni umanistiku-orazjana li kellha xorti kbira fil-gżira minn żmien il-bidu tal-Kavaleri sar-romantiżmu. Fi hdan dan il-kwadru tikseb tifsira r-rabta shiha li hemm fil-ħsieb ta' Vassallo bejn is-sabiħ, il-veru u l-utli.<sup>52</sup> Ir-riflessjonijiet li jinteressawna hawn huma dawk li wiret mid-dinja romantika.

Il-poezija hi waħda mill-forom għoljin tal-letteratura,<sup>53</sup> is-sultana ta' l-arti kollha,<sup>54</sup> innissla minn Alla.<sup>55</sup> Hu Alla nnifsu li jagħzel lill-poeta<sup>56</sup> u li jroddlu l-kelma bħala xhieda ta' paċi.<sup>57</sup> Għalhekk il-poeta huma ftit,<sup>58</sup> u l-poeta veru huwa bniedem superjuri għall-oħrajn, differenti hafna minnhom.<sup>59</sup> Ma jistax ma jzommx lilu nnifsu 'l fuq minn kulma hu qarrieq,<sup>60</sup> u għalhekk ħsibijietu huma dejjem fil-gholi, delikati, għonja u misterjużi.<sup>61</sup>

Il-kawża ewlenija ta' din il-qagħda għolja, li tispicċa biex twaħħad lill-poeta ma' l-individwu fis-shuħija tiegħu, tinsab fit-twelmin li l-

47. *Il-ghanja tač-čaqliq*, vv. 42-48.

48. Dwar l-ispirazzjoni Kristjana tar-romantiżmu ta' Buttigieg ara *Qalbi bħall-bilbla tghanni*, loc. cit., p. 11.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

50. *Xewqa lil għanjeti*, vv. 18-20.

51. *Qalbi bħall-bilbla tghanni*, loc. cit., p. 12.

52. Dawn il-prinċipji klassiċi, waqt li huma ssies ta' l-edukazzjoni tradizzjonali fl-awtur, huma mgħarrbin mill-gdid skond sensiela ta' valuri romantiċi u mhalltin haġa waħda magħhom.

53. *Il-poezija u ahna*, "Il-Malti," Ġunju, 1962, p. 37.

54. *Haġja qasira*, "Il-Malti", Marzu 1938, p. 12.

55. *Rapport ta' l-eżaminatur*, "Pronostku Malti", vol. LIII, 1950, p. 84; *Thewdin*, v. 143.

56. *Il-poeta u l-kaptan*, v. 25.

57. *Tliet saltiniet*, vv. 23-24.

58. *L-aħħar taqbid*, vv. 25-36; *Alla tač-žgħažagħ*, Malta, G. Muscat 1939, p. 32; *Lil Gaspare Pace*, v. 218.

59. *F'jum i-ghid tal-qaddis Nikola ta' Bari*, vv. 17-20; *Il-poezija u ahna*, loc. cit., p. 37.

60. *Alla tač-žgħažagħ* cit., p. 15.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

poeta jitwieled poeta.<sup>62</sup> Il-hajja tinbada fi stat ta' potenzjalità<sup>63</sup> li mba-ghad tasal għall-attwalità tagħha mal-mogħdija taż-żmien, bil-ksib tal-maturità.<sup>64</sup> Id-dmir mitwieled ta' bniedem bħal dan hu li jkanta sakemm imut. Il-poeta li ma jkantax jichad il-missjoni tiegħu.<sup>65</sup>

Minhabba din id-differenza, il-biċċa l-kbira tal-bnedmin ma jstgħux jifhemu lill-poeta;<sup>66</sup> hu qassis tal-mużi,<sup>67</sup> u l-poeżija hi religjon, is-sieħba fidilla tal-qdusija religjuża.<sup>68</sup>

Is-sigriet poetiku sikwit ma jistax jifflisser,<sup>69</sup> u l-kelma umana m'hix xierqa biex tesprimi l-milja ta's-sentimenti.<sup>70</sup> Fil-qofol tagħha l-esperjenza poetika hi għamla sublimi ta' genn, oghla mill-genn ordinarju.<sup>71</sup> Ebda bniedem kbir u għaref ma jghix il-hajja bħalma jghixuha l-biċċa l-kbira tal-bnedmin. Il-genn, bħala qagħda meħtieġa tal-kobor gewwieni, hu għamla ta' dillierju li minnu joħorgu d-dawl, il-gmiel u l-glorja.<sup>72</sup>

Il-waqt ta' l-ispirazzjoni jgiegħel lill-poeta jithasseb u jissahhar, u l-qawwa sentimentali tikkbes u tahrq fih;<sup>73</sup> il-moħħ jiddawwal b'dawl gdid.<sup>74</sup> Huwa waqt ta' ekwilibriju gewwieni,<sup>75</sup> mimli farag u he-na.<sup>76</sup> Il-versi, fil-fatt, huma l-aqwa libieb ta' l-awtur,<sup>77</sup> għajn ta' kalma fit-tbatija,<sup>78</sup> mezz ta' fejda bl-ex wieħed jiftakar u jerga' jghix l-imghoddi.<sup>79</sup> Meta huwa mnebbah il-poeta jkolli l-hila li jgħolli lill-bnedmin 'il fuq mil-livell komuni u li jirrivela dehriet ta' seher naturali u oghla min-natura. L-elementi varji tan-natura jibiddlu f'mezzi ta' kuntatt bejn id-dinja barranija u d-dinja gewwiena, u s-sbuhija oġġettiva titbiddel f'qagħda tar-ruħ fejn il-poeta fl-aħħar iġarrab is-sensazzjoni li jkintieg jingħaqad mal-Poezija, il-"mara" li toffri l-milja tal-htigiet l-izjed intimi u tal-herqa għall-gharfien ta' l-infinit u tal-misterjuż.<sup>80</sup>

Il-poeta hu kkundannat li jghaddi haġja ta' tbatija. Huwa iżjed

62. *Ibid.*, p. 32; *Il-poezija u ahna*, loc. cit., p. 37.

63. *Alla taż-żgħażaġh cit.*, p. 32.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

65. *Tihux hsieb*, vv. 1-4.

66. *Lil Gaspere Pace*, vv. 165-166; *Perfecti mysterium amoris*, vv. 9-10.

67. *Kelmtejn qabel*, J. Saliba, *Ihna tar-rebbiegħa*, Malta, Lux Press 1966, p. 7.

68. *Vatum consortium*, Malta, Dar ta' San Guzepp 1968, pp. xiv, 109.

69. *Il-Muza*, vv. 15-16; *Lir-riħ fuq*, vv. 158-162; *Formosa*, v. 20.

70. *Kelmtejn qabel*, *Nirien*, Malta, G. Muscat 1938, p. 6.

71. *Il-ghanja ta' poeta tal-bierah*, v. 1. *Kelmtejn qabel*, Anon, *Ghanja ta' dghajsa*, Malta, Dar ta' San Guzepp 1971, p. 6.

72. *Alla taż-żgħażaġh cit.*, p. 22.

73. *Thewdin*, vv. 140-143.

74. *Lil Gaspere Pace*, vv. 161-162.

75. *Mill-art għas-sema*, Malta, Dip. ta' l-Infommazzjoni 1960, p. 22.

76. *F'jum il-ghid tal-qaddis Nikola ta' Bari*, v. 37; *Alla taż-żgħażaġh cit.*, pp. 14 u 16.

77. *Tihux hsieb*, v. 10.

78. *Alla taż-żgħażaġh cit.*, p. 32; *Lill-poezija*, vv. 54-60.

79. *Tifkiriet ta' tfuliti*, vv. 90-103.

80. *Lill-poezija*, vv. 1-66.

poeta tax-xorti hażina milli tal-kitba letterarja.<sup>81</sup> L-ewwel raguni hi soċjali: il-poeta hu individwu mħolli barra mis-soċjetà minhabba l-għoli u l-integrità tiegħu. L-ambjent tal-kotra ta' żmien ma jilqax il-mes-saġg tiegħu.<sup>82</sup> It-tieni raguni hi intrinseka, u hi biċċa mill-qofol in-nifsu tal-poeżija: min m'hux imwegga' ma jistax ikun poeta:

Min qatt ma laqqat kwies l-imrar mill-qiegh

poeta m'hux, m'hemmx poezija fih.<sup>83</sup>

Il-poeżija vera hi dejjem il-bint tat-tbatija,<sup>84</sup> hija l-għamla verbali tat-tigrib persunali u intimu.<sup>85</sup> Aktar ma l-poeta jbat, aktar tissaffa u tissaħħa l-opra tiegħu.<sup>86</sup> In-niket hu l-magħmudija tan-nar tiegħu.<sup>87</sup>

#### EGHLUQ

Fil-kitba ta' l-awturi nfushom dawn il-ħsibijiet huma haġa waħda mal-bqija tat-tematika magħżula. Hi haġa rari fost il-kittieba lokali li ssib preżentazzjoni organika ta' dawn il-ħsibijiet, minsuġin f'korp wieħed. Madankollu, 'l hawn u 'l hinn jixref dan il-wirt ta' fehmiet mirutin minn dinja wiesgħa ta' ċiviltà li Malta ħadet u għadha tiegħu minnha l-qofol ta' l-identità kontinentali tagħha. Huma l-waqtiet qsar li jleħħu f'ittra, f'saġg ta' xeħta letterarja jew kulturali, f'versi mdaħħlin f'poeżiji b'suġġetti varji, jew f'poeżiji li minnhom infushom jithaddtu dwar xi aspekk estetiku.

In-nisel storiku tagħhom, l-adattament u l-mod kif intlaqgħu mill-awturi nfushom huma aspekk ta' studju li, jekk isir, jagħti dehra sħiħa lill-awtur bħala ħassieb (jew teoriku ta' l-arti) u bħala artist (jew ħaddiem tal-generu ħallieq tiegħu). Aktarx li sikwit jithalla barra l-ewwel komponent, u b'hekk jintilef l-għarfien tal-kuxjenza kritika ta' l-awtur. Imqar jekk mislutin metodikament fl-għera naturali tagħhom, imħollijin fil-forma letterarja aktar milli teknika u filosofika li suppost jieħdu f'idejn il-kritiku, dawn il-ħsibijiet huma xorta waħda s-sisien li jinbena fuqhom il-pont li jgħaqqad lill-kittieb mad-dnja usa' ta' l-istorja ta' l-ideat, fuq naħa, u mad-dinja moħbija tal-kriterji generali li jmxexxuh, fuq in-naħa l-oħra.

81. *Bier niftieħmu minn qabel, Kwiekeb ta' qalbi*, Malta, G. Muscat 1944, p. 3; *Tifkiriet ta' tfuliti*, vv. 77-89.

82. *L-aħħar taqbida*, vv. 27-32; *Il-poeta u l-kaptan*, vv. 37-44; *Thewdin*, vv. 131-140.

83. *Lil ħabibi* Karmenu Ellul Galea, vv. 13-14.

84. *Vatum consortium* cit., p. 108.

85. *Il-għanja ta' poeta tal-bieraħ*, vv. 29-36.

86. *Il-poeżija u aħna*, loc. cit., p. 37.

87. *Kelmtejn qabel*, J. Saliba, op. cit., p. 18.

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# THE 'MURIE TALE OF CHAUNTECLEER'

Marthese Zammit

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The amusing tale of the vain cock and the deceitful fox is narrated by one of the 'Preestes thre' in the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales.

Chaucer gives us no further information about this character. The only thing we learn about him at this stage is that he is accompanying the Prioress on the pilgrimage to Canterbury. Yet he comes to life when the Host turns to "This sweete preest, this goodly man, Sir John" and urges him to narrate a merry tale that would cheer up the whole company of pilgrims.

The Host demands a light-hearted mood because the previous story-teller, the Monk, has been boring his audience with his seemingly interminable account of human tragedies. As a matter of fact, the courteous Knight interrupts him after his seventeenth tragedy and points out how distressing it is to hear of the downfall of men that once stood "in heigh degree". As the Monk's Tale is concerned with a one-sided view of the reversals of Fortune, it would certainly be more cheerful to hear about those of poor estate who grow more fortunate and consequently enjoy prosperity. The not-so-courteous Host is only too ready to agree with the Knight's objection but his blunt criticism offends the Monk who refuses to relate another story in a different vein. At this point, the Host turns to the Nun's Priest. Addressing him "with rude speche and boold" and encouraging him to be cheerful, he tells him to relate a tale that would gladden the hearts of the pilgrims and the good-humoured cleric is willing to comply with his wishes.

The story he relates is a simple one in itself. It is about an extremely conceited cock who, despite a prophetic dream, is easily deceived by the flattery of a sly fox when the latter pretends to admire his crowing. However, the fox turns out to be so vain about his own villainy that he is soon beguiled by the cock's flattery. The moral at the end of the tale is likewise simple. The Nun's Priest duly warns his audience not to trust flatterers.

Lo, swich it is for to be recchelees

And necligent, and truste on flaterye. (670-1)

But Sir John's narrative is more than a simple tale with a simple moral.

The Nun's Priest's story of the cock and the fox is a mock-heroic beast fable which takes us to a make-believe world where once upon a

time 'Beestes and briddes koude speke and synge' — a world in which animals are given human qualities. Consequently, they are made to behave like human beings and their behaviour ultimately leads to the moral of the story. Such beast fables were popular in medieval Europe and served as illustrative anecdotes for sermons. Perhaps the most popular character of all was Reynard the Fox, the hero of the well-known beast epic, the *Roman de Renart*, which includes an episode that is analogous with the Nun's Priest's Tale. Though Chaucer may have derived his story from this source, or from versions of it, he effects considerable changes in his handling of the narrative and turns the fable into a comic masterpiece.

Chaucer's vivid account of the cock's adventure is a fine piece of mock-heroic writing as he treats a trivial subject in the heroic manner which is usually reserved for epic poetry to enhance the qualities and achievements of heroes. However, mock-heroic is not intended to praise but to ridicule and in the process of doing so it gives rise to comedy. The humour results from the incongruity that exists between a subject matter that is so commonplace and a style that is so grand. A farmyard is an unlikely place for such a lofty form of expression! Yet this is the domain where the princelike hero, Chauntecleer, exercises his "governaunce".

The Nun's Priest starts his tale by sketching the details that form the background of the story. As a matter of fact, the introductory lines are devoted to the "povre wydwe" who lives in a small cottage with her two daughters. She represents a picture of plain humble life that must have been the experience of many a poor widow. Her way of living is indeed simple and modest; her possessions are limited; her daily sustenance is meagre. Yet she is healthy and happy. Her poor living conditions are clearly conveyed when the narrator contrasts her meals with the diet of a wealthier class of people. The widow needs "no poynaunt sauce" to flavour her "sclendir meel" since "No deyntee morsel passed thurgh hir throte". She drinks no wine "neither whit ne reed" because she can only afford to have milk with her food. As a result, she does not suffer from the gout and apoplexy. For being poor makes her eat moderately and this prevents her from becoming ill. We are not told the name of this widow as she is not intended to be the protagonist of the tale. In fact the first name we come across is that of the sheep "that highte Malle" since this mark of individuality is a characteristic of the cock, the hen and the fox who have a significant role in the story.

#### CHAUNTECLEER

Against this background, Chauntecleer stands out as a dazzling picture of magnificent colours. The striking contrast is immediately obvious for his owner's modesty and humility are a foil to his splendour

and vanity. Whereas the narrator used negatives to describe the poor widow, he now uses comparatives to introduce the hero of his tale:

His voys was murier than the murie orgon

On messe-dayes that in the chirche gon.

Wel sikerer was his crowyng in his logge

Than is a klokke, or an abbey orlogge: (85-88)

His very name "Chauntecleer" is significant of his outstanding quality — he is a 'clear singer' whose crowing is unsurpassed. This emphasis on his ability to crow suggests that the cock is both conscious and proud of his talent. So much so, it is this pride which eventually and inevitably leads to his fall when he succumbs to the flattery of daun Russell.

Having stressed this point, the Nun's Priest goes on to portray Chauntecleer's appearance. Following the rules of rhetoric, he describes the cock from the top of his head to his toe-nails, using similes that evoke an image of precious beauty. The comic effect is achieved through the use of the mock-heroic style since the description is deliberately inflated to create humour. The portrayal of "this gentil cok" suggests the valour of epic heroes and recalls a world that is so remote from an ordinary farmyard. Even his incomparable red comb reminds one of "a castel wal"!

However, we are not intended to forget that he is but a barnyard fowl. Chauntecleer's crowing, his comb and his bill characterize him as such. And if he is so clever as to sing a duet with his beloved Pertelote it is because, as the Nun's Priest explains to his audience,

thilke tyme, as I have understonde,

Beestes and briddes koude speke and synge (114 - 5)

From time to time, the narrator refers to Chauntecleer's daily habits which reveal his avian nature and which make the conceited cock seem all the more ridiculous. An example of this is when, after overwhelming his concerned spouse with his erudite references, he flies down from the beam with the other hens,

And with a 'chuk' he gan hem for to calle,

For he hadde found a corn, lay in the yard (408 - 9).

For all his regal bearing he is merely a cock!

Chaucer's feathered hero asserts his position by exercising his dominance over seven hens "which were his sustres and his paramours". The fairest of these is his favourite wife, the "faire damoysele Pertelote". She too seems to emerge from the heroic world of chivalry as she is endowed with the qualities of a courtly lady "Curteys she was, discreet, and debonaire" — truly worthy of the love of "this gentil cok". But Pertelote's role in the Nun's Priest's Tale is significant because of the part she plays in the scene that is staged between cock and hen soon after Chauntecleer has his dream.

## DREAM-LORE

Chauntecleer's dream and the ensuing discussion he has with Pertelote as regards the origin and significance of dreams occupy a considerable part of the tale. However, even though the action is temporarily suspended, the reader becomes interested in the respective points of view presented by husband and wife, perhaps to the extent of taking sides. The situation is indeed familiar and, despite the passage of time, of perennial interest. For a man's authoritative position may be jeopardised by a woman's interference in his affairs and this must have been all the more significant in medieval times when it was considered a husband's prerogative to exercise his supremacy over his wife. Chauntecleer is no exception! His dream does not merely serve to introduce the "beest" that instils fear in this cock of heroic stature, it also reveals Chaucer's understanding of human nature especially where the relation of the sexes is concerned, setting the scene for the interesting dispute between husband and wife.

Chauntecleer's dream disturbs his sleeps so much that it arouses his wife's concern. She asks him

Herte deere,

What eyeth yow, to grone in this manere?

Ye been a verray sleper; fy, for shame! (123 - 5)

From his vivid description of the "beest" that looks "lyk an hound" we gather that he has never seen anything like it but we recognise it as a fox. Though Chauntecleer may feel that his groaning is justified he gets no sympathy from Pertelote who accuses him of cowardice. Realising that he is not the brave hero she has thought him to be, she describes the virtues of the perfect husband as desired by courtly ladies. Chauntecleer may have a beard but he certainly has "no mannes herte". Consequently she declares "I kan nat love a coward, by my feith!" She then proceeds to give her interpretation of his dream and to prescribe an efficacious remedy.

Pertelote's explanation distinguishes her as a typically practical housewife who is solicitous for the welfare of her dear husband. Like any wife she knows what is best for him and feels sure that she can deal with his problems. So she reveals her knowledge of dreams and medicine substantiating her argument with her learned reference to Dionysius Cato "which that was so wys a man". After all, she too can quote an authoritative source to advise her frightened husband that he should attach no importance to dreams. It is obvious that Pertelote is trying to assume control of the situation by showing Chauntecleer that she can handle the matter without any difficulty. She is not even bothered by the fact that there is no apothecary in that town for, she tells the troubled cock,

I shall myself to herbes techen yow

That shal been for youre hele and for youre prow; (183 - 4)

— and she provides him with a list of medicinal herbs found in the farmyard.

Pertelote's interpretation of Chauntecleer's dream is interesting in itself. Speaking like a scientist this knowledgeable hen presents the medical viewpoint which accounts for the terrifying dream that has upset her husband. She bases her explanation on the medieval theory of the four humours known as blood, phlegm, choler and melancholy. It was believed that these four vital fluids were blended in the human body so that the predominant humour determined a man's complexion or temperament. However, an excess of any humour produced some disturbance in the person's complexion and resulted in illness. Pertelote follows this theory when she diagnoses Chauntecleer's ailment. She states that dreams are a result of an imbalance of the humours in the body. In short, they come from physical disorder. She also knows that humours have their distinctive colours and this accounts for the description of the "beest" in the cock's dream:

His colour was bitwixe yelow and reed,  
And tipped was his tayl and both his eeris  
With blak, (136 - 8).

There is no doubt that Chauntecleer is suffering from an excess of choler and melancholy!

Eager to show her profound knowledge of the subject she goes on to prescribe the remedy to cure her husband's ailment. One can just imagine how Chauntecleer's ego is deflated when he is told by his caring wife that all he needs is a laxative that would purge him "bynethe and eek above". She is medically correct in recommending the digestives of worms which he must take before administering the purgatives. Besides, what better diet can she prescribe for a cock? Furthermore, her fears are justified when she warns him to keep his hot humours out of the sunshine lest he may develop some illness that will be the death of him:

Ware the sonne in his ascencioun  
Ne fynde yow nat repleet of humours hoote (190 - 1)

Once she feels so certain that red choler is the cause of all his troubles, she concludes that he may develop tertian fever "or an agu that may be youre bane". So if he follows her instructions he need fear no dream.

Despite Pertelote's learned "loore" Chauntecleer is not ready to take her advice so easily. As far as he is concerned she may think she knows what is best for him but he definitely knows better. In any case, he is too self-centred to accept that he can soon forget his fears by taking a laxative. And the last thing he wants to be is a henpecked husband! Thus he proceeds to give his own view regarding dreams and to show that he is better read than his wife. His masculine vanity makes it essential for him to assert her intellectual superiority and

to prove his point of view he can refer to many a man who is "moore of auctoritee / Than ever Caton was." It is his prerogative to overwhelm Pertelote by showing off his own learned eloquence to illustrate that "no man sholde been to reccheles / Of dremes" and that he has good reason to regard his own dream as a warning.

Chauntecleer speaks like a scholar and a philosopher. It is his conceit which leads him to the conclusion that, whatever Pertelote may think, his dream is an "avisoun", a prophetic one which he should heed. He does not rank himself with ordinary men who have meaningless dreams; on the other hand, he speaks of distinguished characters who have foreseen their future in their sleep. Why shouldn't this dream be such a prophetic vision warning him of the fate that lies in store for him? However, this vain cock does not argue profoundly about the psychology of dreams. Instead he tries to impress Pertelote by narrating lengthy stories and referring to authoritative sources to support his viewpoint. The vivid anecdotes he relates end tragically as he feels so convinced that his dream is a premonition. In the light of this, it is comic that he does not take any heed of the warning so that after arguing at length about the prophetic nature of his dream, he rapidly overcomes the initial fear he senses in the presence of the fox.

Once he has made his point about his dream, Chauntecleer scorns the remedies suggested by Pertelote and refuses to take the laxatives she has prescribed. He even pokes fun at her when he mistranslates the Latin tag "*Mulier est hominis confusio*" which really means that woman is man's ruin, a statement typical of the wave of anti-feminism that was widely current in medieval times. By saying that it means the opposite he is once more asserting his authority over her. At this point he feels sure that his interpretation of the dream has put his concerned wife in her place and that he is master of the situation. However, he is blinded by his love for the fair Pertelote and is ready to put aside all his fear when he looks upon the beauty of her face. He resorts to flattery and, fearing he may lose her love, he defies any dream though he has been so badly shaken by his vision of the "beest". Instead he assumes a regal attitude which helps him restore his self-confidence and which emphasises the pride that goes before the fall.

Thus the scene is set and Chauntecleer "in al his pryde" is soon to become an easy prey for the sly fox that awaits the propitious moment. The happiness that is inspired within him by the vernal beauty of the month of May cannot last for long,

For evere the latter ende of joye is wo

God woot that worldly joye is soon eago! (439 - 40)

The comedy is heightened by the rhetorical outburst of the narrator when he compares the deception of the cunning fox to three famous betrayals, including that of Christ by Judas. The incongruity is obvious, especially as this leads to the philosophical problem of whether man's

actions are predestined or whether man has free will — a problem that had caused “greet altercaoun” and given rise to “greet disputisoun” among scholars. The ensuing events of the tale seem to indicate that Chauntecleer’s dream has truly been a prophetic one. Is he guilty of not heeding the warning or is his fate inevitable? If a dream can foretell what is to happen does it mean that the future has been fore-ordained? Have we got free will or are we constrained to do what has been predestined? Although he introduces this serious topic, the narrator does not come to any conclusion. It is evidently inappropriate to connect the fate of a silly cock with such a philosophic argument. So he dismisses the whole matter by blaming Pertelote for Chauntecleer’s misfortune.

#### ANTI-FEMINISM

It is interesting to note at this point how the Nun’s Priest makes use of the situation to air his own anti-feminist views even though his words may displease the few female members of the pilgrimage. He attributes Chauntecleer’s near tragedy to Pertelote’s misleading advice when he states that this tale is that of a cock “That took his conseil of his wyf with sorwe”. Such misogynous sentiments, as the ones he reveals, are intended to blame women for the misery of mankind. He even illustrates his point by referring to Eve as the archetype of woman’s wicked influence on man:

Wommennes conseils been ful ofte colde;  
 Wommannes conseils broghte us first to wo,  
 And made Adam fro Paradys to go,  
 Ther as he was ful myrie and wel ot ese. (490 - 3).

But the Nun’s Priest knows that he must be careful in his position for he is travelling in the service of the Prioress, and this makes him subordinate to a woman. Consequently, he tries to withdraw what he has just stated since, contrary to what he says, he knows “whom it myght displese”. Still, he does not change the subject. He says that he is travelling in the service of the Prioress, and this makes him su- to “Rede auctors” and what they have to say about women. Then he washes his hands of the matter by dismissing his anti-feminist views as those of the cock:

Thise been the cokkes wordes and nat myne;  
 I kan noon harm of no womman divyne. (499-500).

Though this may be meant to put the blame on Pertelote there is no doubt that the cock’s vanity plays an important part in his downfall. From the narrator’s first description of the conceited cock we get the impression that Chauntecleer takes great pride in his song. And this makes it easy for the crafty fox to execute his plan.

## DAUN RUSSELL

The appearance of daun Russell draws us closer to the action of the tale. Chauntecleer's happy mood is short-lived for he becomes aware of the presence of the fox. Though he has never set eyes on the animal before, his first reaction is instinctive. He is so frightened that he crows against his will

But cride anon, 'cok! cok!' and up he sterte  
 Nothyng ne liste hym thanne for to crowe,  
 As man that was affrayed in his herte; (510 - 2)

But Russell is quick and witty enough to prevent the flight of the terrified cock. His words are courteous and reassuring, his tone is gentle and soothing. He does not find it difficult to appeal to Chauntecleer's conceit once he knows his weak point. Addressing him as "Gentil sire" he proclaims himself as a devoted admirer of the cock's singing. He speaks very respectfully of Chauntecleer's father — "God his soule blesse!" — and mother who have been to his house, as food not as guests! But the cock is too blind to see through all this flattery and to realise the truth behind the fox's words. Russell's plan is indeed cunning and subtle. He even explains how Chauntecleer's father used "to make his voys the moore strong" by closing both eyes, standing on tip-toes and stretching his neck. The silly cock is so "ravysshed with his flaterie" that he fails to perceive any treachery in the words of his admirer. He stretches his neck, closes his eyes and begins to crow. The fox loses no time in grabbing his prey by the throat and running off with him.

The action is once again suspended and the mock-heroic lament that follows contributes to the humour of the poem. Rhetoric is used to achieve this effect. The narrator apostrophizes destiny and Venus since Chauntecleer, a devoted servant of this goddess of love, has met his fate on a Friday, the day dedicated to the same goddess. Invoking the celebrated rhetorician Geoffrey de Vinsauf, the Nun's Priest regrets that he lacks the skill to convey the lament for Chauntecleer's catastrophe in the proper rhetorical terms of this 'deere maister soverayn'. The description of the hens' grief heightens the pathos. The great sorrow of the fallen hero's "sustres" and "paramours" surpasses the grief for great human tragedies. Our attention is particularly focused on Pertelote whose shrieks are louder than those of 'Hasdrubales wyf / Whan that hir housbonde hadde lost his lyf'.

The mock-heroic tone is maintained throughout, the humour is increased and the absurdity of the situation is intensified. The noise is so great that it brings the "povre widwe" and her two daughters out of the house. Hearing their cries the neighbours join them in a chase that becomes farcical. The shrieks and cries, the trumpets and confusing noises of dogs, ducks, hogs, geese, cow, calf and bees, create such an uproar in the farmyard that "It semed as that hevene sholde falle!" But Chauntecleer's fortunes are about to change. He proves to be wittier

than the fox who takes such pride in his cunning that he turns out to be just as vulnerable to flattery. As soon as the fox opens his mouth the cock is quick enough to fly to the safety of the nearest tree. Both of them have succumbed to flattery but both have learnt their lesson. Chauntecleer realises that he should have kept his eyes wide open while dawn Russell admits that he should have kept his mouth shut. The narrator emphasises the "moralite" of his story and requests his audience not to dismiss the tale simply as an adventure.

For Seint Paul seith that al that writen is

To oure doctrine it is ywrite, ywis:

Taketh the fruyt and lat the chaf be stille. (675 - 7).

— and he appropriately ends his tale with a prayer.

The Nun's Priest's Tale is more than just "a folye / As of a fox, or of a cok and hen" for in retelling the story Chaucer adapts the beast fable to suit his own purposes. His elaboration of the narrative reveals his understanding of human nature and human relationships especially where husband and wife are concerned. The debate on the significance of dreams presents a topic which interested the poet as did the philosophical problem of free will and predestination. However, these themes are brought together to provide humour and we laugh at the absurd behaviour of the birds who are so concerned with concepts and ideas that pertain to the human world. The parody of human behaviour and the use of the mock-heroic style heighten the comic effect and increase the fun. Indeed, we laugh at such absurdities but then we realise that the lesson applies to us and that in reality we may be laughing at ourselves. Nevertheless, the tale is so delightful that we are bound to agree with the Host when he tells Sir John, "This was a murie tale of Chauntecleer".

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# ACCOUNTING TECHNIQUES IN BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

**Joseph Micallef**

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The main function of management is the leadership towards the attainment of the most efficient use of economic and human resources in the interest of both the business unit and the general society as a whole. Management works by setting up a plan based on policies and then directing resources available towards its actuation. Henri Fayol writes that the function of control in business is to verify that everything occurs in conformity with the plan adopted, the instructions issued and the principles established. Those who exercise control are an integral part of the system providing a regulator. It is not adequate to regard control as being exclusively a matter of the accounting system, budgeting and standard costs, although business control and accounting practice are near relations. All control draws its lifeblood from a flow of information.

Though accounting is not the whole of control, accounting records provide most of the data, their advantage being that facts of great diversity can be represented in the common denominator of money. From its accounts management acquaints itself with the financial position of the business and gauges the amount of any profit made. Accountants have always been the historians of the business, but today they are much more, dealing with the financial and legal complications of investments, taxation, the granting of credit, and the prevention of error and fraud. Management accounting is described as a system of standards, orders, records and reports. Facts emerge from reports on current operations, revealing deviations, leading swiftly to investigation and remedy. Where traditional accounting emphasises the analysis of transactions, management accounting is concerned with the detection and isolation of areas of special difficulty and with the diagnosis of emerging trends. Top executives are bound to use forecasts and budgets extensively.

In the best of practice these top executives bring the industrial accountant into consultation early, as it is to his skill in the presentation of accounting information that they are entitled to look for reports

which make control effective. Familiarity with management problems and to some extent with technical processes, can make the accountant an invaluable member of the management team. But accounting information is best imparted in simple, easily understood terms, distinguishing between facts and opinion, being intelligible beyond accounting and banking circles.

#### ORDINARY AND PREFERENCE SHARES

One of the first decisions in the launching of a business is to fix the amount of capital to be raised, as the proposed scale of operation bears strongly on it. Overhead expenses must also be realistically estimated. When the amount of capital has been estimated, there comes the question of how it shall be raised. The most common form of capital issue is through ordinary and preference shares. The ordinary share appeals to an investor prepared to shoulder uncertainty in the expectation of high dividends. Where the element of speculation is very great, a company would in practice be forced to rely on the issue of ordinary shares. Preference shares, on the other hand, earn a fixed rate of dividend. Preference shares have a claim on divisible profits for that percentage return, prior to any payment to ordinary shareholders. A preference shareholder could not claim dividends if insufficient profit had been made, although if such shares were given cumulative rights, they would have the right to receive arrears of dividends in subsequent years when profits are again available. However, many preference shares have no voting rights.

The right proportion must be found between the amounts of ordinary and preference shares. The larger the proportion of the total capital in ordinary shares the safer the preferential shares will be. If the proportion of fixed dividend capital grows unduly, it will be difficult to maintain solvency during periods of bad trading. A further form of capital may be issued as debentures, a bond acknowledging the indebtedness of the company, bearing a fixed interest. It is raised on the security of some or all of the assets of the company but debenture does not form a part of the share capital. Over and under-capitalisation are both dangers to the workings of the company although the most common tends to be overcapitalisation. This burdens the management with heavy payments of dividend out of profit thus seriously hindering the process of further growth. In such cases reconstruction is usually suggested before matters deteriorate.

Having found the proper measure and types of capital, the management accountant now looks at the use of such capital and introduces such terms as working capital and capital employed besides the already established invested capital. The existence of working capital level can be ascertained simply by finding the amount of the surplus of current assets over current liabilities even though this may

not be an infallible yardstick of solvency. This is possible if the current assets of the business might be in the form of trade debtors and stock rather than of cash and as a result the liquid position of the company would be unsatisfactory. The structure of the working capital will highlight the trading activities of the company and one must remember that over-trading is as bad as under-trading.

The raising of further capital is a common decision thrown into the lap of the management accountant. Additional funds can be obtained by retaining profits and depreciation allowances, the safest methods in the long run, because the company financed in that way assumes no further external obligations. Alternatively, further issues or even bank loans can be resorted to. Trade credit is another way of financing business. The board of directors is influenced in considering the ways and means, by the purpose for which funds are to be raised, and for short term financing they may well seek accommodation from their bankers.

#### PROFITABILITY AND BREAK-EVEN ANALYSES

Profitability is yet another management accounting feature to note. To plan profits is to control volumes of products, prices and costs. The exercise devises a standard of action to yield a stated profit and in doing so, it appraises manufacturing and distributive costs, profit margins, the level of sales, the comparative profitability of products, the optimum use of fixed assets, and the amount of capital tied up in stocks of materials. If profit is the first figure to be examined, one can start by working out the total required for dividends on issued capital, interest on loan capital, general reserves and specific reserves. Profitability can be demonstrated on a graph of Break-Even Analyses where fixed costs, variable costs and sales are represented. Such a chart is very useful in studying the interactions between these variables. The basic concept on which it is drawn is that every business has a break-even point, representing a state of affairs at which the total cost incurred is just recovered and no more by the total value of the sales made; a point at which there is no profit or loss.

If sales rise above the Break-Even point, a profit is earned; below it a loss is incurred. Even so, the circumstances which actually prevail in many businesses make any attempt to establish a break-even point a very complex project. The company in which costly capital equipment has been invested will tend to have a high break-even point and may work at less than total costs as long as variable costs are met and something is contributed to fixed costs.

The Break-Even chart is a model of costs, sales and prices as associated variables, but it is a much simplified one and not a safe guide over a period of time without revisions. Even so it can show an enterprise where and how its activities can be more profitably co-

ordinated; it would also demonstrate to management the effects of movements in prices and their effects on total profits. Break-Even analysis is not as often introduced into firms as budgetary control standard costing, or internal auditing nevertheless it provides a convenient means of demonstrating quickly price-cost-sales relationships.

A business which, on the other hand, makes use of budgeting is applying scientific management to the financial side of its enterprise. A budget states in terms of quantities and money, the work to be done in a specific period of time and when adopted it is a means of measuring progress. By means of a budget, the programme of each department is adjusted to the policy of the business yet there must be a clear-cut underlying policy. The budget is not self-operating and it cannot replace executive action although it surely complements it highly. Departmental budgets are prepared within an overall business budget and departmental heads submit detailed estimates of expenses, based on the agreed sales figures. Through these the master budget can then be constructed. A system of periodical reports during the currency of the budget will bring to light divergencies from the planned expenditure and remedial measures can be taken. Budgetary control attempts to co-ordinate the productive and financial operations according to a predetermined plan and a potential threat to its success is lack of adaptability. The whole system is based on anticipation and unexpected developments can hardly be avoided. Thus modern budgeting is even made flexible and attention is concentrated on those items which can be affected by management action.

### COSTING

Another contribution to business management can be found in the form of costing. Costing systems show the expenses incurred in doing the various jobs, analysed by categories of expense. As they are essentially analytical, cost accounts cannot be devised as a universal system to fit every business. There are many types of cost accounts that can be kept like marginal, standard, batch, job, multiple, process and departmental costing, each offering a particular set of advantages when fitted to the particular need of the business unit. The advantage of each type will vary with the type of business and the period of operations at which it is applied; for example job costing would best be applied where there were quite distinct jobs and contracts, as undertaken by builders and engineers for clients. Expenses would be allocated to each contract as incurred.

Having chosen the best method of costing to apply, the management accountant will choose a set of cost centres to which primary costs can be allocated. Where an item of costs has to be subdivided, it can be apportioned to the various cost centres on an agreed basis. While the allocation of direct materials and wages could cause few uncertain-

ties, overheads tend to call for more complex reasoning. Yet unless overheads expense is wisely apportioned, the calculation of a true selling price for a product will be impossible. Of particular importance is standard costing which tries to meet the need not only to predict costs more closely but to exercise more control. Where standards are used the costs of production are predetermined and in due course actual costs are compared to the standard costs. Any differences are analysed by causes. Standard costs are related to a particular period; they should also be related to processes and operations rather than products so that variances from standards can more readily be traced.

The use of standard costing takes budgetary control into more detail and gives management more control of the cost of the individual process and product rather than a number of summary totals. Apart from this it is invaluable in estimating, price fixing, and in determining sales policy. The practice of control of costs involves departmental operating statements which show the standard and the actual cost of direct labour, analysed by cost centre, showing also the amount of the difference between the two, the cause of it and how, when and why the variance occurred. Management would expect to receive reports on variances from the cost accountant but to exercise proper managerial control both favourable and adverse variances must be examined.

Costings reports represent but part of the operating statements supplied by accounting officers to management. In general reports will cover purchases, production, sales, finance and personnel; these supplement the financial accounts. Reports and tabulated or charted figures are best presented in standardised forms and layout so as to enable instantaneous grasp of the more important information. Such statements allow comparisons to be made. Through this the efficiency of the business unit can be measured against pre-set yardsticks. One main criterion is the rate of return on capital employed, capital in this context being understood to mean the value of the fixed assets and the working capital of the firm, although intangible assets are excluded. Other yardsticks can be used to measure the particular firm's efficiency.

Management ratios present perhaps, the most obvious link between management and accounting. Many members of top management draw conclusions from ratios between balance sheet items which may be considered under financial, or expense ratios, or under operating ratios. The first group, the expense ratios express relationships between income and expenditure and as such can be specially valuable to shareholders, financial controllers, and creditors. Operating ratios are more likely to be watched with interest by the functional heads of a business. The more important ratios include the net profit to capital employed, profit to turnover, sales to capital employed, rate of turnover, stock of finished goods to production costs and many others. Last but not least one may mention inter-firm comparisons which enable businesses to

match their own performance with that of others in the same industry. The Centre for Interfirm Comparison which is associated with, although independent of, the British Institute of Management provides a service whereby firms in an industry can compare their own performance with other firms in the industry.

Management accounting does have a definite contribution to management control and management is becoming more aware of the valuable contribution of this vital and dynamic subject. To manage without accountancy is like sending a motorist to a destination without a map. Like a map, management accountancy provides management with the starting point and destination, together with the most suitable route, for all the journeys to be taken by the firm.



