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A Journal of Melitensia and the Humanities

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THE BUILDING OF THE COTTONERA FORTIFICATIONS: A Maltese protest against taxation

Charles Galea Scannura

On 28 March 1673 Mgr. Pallavicino informed the Cardinal-Inquisitors that he had withdrawn the patents of some officials of the Holy Office. This decision was connected with the collection of tax which Grand Master Cotoner desired so much to impose in order to finance the construction of the new Cottonera fortifications around the harbour.¹ The resulting crisis that erupted as a result provides insight into the method taxes were levied in Malta and the part played by Rome in determining and influencing local affairs. At the same time bringing to the fore one other perennial problem that characterised local history till the end of the eighteenth century, namely, the question of ecclesiastical immunity.

Even before Mgr. Pallavicino had been appointed Inquisitor, Grand Master Cotoner had indicated that he expected assistance but Pope Clement X could not help the Order financially. Nevertheless, he permitted Cotoner to levy a tax on *beni commestabili* which the Grand Master soon desired to have commuted into another one on *beni stabili* or immovable property. This met with opposition mainly from the ecclesiastics. Canon Ristri petitioned the Pope against it but he was not supported by the Bishop, the Vicar and the majority of the clergy, 530 of whom declared their disapproval of his memorial.² Ristri also appealed to the Congregation of Immunity in Rome,³ but the Pope intended to empower the Inquisitor to carry out the valuation of the *beni stabili* and establish the amount of taxation to be paid. Cotoner, however, wanted this to be done only by the Order and the Jurats of the Università of Mdina.⁴ The Inquisitor, according to Cotoner, could do the valuation of the property of his officials and patentees only.⁵

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1. Bibl. Casan., Rome, Ms.2112, f.28. For a historical analysis of the building of the Cottonera Lines see A. Hoppen, *The Fortification of Malta by the Order of St. John* (Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 78 - 90.
 2. N(ational) L(ibrary of) M(alta), Libr. Ms. 647, Lib. xvii, n.p.
 3. N.L.M., Libr. Ms. 438, ff. 71-77, 77v-80 and 193-204.
 4. A.O.M., Ms. 1444, Cotoner to Verospi 7 June 1670.
 5. *Ibid.*, Cotoner to Verospi 17 October 1670.

The Brief for the commutation of the tax was signed by Clement X on 22 November 1670.⁶ The Inquisitor, Mgr. Tempi, was authorized to give the Grand Master the necessary faculty to impose the tax on *beni stabili* and this was duly registered by the Council of the Order.⁷ A Commission was appointed by the Grand Master and it also included D. Fabritio Testaferata, the *Depositario* of the Holy Office,⁸ to ensure the execution of the Brief.⁹ The Grand Master was to levy a tax of 100,000 sc. on *beni stabili*, so by February 1671 he published an edict which soon met with protests especially from the ecclesiastical side. Canon Ristri even gained the patronage of the advocate, later cardinal, De Luca in his protests.¹⁰ Yet declarations of property were made in 1671 and as far as the Holy Office is concerned, they indicate that the Office and its ministers had an aggregate total property valued at 20,923 sc. 5 tr. 13 gr. in *beni stabili*, 2,410 sc. 9 tr. 18 gr. in *censi bullali* and 23,334 sc. 3 tr. 11 gr. in *introito*.¹¹

However this tax was again commuted to another one on *beni commestabili*, a decision that gave rise to a turbulent period, which has not yet received due attention. This period was much influenced by the

6. A.O.M., Ms. 261, f. 172v.

7. N.L.M., Libr. Ms. 4, p. 320; A.O.M., Ms. 261, f. 173v.

8. A(rchivio) S(ecreto) V(aticano), Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, f. 53, When Testaferata was confirmed in this position, it was remarked: "Si considera e si loda qui come atto di prudenza non meno di giustizia la deputazione fatta da V.S. di legittimare Esattore e Collettore della Decima in persona di D. Fab. Testaferata".

9. N.L.M., Libr. Ms. 4, pp. 321-323. For a full list of the members of the Commission see W.L. Zammit, *Malta Under the Cottoners 1660-1680* (Malta, 1980), p. 12.

10. A. Mišsud, "Papi Fortificazione e Tasse", *Arch. Melitense* III, (1919), p. 425.

11. N.L.M., Libr. Ms. 672, f. 44. The following is a comparative table:

	<i>Stabili</i>	<i>Bullali</i>	<i>Introito</i>
Beni della Segrezia			
Magistrale Sacra			
Religione e suoi			
ufficiali	41345sc.8tr.12gr.	7454sc.6tr. 6gr.	48800sc. 2tr.17gr.
Delle persone			
Ecclesiastiche			
e Religiose	76749sc.5tr.12gr.	18712sc.6tr. 9gr.	95461cs.11tr.18gr.
Habitanti			
della Valletta	55787sc.8tr.12gr.	8542sc.9tr.13gr.	64330sc. 6tr. 5gr.
Habitanti della			
Vittoriosa,			
Senglea e Cospicua	20847sc.0tr.11gr.	4010sc.9tr.18gr.	24857sc.10tr. 9gr.
Notabile e parte			
delli Casali	37450sc.5tr.18gr.	5744sc.5tr. 4gr.	43294sc.11tr. 2gr.
Degl'altri Casali	31089sc.0tr. 5gr.	6583sc.8tr. 4gr.	37972sc. 8tr. 4gr.
Del Sant'Ufficio			
e suoi ministri	20923sc.5tr.13gr.	2410sc.9tr.18gr.	23334sc. 3tr.11gr.
Totale	285625sc.5tr.4gr.	53922sc.6tr. 6gr.	339647sc.11tr. 0gr.

diplomatic dexterity and prudence of Inquisitor Mgr. Pallavicino. For Canon Pietro Ristri was not the only one who protested vociferously. On 16 January 1672 it was noted that the Procurator of the *Mensa* of the Holy Office, Santoro De Cos, had appealed to the Cardinal-Inquisitors to order the Inquisitor not to introduce any innovations with regard to patentees of the Inquisition for both such patentees and also ecclesiastics were not prepared to accept the new imposition.¹² Nevertheless, the Papal Brief of 5 February 1670, when explained to the Inquisitor, was understood as implying that all patentees of the Holy Office as well as the ecclesiastics of Malta and Gozo were to contribute towards the tax for the new fortifications. Only the property of the Holy Office was to be freed and preserved from every imposition and service and to be held in possession of their exemption.¹³

Meanwhile Mgr. Tempi was recalled and substituted by Mgr. Pallavicino who, once appointed Inquisitor, sought to make contacts with the Order's Ambassador, Verospi, whom he informed that he had not yet received precise orders for the execution of the Brief conceded for the imposition of the tax on the *beni stabili*, so Cardinal Borromeo was requested to issue such orders. The Pope, remarked Verospi on 28 May 1672, desired that the Brief be fulfilled, but before giving his orders he wished that Mgr. Pallavicino would forward him a report about the situation (in Malta) particularly about the pretensions of the ecclesiastics on their contributions.¹⁴ It was argued that the fortifications were considered useful for Italy and Christianity and both Cardinal Altieri and Cardinal Borromeo indicated the Pope's clear intentions. However, representations were already being made against this tax even though it was declared that ecclesiastics were not going to be taxed unduly.¹⁵ It was hoped that no difficulty would be met¹⁶ and that the requests of the ecclesiastics would have no effect.¹⁷

In fact the tax on *beni stabili* created a commotion. The Inquisitor was besieged by malcontents and he feared the possibility of a revolution against the Grandmaster. Angry protests together with threats against the Order were heard in every square and drinking shop and it required great circumspection to calm the hundred and fifty priests from the countryside who on 2 July 1672 invaded the Inquisitor's Palace shouting and claiming privileges and exemptions based on what they said were awards of Charles V to the Maltese. They desired to be given audience as a group and it was only after much exhortation that the Inquisitor

12. Archives of the Inquisitor Malta, Corr., Ms. 12, f. 158.

13. *Ibid.*, f. 176; A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, f. 36v.

14. A.O.M., Ms. 1289, Verospi to Cotoner 28 May 1672; A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, f. 34v.

15. A.O.M., Ms. 1289, Verospi to Cotoner 18 June 1672.

16. *Ibid.*, Verospi to Cotoner 13 August 1672.

17. *Ibid.*, Verospi to Cotoner 27 August 1672.

quietened them and gained their trust. Their appeal was also forwarded to Rome while the Inquisitor was praised for the way he dealt with them.¹⁸ The Inquisitor seems to have been determined on ensuring obedience: on 9 October 1672 Giacomo Muxi was deprived of his patent for his disobedience regarding the Brief on the tax for the collection of funds for the fortifications.¹⁹ Whilst facing these protests the Inquisitor also had the delicate job of settling a question with the Grandmaster over the selection of persons deputised to collect the tax.

Cotoner had deputised the tax-collectors following the reception of the Pope's edict permitting the collection of the tax, but the Pope did not approve the assumption by the Grandmaster of a power normally reserved for the Bishop and the Inquisitor in matters affecting ecclesiastics and patentees of the Holy Office.²⁰ Cotoner had been informed by Mgr. Tempi that the Pope had not accorded him such faculty. Mgr. Pallavicino therefore had to tell him to abstain from deputising such exactors as only the Inquisitor could choose those who had to collect tax from the patentees of the Holy Office. As far as ecclesiastics were concerned, Cotoner was to wait for instructions from the Secretariat of State and the Congregation of Immunity.²¹ In fact the Grandmaster had acted in good faith because Mgr. Tempi had been ambiguous in his communication — he had not reserved the deputisation of exactors and treasurers to the approval of the Inquisitor. To solve the problem, Mgr. Pallavicino issued a new deputisation for D. Fabritio Testaferrata while the Bishop was to be allowed to appoint his own deputy as far as ecclesiastics were concerned.²² By so doing the Inquisitor was able to please his superiors and to ensure that no act prejudicial to the liberty of the Tribunal of the Holy Office be made.²³

However, protests against this tax continued. In January 1673 Gregorio Bonnici went to Rome to present protests on behalf of ecclesiastics and patentees. For the Order, he was one of many seditious men.²⁴ Another person who presented an appeal before the Cardinal-Inquisitors was the Consulor of the Holy Office. Cirillo Portelli, who found that the Grandmaster was so ill-disposed towards him that he could not even return to Malta without endangering his own life. In-

18. Bibl. Casan., Rome, Ms. 2112, ff. 223-223v, the people's anger was described as "le rabbiose istanze di quegl'Affricani tumultuanti" while the priests' loud protests at the Inquisitor's Palace as "con strepiti di natural ferocia". The Inquisitor's dexterity was praised as "per sedare gli animi commossi ed haver luogo e tempo di procurar la concordia con sodisfazione delle parti", see, A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, f. 48.

19. A.I.M., Ms. Memorie No. 12, Salvati Vol. I, f. 311.

20. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, f. 43v.

21. A.I.M. Corr. Ms. 12, f. 188.

22. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, ff. 54 - 55.

23. A.I.M. Corr., Ms. 12, f. 202.

24. A.O.M., Ms. 1290, Verospi to Cotoner 7 January 1673; Bibl. Casan., Rome, Ms. 2112, f. 223v, describes him as "ardito, inquieto nemico scoperto del Magistero."

directly he was being denied the income of payments due to him by his debtors because he could not sue them in the Civil Courts for the ministers of justice were hardly favourable to his cause as they were dependants and subordinates of the Grandmaster.²⁵ Portelli seems to have been a persistent opponent to the tax even though he was told bluntly in Rome that he could tell his followers that their request for exemption was not going to be favoured by the Pope.²⁶ He was told threateningly to restrain his tone and also not to make his correspondents hope for a commutation of the tax, even though he had promised to present a memorial to the Pope through a certain Mgr. Bottini. Referring to Bonnici's presence in Rome, on 1 January 1673, Mgr. Pallavicino opined that he should be forcibly impeded from giving the Maltese the impression that they could resist further the imposition, and that Gregorio Bonnici should also be made to tell the truth to avoid the possibility of revolution.²⁷

Another indication of commotion in the Island was the convocation which the Cathedral Canons wanted to hold to discuss the issue. The Order feared this could incite the people and lead to a rebellion, and in this circumstance Cirillo Portelli was indicated by Verospi as one of the leaders.²⁸ However, Bishop Astirias sought to avoid catastrophe by prudently prohibiting and impeding the convocation.²⁹ In view of these circumstances, the Inquisitor sought to make a number of suggestions to help the Grandmaster whilst at the same time trying to appease the people. He proposed to have the *moneta di rame* removed and to commute the tax to one on *beni commestabili*. But on 5 November 1672, he was instructed to sustain the Brief and to help the Grandmaster who was facing the opposition of the people and disunity among the Grand Crosses.³⁰ As far as exemptees of the Holy Office were concerned, he was to take away the patent of those who showed repugnance or opposition towards the payment of the tax. This was meant to help the Grandmaster to constrict and force whoever was deprived of the habit in a manner best decided by his prudence and justice.³¹

Meanwhile, a memorial prepared on behalf of the ecclesiastics and the people of Malta had been presented to the Pope. It was also forwarded to Mgr. Pallavicino on 3 December 1672 to solicit his opinion. The memorial accused the Grandmaster of violating his magisterial authority by intending to extort an exaction of 100,000 sc. of gold imposed on the

25. A.I.M. Corr., Ms. 12, f. 199.

26. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, ff. 62 - 62v; A.O.M., Ms. 1289, Verospi to Cottoner 15 October 1672.

27. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27 A, f. 5.

28. A.O.M., Ms. 1289, Verospi to Cottoner 17 December 1672.

29. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, f. 66.

30. *Ibid.*, ff. 58 - 59v.

31. A.O.M., Ms. 1289, Verospi to Cottoner 19 November 1672.

32. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, ff. 63 - 65v.

beni stabili of the Maltese Islands and pointed out that about 400 representatives had appeared before Mgr. Pallavicino to oppose this exaction. In their demand, these were supported by 10,000 laymen. It was alleged that much money had been taken in various ways from the people for the financing of the fortifications of Floriana, Santa Margerita and what later became known as Ricasoli. It was also claimed that since 1651 a new tax of 110,000 pieces of eight royal of Spain had been imposed and preordained for the effective extinction of the *moneta di rame*. But in spite of the fact that this tax was collected, the copper coins concerned were not removed so as not to deny the Order an annual profit of 180,000 sc. to the detriment of the people. For this reason they proposed to have the tax substituted by another one consisting of personal service or *neuba* and the payment of 1 tr. per head, including ecclesiastics.³² In arguing for this system of taxation, Bonnici, Portelli and others who preferred it to one on *beni commestabili*, pointed out that in such a system the poor would gain through employment and the rich would pay without difficulty 1 tr. per head and the Order would get an annual subsidy of 36,000 sc. It was calculated that there were 18,000 persons in Malta able to work, and at the rate of two days each per month and each paying the value of 1 tr. per day, they would give 36,000 sc. But the Order thought otherwise for, as Verospi pointed out to the Grandmaster on 3 June 1673, the *neuba* had already been introduced at the beginning of the building of the fortifications at the rate of four days work per year per person. In other words, the Order required nothing less than 100,000 sc. of gold as quickly as possible.³³

Opposition to the tax on *beni stabili* persisted, but as the fortifications were considered necessary for the security of the Island, on 17 December 1672, the Inquisitor was informed that the Pope was ordering him to assist the Bishop to force ecclesiastics to pay their tax without further delay. To make his position more efficacious, the Inquisitor was empowered to threaten deprivation of benefices, suspension and any other punishments he deemed fit. He was also instructed to issue a precept to make insubordinate clerics appear personally before him within a given time. Patentees who did not wish to co-operate and pay the tax could be deprived of their patent and even be suspended from their duties. But it seems that the protests were making way, for the Inquisitor was also asked to give his opinion on whether it was better if the tax was commuted to one on *beni commestabili*. If this was considered practicable and he agreed, a Brief could be prepared and forwarded to him.³⁴

While having such power to make all ecclesiastics pay their dues, the Inquisitor seemed, according to the Grandmaster, to be slow in executing the orders given to him to check those who protested

33. A.O.M., Ms. 1290, Verospi to Cottoner 3 June 1673.

34. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, ff. 67 - 68.

against the tax and to force them to pay. So he instructed his Ambassador in Rome to appeal to the Pope and to Cardinal Altieri to make the Inquisitor accomplish his commission.³⁵ It was further implied by the Order that many Maltese were taking refuge in Churches or fraudulently taking the clerical habit to avoid payment. When the Bishop affixed copies of letters on the said tax for public view, many priests complied but there were still others who remained obstinate.³⁶ Yet the Inquisitor was not considered to be procrastinating by his superiors: the Pope praised him for his vigour while on another occasion (within a week) he was praised for having managed to calm the people and ensured respect towards the Grandmaster.³⁷ Although public peace was being ensured, there was still opposition to the tax and the Inquisitor proposed to the Grandmaster on 27 August 1672 to commute the tax into another one on *beni commestabili*. To try to ensure further peace, the Inquisitor also proposed the removal of the *moneta di rame* and thus it was hoped that malcontents would be turned into demonstrators of gratitude.³⁸

In other words the Grandmaster was being made to change his decision in favour of the tax. Early in 1673 a resolution was taken to Rome to prepare a new Brief to enable the Grandmaster to impose this new tax. For this reason Cardinal Altieri informed the Order's Ambassador through the Prior De Vecchi that this was being proposed by the Inquisitor and that it had been approved by Cotoner.³⁹ At the same time the Inquisitor was informed that the Brief was going to be prepared in such a way as to appear that it was being required by the Grandmaster to ensure peace and obedience among his subjects.⁴⁰ Mgr. Pallavicino was further advised by Mgr. Casanate, who knew Malta well, on how to proceed to calm the people.⁴¹

While these diplomatic concerts were going on, some Canons still persisted in their opposition even to this commuted tax. The Inquisitor hoped to call on the Bishop to advise him to submit the defaulting Canons to his orders that they may serve as an example to other ecclesiastics.⁴² On 16 January 1673, Bishop Astirias wrote to the Inquisitor telling him that he had informed his Canons about the Pope's mind and intentions regarding the tax concerned and emphasized obedience. However, he felt that his word was not enough and therefore requested the assistance of the Inquisitor who quickly replied that he

35. A.O.M., Ms. 1290, Verospi to Cotoner 18 February 1673.

36. *Ibid.*, Verospi to Cotoner 25 February 1673.

37. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, ff. 74v., 78v.

38. *Ibid.*, ff. 49, 51.

39. A.O.M., Ms. 1290, Verospi to Cotoner 4 March 1673.

40. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, f. 82v.

41. A.O.M., Ms. 1290, Verospi to Cotoner 18 May 1673.

42. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27 A, "Stimai d'inisnuare a' questo Mons. Vescovo la chiamata de suoi Can. contumachi per farli ravveduti accio dall'esempio loro gl'altri eccl. s'arrendessero".

was ready to give all the help necessary.⁴³ The situation, however, was rather irksome for the Inquisitor for, because of Cardinal Altieri's orders regarding those priests who did not submit to the imposition of tax, by 25 January 1673 he found himself being criticised by both the Grandmaster and the Bishop. On 18 January 1673, the Bishop had written to him indicating that the Canons had often declared him suspect, and that therefore help was required to make them submit to his authority. The next day Bishop Astirias noted that the principal leaders were Canon Alessandro Bologna, Canon Matteolo Xeberras, Canon Antonio Testaferata, Canon Domenico Attard and Canon Girolamo Piscopo besides the Archdeacon and the Cleric Ferdinando Vassallo, who, together with Dr. Pietro Perdicomato Bologna and Dr. Domenico De Bono, pretended to be the advocates of the clergy which was threatening to refuse to submit to the Apostolic See.⁴⁴ Mgr. Pallavicino quickly made these Canons submit to order by making full use of the power vested in his authority. With the approval of Cardinal Altieri, he issued an order on the 5 February 1673 threatening with suspension, deprivation of dignity and ecclesiastical benefices, Canons Bologna, Xeberras and Testaferata and ordering them to present themselves within ten days and to appear before the Roman Court.⁴⁵ Once handed to the Canons concerned, this note helped to change the attitude of the reluctant clergy: on 25 February 1673, an apology was presented to the Inquisitor who was kindly asked to intercede for them to ensure the Pope's pardon whilst they promised total obedience.⁴⁶ Their attitude was so changed that the Grandmaster himself interceded on their behalf before the Inquisitor.⁴⁷ Mgr. Pallavicino appeared to be adamant in his decision as he wanted to reserve the granting of pardon to His Holiness.⁴⁸ In fact it was the Pope himself who, through his Cardinal-Inquisitor, informed him that since the Canons had shown obedience to the Bishop and the Grandmaster, it was being left to the Inquisitor's will to exempt them from surrendering themselves to the Roman Court within a prescribed time and the cumbersome and expensive voyage to Rome. The Pope wanted him to admonish them and to tell them to be more careful and obedient in the

43. *Ibid.*, ff. 46 - 46v.

44. *Ibid.*, ff. 59 - 60v.

45. *Ibid.*, ff. 78 - 78v.

46. *Ibid.*, f. 104, "Li Canonici infrascritti della Catedrale di Malta umilissim suditi servi et ob. di V.E. riverentemente e con ogni dovuto ossequio la supplicano a' scusarli, ed ad intercedere a' loro il perdono da S.S. per non havere ciecamente e senza replica ubbedito a' gl'ordini di V.E. intorno al pagamento della tassa prima d'esser stati spagnati, sequestrati li beni di alcuni di loro, et altri citati per andare a' Roma e genuflessi a' suoi santissimi piedi supplichano per la continuatione del Suo Clementissimo patrocino verso tutto il clero ..."

47. *Ibid.*, f. 106v, "dopo la sudetta intimazione sono stati collo loro obbedienza d'esempio alli pertinaci mentre tutti questi Isolani concorrono presentamente alla volontà del Sommo Pontefice."

48. *Ibid.*, f. 110, "quale però non volle liberarli affatto, ma' riservare il compimento della grazia a' Sua Santità".

future.⁴⁹ On 18 March 1673, the Inquisitor received a congratulatory despatch for his vigorous assistance to the Bishop and the Grandmaster in ensuring peace and respect towards authority. It was felt that the Grandmaster, the Bishop and the Holy See itself would express their gratitude for his services, while he was encouraged to make the Maltese more loyal towards him and to make them obedient subjects of the Holy See. It was also felt opportune to commute the tax and to encourage the Order to suppress the *moneta di rame* and thus a well-founded stimulus for a possible revolt in Malta could be removed.⁵⁰

While this storm abated, the Inquisitor waited for the Brief that would empower the commutation of the tax to one on *beni commestabili* as this was considered essential to pacify the Island completely.⁵¹ In April 1673, Ambassador Verospi informed Cotoner that though he had met Cardinal Altieri and thanked him for his help and for the action the Inquisitor in suppressing the troublesome Canons, he had got no information about the expected Brief.⁵² On 24 April, Mgr. Pallavicino confirmed that he had pardoned the disobedient Canons⁵³ and that he was anxiously awaiting the publication of the Brief to ensure peace and tranquility in the Island. He feared that procrastination would provide an opportunity for some disaffected Grand Crosses to foment opposition against the Grandmaster.⁵⁴

In May 1673 the Council of the Order was convened at the request of the Inquisitor. It agreed to condescend to his desire and to the wish of Maltese exemptees to commute the tax for the fortifications into one on *beni commestabili*. The official record of the Order notes that this was done for the benefit of all the people and to conform with the sentiments of the Pope.⁵⁵ The Brief of Clement X approving commutation was issued on 1 July 1673.⁵⁶ The Pope desired that deputies were to be chosen to keep record of bills which were to be collected daily, and that among these deputies there was to be someone selected to take care of dues collected from ecclesiastics and exemptees. Moreover the Inquisitor was instructed to send an annual report on the quantity collected and respectively applied in financing the fortifications, while he was to register such instructions at his Chancery.⁵⁷ The declaration of the quota

49. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, ff. 83 - 83v.

50. *Ibid.*, ff. 83v - 84.

51. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27 A, f. 182, "per toglier ogni sospensione d'anime in questi Isolai, che doppo un'grandissimo strepito, et tempesta s'ingelosiscono hormai da tanta calme; il Cauchi Vicario, e Bologna Can. fattionarii tra' preti, e nemici, Dio m'ha', permesso d riconciliarli, perche non habbia in pregiud. di clero a' fomentarsi nove scissure ..."

52. A.O.M., Ms. 1290, Verospi to Cotoner 19 April 1673.

53. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27 A, f. 206.

54. *Ibid.*, ff. 239 - 239v.

55. *Ibid.*, f. 241; A.O.M., Ms. 282, f. 12.

56. N.L.M., Libr. Ms., 1209, ff. 493 - 501.

57. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, f. 94v - 95.

which was to be imposed proportionately on every item, was to remain at the will of the Grandmaster and the Inquisitor together while accounts were to be kept to ensure that the sum of 100,000 sc. would not be exceeded. At the same time, the Inquisitor received two letters, one which had to be presented to the Grandmaster empowering him to execute the new Brief and the other, with the date left blank, to be made use of by the Inquisitor to stimulate the Grandmaster to suppress the *moneta di rame* at an opportune time.⁵⁸ A copy of the Brief was also handed to the Ambassador to be forwarded to the Grandmaster at the same time. This was received on 26 August 1673.⁵⁹ So the new tax was levied on concessions of monopolies for brandy, tobacco, playing cards and other articles which the Grandmaster could decide. To avoid evasion, the Grandmaster and the Inquisitor nominated officials to check the accounts with the help of the Jurats of the Università while a balance sheet was to be presented annually to the Inquisitor to be forwarded to Rome.⁶⁰ The Grandmaster also granted monopolies for leather, soap, paper and coffee. The deputation in charge of the collection of the tax included Gio Andrea Cangialanza who represented the Grandmaster, and Fabritio Testaferrata who represented the Inquisitor. The deputation started its work, while the Inquisitor was informed by the Cardinal-Inquisitors that now he was to see that everything was executed punctually.⁶¹ The Inquisitor duly conformed with these orders and, on 1 April 1675, forwarded a note of exactions made as required by the Brief.⁶²

But it seems that problems still existed for the Inquisitor who had constrained officials of the Holy Office to pay the tax. The patentees

58. *Ibid.*, ff. 95 - 95v.

59. A.O.M., Ms. 262, f. 16.

60. N.L.M., Libr. Ms. 740, ff. 108 - 108v.

61. A.I.M. Corr., Ms. 12, f. 223.

62. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27 C, ff. 90 - 90v, reports on 1 April 1675

"Gio Batta Vella gabellotto delle carte

affittate li a sc. 800 l'anno deve dal

1 Nov. 1673 sino l'ult.Feb.75 (16 mesi):

suddetto: gabellotto dell'acquavita a 2001 sc. l'anno

Luigi Cassia gabellotto della carta a 705 sc. l'anno

Antonio Leone gabellotto de tabacco a 5580 l'anno

Natale Grech gabellotto de sapone a 2305 l'anno

Desiderio Xuerep gabellotto de caffè a 630sc.

Marcello Revers gabellotto de corame a 1671 sc.

1066 sc. 8 tr. 0 gr.

2668 sc. 0 tr.

883 sc. 3 tr.

6976 sc. 8 tr.

2883 sc. 0 tr.

787 sc. 6 tr.

278 sc. 6 tr.

15545 sc.10tr.

Till 31 May 1680 these monopolies had ensured the following balance:

Tobacco 37424sc. 7tr. 0gr.

Soap 13607sc. 4tr. 0gr.

Leather 11772sc.11tr. 0gr.

Brandy 8541sc. 8tr.14gr.

Playing Cards 3962sc. 6tr. 0gr.

Paper 4926sc. 6tr. 0gr.

Coffee 2552sc. 1tr. 0gr.

of the Holy Office, usually protected by the privilege of immunity, now found that property belonging to them was being taken as required for the fortifications. They felt aggrieved as they suspected that they would not get what was due to them for their lands. So they requested the Inquisitor to intercede on their behalf. The price of the expropriated land, was ensured by the Inquisitor by 13 May 1673, but this did not mean that Order's officials readily and promptly paid them their value.⁶³ One of the patentees who was gravely affected was Domenico Bonnici who had always been among the leaders who opposed the Order. According to the Inquisitor he lost what was probably the most beautiful garden in Malta and which was valued at 15,000 sc. though when it was evaluated by the Order's officials, it was evaluated at 6,000 sc. only. The Inquisitor could not ensure the price Bonnici desired as he had no jurisdiction over active cases of his patentees who were always badly treated by lay judges. He could only intercede for him before the Grand Master.⁶⁴ But Bonnici was not even ready to accept the decisions of the lay court and so he soon lost the Inquisitor's protection and his patent. He had become troublesome even to the Inquisitor and it was noted that when he was offered payment for his property, he proceeded to occupy sites other than those assigned to him and these included streets and coastal areas.⁶⁵ Though Bonnici was unreasonable in his demands, it was an admitted fact that many patentees suffered because although the Grand Master showed good intentions, nothing happened in fact and no prompt justice was done to the patentees.⁶⁶ For this reason in May 1674, the Inquisitor had to draw the attention of the Grand Master during one of their meetings.⁶⁷ His demands were soon strengthened with a letter which Cardinal Altieri forwarded to him to show to the Grandmaster if necessary.⁶⁸ By January 1675, the Inquisitor was able to report that one other victim of the lay court's indifference to requests for payments for expropriated lands, was a widow, Vincentia Castelletti, but he had managed to get indemnity for his *famigliari*.⁶⁹

The Grandmaster's desire to impose tax for the fortifications and the ecclesiastics' and patentees' pretention to be singularly protected by ecclesiastical immunity on the other hand, were the cause of what would now be described as a political question on what type of taxation should be imposed and whether the Prince of the Island had the right to impose

63. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27, f. 89.

64. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27 A, f. 175.

65. A.I.M. Corr., Ms. 12, f. 244; A.O.M., Ms. 1445, Cotoner to Verospi 22 August 1675; A.O.M., Ms. 1292, Verospi to Cotoner 21 September 1675 where it is indicated that Bonnici's petition to get back his patent was being opposed even by the Ambassador.

66. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27 B, f. 61.

67. *Ibid.*, f. 77.

68. *Ibid.*, f. 136.

69. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27 C, f. 12.

it. Within the circumstances, it is clearly seen that the Inquisitor, Mgr. Pallavicino played an important part first in quietening the so-called rebels and then in bringing about a commutation in the tax whilst at the same time, under the guidance of the Cardinal-Inquisitors and the Roman Court, he managed to save face for the Grand Master who thus appeared as a benevolent prince who was ready to commute the tax as the people desired. One problem that Cotoner had to face unwittingly was the security of the funds that were being collected: on 12 March 1673 a thief had entered into the house of Canon Colonia, the *Depositario* of the tax that was being levied on ecclesiastics, with the intention of stealing the amount then so far collected. The thief was only stopped by the shouts of a slave woman.⁷⁰ In such circumstances, Cotoner had to ensure full security for the collection of tax so much needed for the building of the massive walls around the harbour.

70. A.S.V., Fondo Malta, Ms. 27 A, f. 123v.

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THE HONEST VILLAIN

David Cremona

Othello is one of the most notable works in the Shakespearean canon, interesting as well for its affinities with some of the other plays as for its differences. In having for protagonist a great and noble soldier of mature years who is at once deeply in love and through that love is driven to degradation and ruin, for instance, it recalls *Antony and Cleopatra*. In that the mainspring of the action is the onset of jealousy leading to a kind of madness and having fatal consequences, the similarity is to *A Winter's Tale*. The subtle Italian schemer who wilfully slanders an innocent wife to her lord, producing circumstantial evidence to back his accusation, and whose machinations are only exposed after much sorrow and suffering, is to be seen again in *Cymbeline* — even Iago and Iachimo are merely variants of the same name. The wholly amoral philosophy of the villain, coupled with a parallel gift for improvisation and characterised by an earthy humour, had appeared in as early a play as *Richard III*, the eponymous hero of which is identically motivated by a desire to 'check Such as are of better nature than myself'. The same reductivist view of the human animal and a cynical readiness to take advantage of it were to reappear in Edmund as he intrigues his way through *King Lear*. Examples could be multiplied: even the Venetian setting of the first act had been used before in *The Merchant of Venice*, where moreover a princely and magniloquent Moor had briefly made an appearance. The laws of the Signiory had even in that play been seen to bow a little to expediency: ominous precedent.

The most striking point of difference, at least where the tragedies of Shakespeare's maturity are concerned, is perhaps that though *Othello* is beyond question a tragedy in any accepted sense of the word, there rest on its outcome no great issues of human empire or spiritual regeneration: the scheme of things entire has not been threatened, and even the security of the Venetian dominion has been assured before the events unfold which constitute the action of the play; the tragedy then is private and poignant. We are left, when all is over, with the sentiment summed up by *Othello* himself: the pity of it. The scale is intimate, domestic.

Another and a seemingly minor difference, but one which affords scope for discussion and is largely the basis of this paper, is what might almost be called a quirk of procedure, though its dynamic function in

the play is considerable. All the great tragedies, and not a few of the comedies, make use of structural images and a linked series of key words: 'nature' and the unnatural in *Macbeth*, with the attendant motifs of darkness and blood, or the unrestrained and cruel bestiality of *Lear*; the opposed elements of solid and liquid in *Antony*, and so forth. But it is seldom that a dominant epithet is repeated with such frequency, and never is it attached so invariably and with such dramatic irony to one particular person, as the word 'honest' is in *Othello*. There are, to be sure, other loaded words used, and a series of images independent of, as well as some which support, the theme of honesty. The seas which gave Venice her eminence and her very streets are those that wash around Cyprus: sea imagery and the terms of shipping intimately connected with it thus provide an imaginative as well as a historical and geographical link between the two settings and further emphasise the continuity of action. Iago's curt complaints of being 'be-lee'd and calm'd' and the highly wrought Othello's sonorous invocation of 'the Propontic and the Hellespont' both derive from the same ductile source. Then there are the antithetical pairs, white and black, purity and grime: simple, obvious and dramatically valid contrasts. At a more complex level, 'super-subtle' Venetians and 'extravagant' barbarians are held up as foils, each to other, and the differences between the life of camp and city and, more starkly, the possible incompatibility between maturity and youth, have their own cluster of images: the tapestry is as closely woven and as richly coloured as in any of the great plays.

It is the concept of honesty however which is harped on so insistently, with a cumulative effect of irony not dissimilar to Antony's use of 'honourable' in his rabble-rousing oration in *Julius Caesar*, though far more subtly and over a considerably larger period. For those who cherish statistics, adjective and abstract noun are used some fifty-two times in the course of the action. And it is an essential part of the strategy of deception that both should be most often applied to, and sometimes by, the one man whose flagrant villainy works through a sustained pretence of honesty, and so successfully (for a while) that 'honest Iago' becomes as much an invariable and defining epithet as pious Aeneas in Vergil, or 'swift Achilles' and 'wily Odysseus' in the Homeric epics: the effect, to an audience equipped to appreciate it, is richly, bitterly ironical. As of course it was in Shakespeare's mind that it should be.

Hypocrisy has been memorably defined as the homage which vice pays to virtue. It was a commonplace, particularly in the Elizabethan age, that many who practised public morality might well be villains in their hearts; merely, they found it more profitable to conform in their outward behaviour to received norms of ethical conduct. It was this awareness that underlay the preoccupation with Appearance and Reality which surfaced so often in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama; and in

Shakespeare, who in so many ways saw deeper and felt more keenly than his contemporaries, it often colours much of his tragic vision of fallen man. It is as central to his view of society in constant danger of disruption as are the stabilizing principles of Order and Degree to his political thinking; that is, to his concept of the hierarchical structure which alone, as he saw it, could preserve that society from individual human evil and the innate tendency to chaos which such evil inevitably enhanced. This pattern is unmistakable in the mature dramas: villainy for a time masked as virtue slowly eroding the bonds of human community in family and state, and the restabilization of that community through the eventual exposure and punishment of the source of evil, very often at extreme cost to the virtuous and the innocent. In this last lies the tragedy.

Iago is the villain in *Othello*. To the Romantic critics, he was the Shakespearean villain *par excellence*, and they were inclined to invest him with as much factitious grandeur as they did Milton's Satan, and even more nonsensically: one might call it the Promethean (or She'leyesque) Fallacy. Even Coleridge, who had more insight than most, babbled of Iago's 'motive-hunting of motiveless malignancy' in terms suggesting almost the Satanic. Shakespeare, one would have thought, had gone out of his way to reject just such hysteria — 'but that's a fable'. Certainly critics less cloistered and rather less given to hyperbole take a simpler view. Shakespeare — his works offer abundant confirmation — was not the man to overlook that evil is in itself petty, small-minded, notwithstanding the enormity of harm it may cause. In his world, where a decaying Mediaevalism had still left much power in the gift of a few great lords and their households, he must have had daily experience of unscrupulous place-seekers scrabbling for position, fawning obsequiously on their superiors and adroitly back-stabbing their rivals. In any case, the text makes it very clear that Iago, far from being the far-sighted and malignant mastermind who has already at the outset plotted the destruction of his general, the general's wife, his lieutenant, his dupe and (for luck) his own wife, is essentially no more than that (to an Elizabethan) excessively familiar petty scoundrel, the 'coney-catcher': that is, a small-time confidence trickster who lived by exploiting unsophisticated and often foolish provincial visitors to London, rich young gentlemen usually, acting as their guide to the supposedly exotic pleasures of the capital, and spending their money for them. Shakespeare's London was full too of discharged and often disgruntled veterans of the Dutch wars, hard-living and hard-drinking men with no more scruples than such men usually have. Iago, living off Roderigo and temporarily between wars, is just such an amalgam as one might expect Shakespeare to make from his experience. Iago is in fact a professional (ie: a mercenary) soldier, an officer. When the play opens, he conceives he has a grudge against his own C.O., Othello, since he believes that he has been passed over for promotion in favour of a

less experienced man. He chooses to believe (or half-believe) that that same C.O. has seduced his wife; added to the other, this is external motive enough to set him going, and the nasty little man grinds into action, reviewing any possible means to gratify his injured vanity and vent his spite: it hardly amounts to more than that at first. What is more, he is repeatedly in danger of being seen through even by his notably foolish 'gull', Roderigo, who has to be fobbed off with more empty promises and hearty encouragement. Improvising hastily, hurried from shift to shift, instinctively adapting circumstances to his purpose, adding with each expedient a further tottering storey to the ramshackle edifice of his plot, the entire makeshift structure threatening to come down on his head at any moment, he bustles on: mere action keeps him going for a while. But he is the victim of his own momentum, and the situation soon snowballs beyond his direction or control; and for all that he can stand by and derive mean-souled satisfaction from the spectacle of degradation and death he has somehow contrived, he is as inexorably caught up in it as any of his hapless victims. Nor, when all is revealed at the end, can he make any sort of statement to explain himself. No: in his own small way a brilliant pragmatic tactician undoubtedly, making full use of the initiative that is traditionally the ambusher's: but by no manner of means a grand strategist of evil. Othello had his measure from the start: competence without imagination, decidedly not officer material.

It is his technique however with which we are concerned here. Like all confidence tricksters anywhere and at any time, his chief stock-in-trade is the projection of an aura of absolute reliability, of integrity, such that all sorts of people will be ready to swear blind to his honesty. Usually this is done in one of two ways, though there may be minor variations: there is the assumption of a child-like innocence, a guilelessness so convincing that all thought of duplicity becomes inconceivable. At the other extreme, one might adopt an air of cynical hard-bitten directness, as of one who has seen the corruption of the world and become outwardly disillusioned, though retaining a basic code of honour. Shakespeare played the changes on these two attitudes often enough: Richard of Gloucester at different times essays both, affecting to be a plain man who thinks no harm even if he is outspoken, and later a simple soul like 'the infant that is born tonight', and thanking his God for his humility. Of the alternatives, a veteran soldier who had knocked about the world could scarcely opt for a child-like simplicity; rather he chooses to exaggerate a certain professional coarseness of grain, a callousness of manner and hardening of conscience — short, to be sure, of 'contrived murder'. The very self-accusation, in this light, becomes a warranty of his rugged 'honesty'. The manner was not uncommon, even in genuinely honest men: Aenobarbus in *Antony* is one such, a faithful war-hardened soldier with a sardonic tongue and a jaundiced eye, but his honour — though he falls from grace for a time — is strong enough

to kill him. The loyal Kent in *Lear*, adopting it as a disguise, is wrongly accused of being what Iago in fact is. The passage is worth quoting:

This is some fellow
Who, having been prais'd for bluntness, doth affect
A saucy roughness and constrains the garb
Quite from his nature. He cannot flatter, he;
An honest man and plain — he must speak truth.
An they will take it, so; if not, he's plain.
These kind of knaves I know, which in their plainness
Harbour more craft and more corrupter ends
Than twenty silly ducking observants
That stretch their duties nicely.

This kind of 'honesty', then, depends to some extent on an avowal of venial faults, and often on a declaredly soured view of human activity. It is only a partial 'self-revelation', made with the intent of deceiving; even so, it may vary in degree. Roderigo, Iago's dupe, is also made in some measure his confidant. No doubt this is partly a stage convention, rather more plausible than the simple soliloquy, whereby the audience may be kept informed of the true motivation of the character onstage; but it has the added function of involving Roderigo as intimate, and later as accomplice, of the plotter. But even to Roderigo, only so much can be revealed; and even then his is an inconvenient knowledge which makes his death inevitable when things come to a head. It is questionable whether Iago could reveal himself fully; shallow as his character is, his self-knowledge is all surface. It might be thought that his reductive philosophy has effectively reduced his own intellect: he has simplified himself below humanity.

But the word 'honesty' in Elizabethan times, and particularly in Shakespeare and in this play, embraced rather more than even this large concept of 'integrity', with its branching virtues of loyalty, trustworthiness, truthfulness and responsible action. One aspect of it has already been adumbrated: the blunt forthrightness which can so easily become censoriousness; Iago claims he is nothing if not critical. That is, he expects to find faults in his fellow-men, and find fault he constantly does — whether it is there or not. This shading of the word 'honest' must, I believe, be given its full consideration in any reading of Iago's character. For this facet of his 'honesty', though he plays it down till it seems a mere quirkiness, corresponds to something which is genuinely Iago. To Roderigo he professes to believe — he does believe — in the falsity of all human claims to virtue; he is sceptical of all ethical behaviour. Yet while he mockingly rejects the possibility that any of his fellow-men (and women) could seriously be motivated by principle, or pay it more than lip-service (fools apart, that is), he paradoxically resents and hates, to the point of willing their destruction, those around him whom he must acknowledge to be so motivated. For all his sneering at 'honest knaves' and 'free and open' natures — at anything that savours of the noble

and the generous — he must concede that they exist: and it is unendurable that people with such virtues should survive. They show up his meanness. Thus, Cassio must die because 'he has a daily beauty in his life That makes me ugly'. It is why he is so willing to believe that Othello has bedded Emilia, and that Desdemona would very likely soon tire of her lord and look elsewhere: it would confirm his reassuring view of mankind as selfish, greedy and amoral. In short, himself writ large. Anyone who is not as corrupt as he, threatens his *raison d'être*. The mask of affected cynicism is thus seen to hide the hideous reality of a total and annihilating cynicism: as a disguise, not without subtlety, and easier than most to maintain.

Yet another meaning of the word which Elizabethan English still retained is that yet current in most Romance languages: honesty as sexual fidelity or (in the unmarried) as chastity. In this sense it was most frequently (though by no means exclusively) used of women. In a play where three women at some time have their sexual conduct queried, this aspect cannot of course be ignored. Bianca, identified as a courtesan, is clearly not 'honest', though she may claim at one point to be more honest than Emilia. Iago's wife seems honest enough — she indignantly reproaches her husband for crediting reports of her alleged affair with Othello. On the other hand, she is 'honest' (ie: candid) enough to admit in confidence to her mistress, to whom she is devotedly loyal (honest again), that, with the world offered as an inducement, she would unhesitatingly cuckold her husband, if only for his own good. There is an obvious humour in the idiomatic 'for all the world'; it is all remotely hypothetical, and no more than a jest, no doubt. Nonetheless there are echoes of profounder things here: as, what shall it profit a man if he gain all the world, and lose his soul? Fanciful? I think not. Biblical echoes are to be heard more unmistakably in a short while. Desdemona, whose real and unassailable 'honesty' is so vilely and so fatally slandered, finds it inconceivable that there should be such women; she wonders at Emilia. But how does this affect Iago, except as a means of entangling Othello? The fact is that he is irredeemably foul-minded, not merely in that he sneers at female virtue as he sneers at male honour, but in that the very cast of his mind is smutty: his natural mode of self-expression is the brutally graphic and the obscene, beyond the licence granted to a rough soldier and roistering boon companion. In his view, man is never more typically bestial than when coupling: he relishes each grunt and groan. In Iago, sexuality itself is corrupt.

There are more nuances yet to the word, and one particularly that, just forming in idiomatic usage at the end of the Sixteenth Century, was to establish itself as one of the favourite epithets of the late Seventeenth in the ruffianly *milieu* of Restoration London. Shakespeare seems especially to have loathed its implications, as we know he loathed spariels. As with many idiomatically extended words, it is easier to recognise the complexity it refers to than it is to define it. The *datum*

is that if a man is no better than he should be — coarse, aggressive, self-seeking, envious, whatever — it is, in this sense of the word, 'dishonest' to try and behave as if he were not. To act according to these basic impulses is therefore to be 'honest'. Or so it was felt at the time. It follows that when Iago talks to Roderigo about his guiding principle in life, he is being true to these characteristics and therefore 'honest'. The use has about it a jeering hearty 'that's the way I am, like it or lump it' air that sorts well with his temperament.

Even the basic connotation of honesty — that of integrity discussed above — is extended to cover, and not only in metaphor, parallel concepts like 'honour'; itself an elastic word in Shakespeare. Iago, when he shams a reluctance to sneak on Cassio for brawling, seems to suggest a sort of honour among colleagues: he will not betray a fellow in the mess and a superior officer; or that is the impression he tries to convey. Again he affects a similar unwillingness to expose the possibly (!) tainted workings of his mind to Othello when questioned about his suspicions of Desdemona; here honesty might mean something like 'decency'. Elsewhere it takes on shades of meaning to suggest respectability or even reputation. At its most fundamental, it need mean no more than a refusal to steal. But even in this sense, Iago is not honest; by proxy, and then in his own person, he steals the fatal handkerchief and plants it where it will do the most damage. But this is merely a detail: his entire relationship with Roderigo is an extended 'cozenage' — a creating of expectation compounded with a repeated extraction of money under a series of false pretences. In a word, lies. Lies come readily to Iago: Cassio's sole act of drunkenness, Othello's unprecedented harshness, are multiplied into habitual action by the 'sorrowful' Ancient. (I wonder, incidentally, whether the title stirred memories in Shakespeare's richly allusive mind: perhaps that of the two elders, grown ancient in sin, who slandered Susanna almost to her death, but as it turned out to their own undoing. No timely Daniel to discover all, here). Iago's career in the events of the play is a living lie, of course, built up of wilful and increasingly mischievous misrepresentation of what he sees. The essential lie is in Iago himself, in his deliberate acceptance that the values of humanity are as warped as are his own; that, because he is villainous, there shall be no more faith and truth.

It is in the light of all these interpretations that the deeply ironic qualifying epithet of 'honest' Iago is seen to be mordantly appropriate. And it seems possible to argue further that Shakespeare was representing in Iago one kind of Renaissance man, then new, since become almost a stereotype. I mean the sort of personality that later ages would call, depending on the context, a free-thinker or an anarchist: one who prided himself ('plumed' if we accept the reading of the Folio) on despising the established social, moral, and religious values and the structures which embodied them, and assumed a posture of sturdy independence. Hobbes was to be such a man in England; Macchiavelli was considered the proto-

type, if only through the distorted view that the Elizabethans had of him. The Romantics were to exalt the type as the heroic rebel; our own more cautious age might use words like nonconformist or, at most, 'outsider'. Many of these men have been malcontents; some were sincere in a negative and obstinate way; few have been man of any stature — the ill-tempered and stubborn Galileo was nothing like Brecht's dramatic presentation of him, for instance. Be that as it may, and it is a subjective view, what is not I think to be disputed is that Iago is, in the last analysis, an exceedingly shabby creature: a low trickster armed with a degree of cunning and some practical psychology, hag-ridden by a consuming contempt for human worth which somehow co-exists with an envy of that worth and a consequent compulsion to degrade and destroy it. Since hierarchy is one of the stabilizing factors in the society he professes to despise, there is in him too an element of envy towards his superiors in rank and class, and a delight in his ability to outwit them, for however short a time. Adapting his habitual social *persona* of bluff hard-headed man of the world, sceptical but basically sound enough, he contrives to enmesh his victim — as he blunders on, his victims — in the toils of a hastily improvised net, yet is himself caught up in its folds. To vary the metaphor, the situation very soon gets out of hand, developing beyond his control and in a direction other than his intention had directed it. What he destroys is infinitely beyond his capacity to understand, but the destruction is itself beyond his petty malice, almost accidental. He is intent even in his villainy. True, he is irresponsible enough to gloat over the ruin he has somehow engineered, but his was only the original impulse to harm; the dimensions of the tragedy are beyond his resources deliberately to compass. A small stone shifting underfoot precipitates a landslide and, in that vast mass of rubble, is buried without trace. Faced with his guilt, believing in nothing, he can say nothing to justify himself; his future is the imposed silence of one who has corrupted language, the medium of truth. In that he is consistent: his is to be, not the stoical silence of the hero in adversity, but the vacuum of human meaning that is his philosophy, the vast nothing of the petty nihilist. He is, after all, honest: true to the void within.

“LA NUVOLO DI SMOG”: RICERCA DI UN EDEN

Gerard Bugeja

Quando Calvino si accingeva a scrivere *La nuvola di smog*, pubblicato nel 1958, si facevano già sentire le conseguenze negative del processo industriale italiano, e del cosiddetto “boom” economico. Fra queste spiccavano l'inquinamento, più marcato nelle zone industrializzate, e il conseguente senso di vuoto, di spersonalizzazione, dovuto ad un sempre crescente ritmo frenetico che caratterizza la vita di tutto il mondo occidentale industrializzato. Sebbene l'italiano medio avesse accesso all'automobile, alle vacanze all'estero, ad una gamma infinita di utensili domestici (lavatrice, frigorifero, e via di seguito), sentiva che non tutto andava come doveva andare: l'aumento notevolissimo del tenore di vita chiedeva il suo caro prezzo. *La nuvola di smog* è la testimonianza viva di questo conflitto: da una parte, le esigenze sempre più assurde delle pesanti industrie siderurgiche, dell'e raffinerie, delle fabbriche per la produzione di materiale bellico; dall'altra parte, il bisogno urgente di preservare l'ambiente naturale, rivendicato dagli ecologi, accoppiato al desiderio di un ritorno ad uno stile di vita che sia più a misura d'uomo, messo a fuoco da gran parte dell'intelligentsia. A Italo Calvino, il quale è cresciuto nella Liguria, la regione dal clima temperato e mite, con la sua costa dalle acque nitide e pulite, e l'entroterra protetto dalle Alpi e rigoglioso di fiori e di piante, non può non rattristare tutto questo patrimonio che rischia di andare perduto per sempre. Egli è in preda ad un'angoscia terribile nel constatare quante persone si trovano schiacciate da tanta alienazione, dal non-vivere. Infatti i racconti antecedenti alla *Nuvola*, come la *Speculazione edilizia* e gli *Amori*, con il loro oggettivismo,¹ ponevano i protagonisti in una luce negativa, sottolineando la loro imminente degenerazione totale.²

Nella *Nuvola* tutti i personaggi subiscono pure la degradazione accordata ai personaggi dei racconti testé accennati: soffrono e patiscono l'inquinamento nei suoi aspetti fisici e morali, come nella *Speculazione edilizia* Quinto Anfossi è stato risucchiato dal vortice che si chiama

1. Con “oggettivismo”, s'intende quel tipo di racconto in cui lo scrittore non interviene. Il protagonista di solito in terza persona appare come un pupazzo. Nella *Speculazione* Quinto Anfossi è la vittima del “momento economico”, condizionato a tal punto da esso che non può non arrendersi.

2. Osservazione rilevata da C. Calligaris in *Italo Calvino*, (Milano, 1973), p.67.

“guadagno facile”. Ma nella *Nuvola*, come ha ben rilevato Calligaris,³ il protagonista è conscio di questa auto-distruzione, anche perché il racconto procede in prima persona. Il subire è “decisione di subire “in cui “si delinea un atteggiamento di rivolta tutto represso e tutto implicito”.⁴ Non solo il “dottore” ma anche il sindacalista Omar Gasaluzzi è preoccupato, anzi angosciato dal grigiore che opprime tutta l'umanità. Essi non ritengono, come fanno invece gli altri personaggi quali Claudia e Avandero, che la soluzione sia nell'evadere e nel crearsi un mondo finto, illudersi di non vedere l'inquinamento, di non pensare ai problemi, di plasmare una bellezza ideale distaccata dalla realtà. Soltanto partendo dalla constatazione che esiste il grigiore, che siamo assillati dalle malattie e dalla morte, si può cominciare a rimarginare le ferite inferte contro la natura, contro l'uomo e il suo *habitat*. Purtroppo, questo progettato ritorno alla natura non è che risolva di colpo i problemi, perché anche la natura può configurarsi come un mito, e come tale sarebbe irrazionale.⁵ Bisogna infatti trovare il giusto equilibrio fra natura e civiltà, un rapporto che rivendichi i diritti di entrambi, senza che un termine sopraffaccia l'altro.

Come si può dedurre, il racconto di *Calvino* desta interesse non tanto con la delineazione del protagonista o dei personaggi (la quale è spesso arida), quanto con gli scontri di opinioni dei vari personaggi. Un critico ha messo a fuoco il carattere di *conte philosophique*, cioè di romanzo filosofico dei racconti di *Calvino*, rilevando che “le situazioni sono più importanti dei personaggi, le idee dei sentimenti, e il ritmo degli avvenimenti, il susseguirsi rapido dei fatti, degli episodi, appaiono più degni di attenzione della coerenza realistica (nel senso ottocentesco del termine), della verisimiglianza romantica”.⁶ Infatti sebbene nella *Nuvola* non possa sfuggire al lettore una certa monotonia nel raccontare arido (un appunto imperdonabile mosso dal critico testé accennato), si possono nel contempo apprezzare certi dibattiti, un certo argomentare finissimo e arguto, che rasentano a volta un'ermetica ambiguità; certo, non è di facile lettura perché allo scrittore premono le idee; e anche le situazioni sono spesso un pretesto per la messa a fuoco di idee-chiavi.

Dal racconto spicca, ad esempio, l'incomunicabilità fra le persone, specie se di estrazione sociale diversa. L'incomprensione si dimostra nei suoi aspetti più tragici nel rapporto fra il “Dottore” protagonista e Claudia, la sua fidanzata. Quando si trovano sulla terrazza della trattoria apprezzando il paesaggio autunnale, il protagonista, afferrando Claudia, esclama: “Guarda! Guarda laggiù!” Lei rimane sor-

3. E. Calligaris, *op.cit.*, p. 68.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Per l'approfondimento di questo aspetto, si consiglia la lettura delle pagine dedicate alla *Nuvola* in *Calvino* di Germana Pescio Bottino, (Firenze, 1976), pp.77-80.

6. G. Barberi Squarotti, *Poesia e narrativa del secondo novecento*, (Milano, 1978, 4ª ediz.), p. 232.

presa e gli chiede: "Ma cos'è? Cos'hai visto?" Mentre il protagonista è tutto terrorizzato dalla vista della nuvola di smog, Claudia non solo non se ne preoccupa, ma neanche se ne accorge. Un altro scontro avviene quando sono a colazione in un ristorante, e Claudia rileva che "la bellezza è sempre la bellezza, è eterna", al quale il Dottore replica che "la bellezza nasce sempre da un urto". Se nasce da un urto — dà ad intendere il Dottore — non sarebbe un concetto aprioristicamente stabilito, qualche idea di platonica reminiscenza, ma un fenomeno storicamente e culturalmente determinato. L'argomento del Dottore è più vicino all'idea aristotelica del continuo mutare e scontrarsi delle cose; concetto che è stato ripreso nel corso della storia da Bruno, Spinoza (*natura naturans*), Goethe (*bewegliche Ordnung*), e dall'antinomismo kantiano. La materia, per il protagonista, è *dynamis* on, "essente-in-possibilità" aperta al futuro, ma non è chiaro quale forza politica o ideologica possa fungere da tramite fra futuro e materia. Il protagonista è convinto che un certo stile di vita borghese non aiuta in nessun modo gli uomini a realizzare questo fine perché egli ritiene che la civiltà sarebbe anche crudeltà siccome vede il *maitre*, "in marsina... corpulento" che cattura il pesce che boccheggia, e gli avventori, che sono "gente di riguardo, una famiglia di agiati buongustai":⁸ descrizione dal timbro ironico che mette a nudo la vacuità, il mondo insulso dell'alta classe, o di quella borghese e benestante. Naturalmente non è che il Dottore tacci l'attività venatoria per scopi di sopravvivenza da parte dell'uomo; ma è certo che egli censura la mancanza di coscienza della sistematica distruzione del patrimonio naturale ed ecologico da parte di uomini che sembrano godere di tale spettacolo pietoso. Si è arrivati ad un punto fondamentale: se ci si può formare una coscienza e un concomitante senso di responsabilità di ciò che sta accadendo. Sulla scia della sociologia marxiana, l'autore dà ad intendere che la coscienza dell'individuo dipende dalla classe in cui si è nati e cresciuti: Claudia, che proviene dall'alta società, non può rendersi conto che la civiltà che lei tanto esalta serba anche il germe della sua stessa distruzione. Vale la pena di citare il brano che tratta dell'opinione che si è formato il protagonista della sua fidanzata:

Come dirle che rispondevo da un luogo pieno di polvere, che i listelli della persiana erano coperti di una nera crosta sabbiosa, che sui miei colletti c'era l'orma di un gatto, e che quello era l'unico mondo possibile per me, era l'unico mondo possibile al mondo, e il suo, di mondo, soltanto per un'illusione ottica poteva apparirmi esistente? Non mi sarebbe neanche stata a sentire, era troppo abituata a vedere tutto dall'alto e le circostanze meschine di cui era intessuta la mia vita era naturale che le sfuggissero. Tutti i suoi rapporti con me di cos'altro erano frutto se non di questa sua superiore distrazione, per cui non era mai riuscita a rendersi conto che io ero un modesto pubblicitista di provincia, senz'avvenire e senza ambizioni, e continuava a trattarmi

7. Calvino, *Nuvola di smog*, (Torino, 1978, 4ª ediz., p.49.

8. Calvino, *op.cit.*, pp.64-65.

come facessi parte dell'alta società di nobili, ricconi e artisti in cui s'era sempre mossa... (p.33).

Risulta infatti che si tratta di due persone da due classi sociali diverse che danno alle stesse parole (come "bellezza", "civiltà", e via dicendo) connotati diversi e non riescono perciò a capirsi. Il battibecco fra Claudia e il Dottore termina con una frase allucinante: "Con te non si può mai discutere", dove il "tu" indica coloro che sono intrappolati nell'ideologia della loro classe. L'unica speranza — e non è da scartare — sta nella capacità degli intellettuali di trascendere la visione miopica determinata dalla loro estrazione sociale. Il protagonista infatti capisce le ragioni per cui Claudia non lo comprende, mentre Claudia non è capace di questo esercizio.

Un altro motivo di speranza è costituito dal fatto che quando ci si esprime, nel discorso c'è anche l'Altro: l'Altro che è certo nell'inconscio ma che riemerge, asserisce la sua autorità, che "può essere quell'immagine più essenziale al desiderio del vivente che il vivente deve stringere per sopravvivere nella lotta o nell'amore";⁹ quando Cordà parla o scrive, questo *alter* si fa sentire in modo palese. A volte egli vuole cambiare il tempo di un verbo, dal futuro al presente, per dare più carica all'azione dell'Ente (da "risolveremo" a "lo stiamo risolvendo"). Così Cordà, che si identifica nell'azione riscattatrice dell'Ente fondato per combattere lo inquinamento, soddisfa l'Altro di sé, quell'altro che è in stridente, dissonante contrasto con l'Ego che produce lo smog.

Un'altra figura patetica è Margariti, la quale vive da sola e triste. Il suo bisogno di comunicare fa sì che lei si metta davanti allo specchio e "dialoghi" con se stessa, illudendosi che si tratti di un'altra persona; arriva pure a confabulare con il gatto, su cui riversa tutto il suo materno amore. Nello stesso tempo tiene pulitissime le stanze della sua casa, in cui non entra mai nessuno. Perché tutta questa ossessione? Secondo la teoria freudiana, la stanza, essendo forma chiusa, darebbe protezione e sarebbe allora simbolo del grembo materno, il luogo in cui lei si ricorda di trovarsi — magari a livello inconscio e fantasmagorico — in perfetto accordo con il cosmo. Come sostiene Bachelard,¹⁰ "l'essere della *rêverie* attraversa senza invecchiare tutte le età dell'uomo, dalla infanzia alla vecchiaia... Nella *rêverie* nasce il ricordo. I nostri ricordi ci restituiscono un semplice fiume che riflette un cielo appoggiato alle colline", un eden profondo, seppur provvisorio, in altre parole. Però, in questo anelito al silenzio del cosmo si ravvisa pure un'angoscia che, in sede psicanalitica, sarebbe il desiderio di morte, inteso come l'annullamento di tutto ciò che è vitale; il che sarebbe l'unico sbocco di gran parte della umanità alienata.¹¹ Margariti, ad esempio, ogni giorno legge la lista di coloro che

9. J. Lacan, *La cosa freudiana*, (Torino, 1972), p.240.

10. B. Bachelard, *La poetica della reverie*, (Bari, 1972), p.113.

11. Bisogna fare uno studio sulle implicazioni dei gesti ossessivi, come lo spolverare, per cogliere lo spirito del racconto, come ha fatto nei riguardi della

muoiono; nella quale abitudine si scorge una non dichiarata soddisfazione per l'autodistruzione.

Autodistruzione, speranze inconscie, incomunicabilità: tutto questo costituisce la vera sostanza della *Nuvola*. L'uomo perciò a stento si riconosce in questa siffatta società, anzi appare come un essere non ancora realizzato, e non facile a realizzarsi, per una serie di causa che siamo venuti individuando. Viene addirittura il sospetto che non ci si possa sottrarre ad una lenta ed inevitabile atrofia, e che si sia parte di una "ghiacciata moltitudine di morti", per dirla alla Montale. Vale la pena di citare il paragrafo con cui si chiude la descrizione del veglione di carnevale, dove l'atmosfera festosa e carnevalesca s'intreccia con un presentimento ominoso e catastrofico:

Era il carnevale; perché non avrei dovuto divertirmi? Le trombette ululavano scompigliando le loro frange spioventi, manciate di coriandoli picchiavano come uno sbriciolo di calcinacci le spalle delle marsine e quelle nude delle donne, s'infilavano nell'orlo dei *décolletés*, e dei colletti, e dai lampadari al pavimento s'ammucchiavano in molli grovigli spinti dallo scalpiccio dei ballerini si tendevano le stolle filanti come fasci di fibre ormai spoglie di materia o come fili rimasti penzolanti tra i muri crollati d'una distruzione generale. (p.69).

Tutta la nostra vita risulta essere un grande veglione, dove gli uomini, in una ridda erotica, si divertono nel guardare narcisisticamente (e masochisticamente) la loro nudità fisica, che rifletterebbe un'altra più terrificante nudità: godere del vuoto, dell'unica cosa consistente e vera che abbia l'uomo. E, si ricordi, nei veglioni s'indossano le maschere, che sarebbero noi stessi e le nostre idee storte: uomini mascherati e coriandoli colorati si confondono e si ammucchiano in un grande vortice assordante. Per uomini come Cordà, e donne come Claudia, stordirsi di questa *danse macabre* sarebbe una provvisoria tregua. Ma non ci sorprende il disagio del protagonista, che ha piena consapevolezza delle implicazioni di tale scena disumana.

Sullo sfondo di questo profondo pessimismo l'atteggiamento ottimistico di Omar Basaluzzi, il sindacalista che è entusiasta dei regimi marxisti asiatici, è motivo di ironia. Egli mostra al Dottore delle foto che ritraggono il "popolo asiatico, con berrettini di pelliccia e calzari", che "andava beatamente a pesca per un fiume". Si tratta di una scena idilliaca, certo, che attrarrebbe il protagonista se non fosse per il fatto che egli non crede che con i mezzi che questi paesi stanno usando si possa realizzare questo "paradiso"; perché anche loro dovranno lottare contro il problema della produzione di massa, dato che c'è il tornio, come gli rileva il protagonista. L'idea-chiave che l'autore vuole sottolineare è che ogni ideologia sarebbe pur essa condizionata dal sistema produttivo, dalla macchinizzazione dei mezzi di produzione; e sic-

come ogni paese vorrebbe svilupparsi e aumentare il tenore di vita, la produzione meccanica offre la più sicura scorciatoia per l'attuazione di tale ideale. Però così facendo causa l'inquinamento e l'autodistruzione del pianeta.

Sembra che l'autore, nelle ultime pagine del racconto, sia tutto rivolto a rivalutare il ruolo rasserenante della natura: "Io giravo tra i campi biancheggianti di roba stesa e mi voltai di scatto a uno scoppio di risa. Sulla riva di un canale, sopra una chiusa, c'era la sponda d'un lavatoio... e le file dei pioppi si facevano a ridosso della strada, segnando le rive dei requenti canali... e la campagna nel sole dava fuori il suo verde tra quel bianco, e l'acqua correva via via gonfia di bolle azzurrine" (pp.80-81): è la descrizione in chiave surrealistica del paese di Barca Bertulla dove l'unico mezzo di trazione è il mulo, e dove le donne e gli uomini vivono in un sereno pacifico umano sodalizio. Si aiutano, si raccontano barzellette, si amano; non sono ricchi, ma hanno una ricchezza interiore, il che li fa affrontare la vita come se fossero degli eroi. Diventa quasi mitica l'immagine della bambina "con le trecce" che "stava in cima alla montagna bianca dei sacchi"; come pure suggestiva, prometeica la forza del padre che scarica i sacchi pesanti. Anche le donne godono ottima salute, hanno "le braccia rotonde" e "i petti che andavano su e giù" — immagine di materna protezione, ma anche di forza, di vitalità, di vita: si fa sentire la distinzione fra chi vive in campagna e chi vive in città. Già altri scrittori si sono accorti della pelle sbiadita degli abitanti di città, come notò Proust nella sua *Albertine*, la parigina fragile e pallida, figura di morte.¹²

Ma, sebbene ri'evi il carattere positivo di questo ritorno alla natura, l'autore ci mette in guardia dal non lasciarci trarre in inganno, proprio perché questa *anamnesis* può anche essere un mito, un sogno: l'uomo e la sua intelligenza sono anche il frutto della natura, la sua ratio ha costruito delle civiltà. Bisogna allora trovare il giusto equilibrio fra *civitas* e natura. Oggi, più che mai, occorre che l'uomo si renda conto delle sue grosse responsabilità verso se stesso e verso i posteri.

12. Osservazione rilevata da W. Benjamin in *Angelus Novus*, (Torino, 1972), p.101.

INFLATION AND CURRENCY RATES

J.A. Consiglio

Floating exchange rates have now been the operative international exchange system for the past ten years or so. Their introduction at that time was greeted by widely varying public opinion.

The optimists hoped for a level of monetary autonomy, and for exchange rates which would follow the straight and narrow path of purchasing power. On the other hand the pessimists feared that floating would lead to serious problems and dislocations in international trade and capital movements.

Experience so far would seem to indicate that none of these extremist views is right. It is no more appropriate to speak of the grave effect of floating rates on world trade, than it is to speak of the complete autonomy of nations in regard to inflation, as was argued a decade ago.

Even if all the promises have not been fulfilled virtually nobody — except perhaps for the gold standard romanticists — sees any chance of a return to fixed parities in the near future. As long as economic policy priorities, for example with regard to fighting inflation, are not aligned among the important trading nations, and economic trends continue to vary, fixed exchange rates leave the door open for the transmission of inflation from one country to another. A current example is the fixed (within set limits) EMS system that links the Common Market countries' currencies together.

Switzerland was in the past a classic example of how a nation can import monetary erosion through fixed exchange rates. Persistent balance of payments surpluses (as funds flowed in chasing "rate/currency" stability) compelled the Swiss National Bank (the Central Bank) to intervene massively on the foreign exchange markets at the end of the sixties and the beginning of the seventies. Because as the foreign funds flowed in to constantly increase the money supply, demand grew uninterruptedly and this steadily fed the fires of inflation.

Of course the situation was further exacerbated through the existence of inflation even in the countries of origin of the incoming funds. The prices of goods there were rising, hence the value of their local currency's purchasing power was dropping. Hence the flight outwards of these funds. Simultaneously the prices of imports of internationally traded goods rose in tandem with the trends on the world market. Floating was considered as the way to block these channels (imported inflation and the old classic "demand pull" inflation).

Advocates of floating insist that exchange rates normally move parallel to trends of purchasing power. Over the long term this view has been proved right, but in the short term market quotations have by no means followed the "ideal" pattern, i.e. consistent with purchasing power.

In times of exchange rate dislocations there are limitations as to what extent autonomous national monetary policies can be adopted or followed. As revaluation of the currency is perceptibly taking place pressure on the central bank will mount to clear away the obstacles in the path of export-oriented companies. The required intervention on the foreign exchange market will exert an effect similar to that in a system of fixed exchange rates: by increasing the money supply it accelerates inflation.

In such a situation it is not surprising that previously planned money supply targets will be abandoned, or possibly modified. In the midst of a lot of chatter from the "experts" a rapid turnaround often takes place in the then current trend, and for the moment it might appear that the high value of the indigenous currency was unrealistic and that intervention was justified.

Sooner or later however the view often starts sinking in that the weakening of the currency is still accompanied by a continuing substantial price uptrend in the overseas markets, or in the sources of raw materials. And very quickly the relief at the improvement in export conditions gives way to worries about the rising rate of inflation. Only then does it become clear that the previous upvaluation had provided effective support for the stabilisation policy. The path from an overvalued currency to the vicious circle of devaluation and imported inflation suddenly appears quite short.

IMPORTED AND HOMEMADE INFLATION

Attempts at determining the shares of imported and "homemade" inflation in the overall rate of inflation of a country normally meet with considerable difficulties.

The approximate contribution of *homemade* inflation can be seen from the GNP deflator as this does not directly contain the prices of imports.

To determine the share of *imported* inflation the changes in the terms of trade can be used. The relationship between import and export prices is influenced by both the development of exchange rates as well as the prices of the exports and imports.

The GNP deflator and the change in the terms of trade together indicate the total rate of inflation, as measured by the price index, or deflator, of domestic demand.

There are however certain interplay effects between homemade and imported inflation the exact extent of which is difficult to assess.

In the following table, compiled by the Bank for International Settlements in Geneva (the central banks' own Central Bank!) from inflation statistics of five major industrialised nations, an inflation analysis is shown covering the period 1978-1981.

IMPORTED AND "HOMEMADE" INFLATION										
						Switzer- land ¹	West Germany	Italy	USA	Japan
Imported inflation ²						Percent change in 4th quarter from previous year				
1978	.	.	.	.	.	-2.4	-0.6	-0.3	-0.3	-1.5
1979	.	.	.	.	.	0.5	1.2	1.4	1.5	4.2
1980	.	.	.	.	.	2.2	1.2	0.8	-0.1	1.8
1981 ⁵	.	.	.	.	.	0	1.3	3.0	-0.5	0.2
"Homemade" inflation ³										
1978	.	.	.	.	.	3.3	3.5	13.7	8.2	4.0
1979	.	.	.	.	.	2.1	4.0	17.3	6.9	1.7
1980	.	.	.	.	.	3.1	5.1	19.8	9.8	4.3
1981	.	.	.	.	.	6.7	4.6	15.0	8.6	2.3
Total rate of inflation ⁴										
1978	.	.	.	.	.	0.8	2.9	13.3	7.9	2.5
1979	.	.	.	.	.	2.6	5.2	18.9	8.5	5.9
1980	.	.	.	.	.	5.3	6.3	20.8	9.6	6.3
1981 ⁵	.	.	.	.	.	6.7	6.0	18.5	8.0	2.5

¹Average annual figures ²Change in the terms of trade ³GNP deflator ⁴Domestic demand deflator ⁵Provisional figures
Sources BIS national statistics

The main conclusions to be drawn from the above table are:

- (1) *Switzerland*, in comparison to the other countries, received the most support for its stabilisation policy from external sources between 1978 and 1981. Its "homemade" inflation of 3.3% in 1978 decreased by 2.4% to a total inflation rate of less than 1% in terms of the domestic demand deflator as a result of the improvement in the terms of trade.
- (2) In *Japan* too the same factor brought the rate of overall inflation down by 1.5% in 1978. But then in 1979 Japan also had to deal with the highest rate of imported inflation of 4.2% and its total rate of inflation more than doubled to 5.9%.
- (3) In 1980 and 1981 most *European countries* experienced substantial external stimuli to inflation, whereas the *United States* profited in its fight against rising costs from the strength of the dollar. Thanks to better terms of trade overall inflation was lower in the United States than the "homemade" rate.

EXCHANGE RATES

One of the main causes of the varying development of imported inflation is that it is sometimes exceeded by the fluctuations in exchange rates. On the foreign exchange market the purchasing power of the currency does not always correspond to the exchange rate at any given time. This has tangible consequences for the economy. The overvaluation of a currency has the effect of slowing down business and prices, whereas undervaluation speeds up domestic inflation.

The reason why exchange rates sometimes overshoot the mark is the lack of coordination in the economic policies among nations, particularly the monetary policies. If a country follows a more restrictive course than its neighbours, inflationary expectations decline. This in turn runs up the value of the country's currency and leads to a stronger inflow of capital. Through the cheaper prices of imported goods the country's fight against inflation receives external support.

However, there is a danger that the country's currency can become so strong that it jeopardises the competitive ability of the country's exporting companies, and places the producers for the domestic market at a disadvantage owing to the lower prices of imported goods. The intervention that becomes necessary under these circumstances thus limits monetary policy autonomy.

For the nations that pursue less restrictive economic policies this process develops in the opposite direction: the stabilisation policies of such nations suffer a setback due to the weakening of their currencies and they end up importing the inflation which the country whose currency is undergoing upvaluation "exports". Between 1980 and 1982 this interrelationship has proved a disciplinary instrument for Europe, whilst during the dollar's preceding phase of softness there was somewhat larger room for monetary manouvering.

When exchange rates move up or down in excess of purchasing power changes, the fight against inflation is temporarily impeded. However it should be remembered that, as hinted at the start of this paper, without floating it would probably not have been at all possible for the countries seeking stability to disengage themselves, at least to some extent, from the very worrying international trend towards inflation.

THE FUTURE TENSE IN THE MALTESE LANGUAGE

J. Zammit Ciantar

In the Maltese language the normal complement of every verb consists of two moods; the imperative and the indicative. The indicative mood contains only two simple tenses; the perfect, *Perfett* or *Passat* in Maltese, and the imperfect, *Imperfett* or *Prezent* in Maltese.

Taking the personal pronouns *jien* 'I', *int* 'you' (sing.), *hu* 'he (or 'it')', *hi* 'she (or 'it')',¹ *aħna* 'we', *intom* 'you' (pl.) and *huma* 'they', and the trilateral verb *qatel*² 'he killed' as a model the tenses³ are conjugated thus:

Imperative (in Maltese *Kmand* or *Imperattiv*)

2 nd. sing. *oqtol int* 'you kill' and
2 nd. pl. *oqtlu intom* 'you kill'.

N, *t* and *j* are the preformatives which when prefixed to the stems of the imperative mood form the imperfect tense. This is a sample conjugation:

<i>jien</i> <i>n</i> + <i>oqtol</i> 'I kill'	<i>aħna</i> <i>n</i> + <i>oqtlu</i> 'we kill'
<i>int</i> <i>t</i> + <i>oqtol</i> 'you kill'	<i>intom</i> <i>t</i> + <i>oqtlu</i> 'you kill'
<i>hu</i> <i>j</i> + <i>oqtol</i> 'he/it kills'	<i>huma</i> <i>j</i> + <i>oqtlu</i> 'they kill'
<i>hi</i> <i>t</i> + <i>oqtol</i> 'she/it kills'	

The perfect tense is formed by the junction of verbal morpheme suffixes with the verbal stem morpheme in this way:

<i>jien</i> <i>qtil</i> + <i>t</i> 'I killed'	<i>aħna</i> <i>qtil</i> + <i>na</i> 'we killed'
<i>int</i> <i>qtil</i> + <i>t</i> 'you killed'	<i>intom</i> <i>qtil</i> + <i>tu</i> 'you killed'
<i>hu</i> <i>QaTeL</i> ⁴ 'he/it killed'	<i>huma</i> <i>qatl</i> + <i>u</i> 'they killed'.
<i>hi</i> <i>qatl</i> + <i>et</i> 'she/it killed'	

1. There is no neuter in Maltese. All nouns are classified as being masc. or fem. in gender and are replaced by *hu* for 'he' and *hi* for 'she'. The respective *-h*, *-hu*, *-u* and *-ha* pronominal suffixes are then used when needed.
2. This is the simplest form of the verb in Maltese. As in Arabic, the three radicals Q.T.L. express the basic meaning of the verb, hence 'to kill'. As in the Semitic languages, in Maltese it is a rule to cite the verb by this form, the 3rd. person sing. masc. of the perfect tense. This has a function corresponding to that of the English infinitive in this case, hence 'to kill'.
3. The model conjugation given *infra* for the tenses is that of the simple verb only. For an extensive study of the different forms of conjugations of other verbs and verbs of derived forms, *vide* E. F. Sutcliffe, *A grammar of the Maltese Language*. 3rd. ed., Malta, 1960, pp. 81 — 137.
4. As stated in n. 3 *supra* this is the simplest form of the verb. It belongs to

In the absence of a specific tense to denote an action which is going to take place in the future,⁵ Maltese makes use of the imperfect. This is done in various ways, always, however, with the forms of this tense.⁶

GHAD

The indefinite future may be expressed by the use of the adverbial particle *ghad* 'conveying the idea of 'one day', 'perhaps', preceding a verb in the imperfect. E.g. *ghad immur l-Awstralja* which means 'I will go to Australia someday'. A certain amount of uncertainty is expressed by this combination.

KIEN and KELLU

The imperfect tense conjugation of the verb *kien*⁸ 'to be' by itself denotes futurity. *Jiena nkun* 'Spanja' would be translated into 'I shall be in Spain' and *huma jkunu Londra fil-ħin* into 'they will be in London in time'. One cannot translate these phrases into 'I am in Spain' or 'we are in London in time'. In fact, for the latter sense, Maltese would make use of the present participle of the verb *qagħad* 'to stay' which, in the language, expresses also the sense of the English verb 'to

the first Form. In Maltese there are nine other Forms, numbers II to X as against the generally accepted II to XV in Classical Arabic. Vide J. A. Haywood et H. M. Nahmed, *A New Arabic Grammar*, London, 1970, pp. 151 et seq. E. F. Sutcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 66, omits Form IV in Maltese, because it "... is not in use, though traces of it remain in the [Maltese] language."

5. Today linguists describe the imperfect as the *Present-Future* mood and the perfect or past tense as the *Not Present* mood. Cp. G. F. De Soldanis, *Della Lingua Punica presentemente usata dai Maltesi*, Rome, 1750, p. 88, n. "Il futuro e presente nella nostra lingua è uguale *n hħob amo = n hħobb amerò*." Vide also *ibid.*, p. 93 and A. Cremona, *Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, I, Great Britain, 1936, p. 57, "... *biex naghmlu l-Preżent-Futur*..." M. A. Vassalli, *Mylsen*, Rome, 1791, p. 154 too called the present tense by the name *Futuro*.
6. For various rules concerning the future tense cfr. :-
 G. F. Agius De Soldanis, *op. cit.*, p. 85 et seq.
 M. A. Vassalli, *op. cit.*, p. 150 et seq.
 A. Cremona, *op. cit.*, pp. 56 - 57.
Id., *Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, II, Malta, 1959, pp. 62 - 63.
 E. F. Sutcliffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 70 - 71.
 H. Grech, *Grammatika Maltija*, Malta, 1973, p. 72.
7. Cfr. De Soldanis, *op. cit.*, p. 88, "Chi è delicato in essa favella, può aggiungere al futuro, *ghat*, v.g. *ghat en hħobb io amerò*." Vide also Dozy R., *Supplément aux Dictionnaires Arabes*, Leide, 1927, *sub voce*, "Quelquefois pour exprimer le futur." A. Cremona, *op. cit.*, II, 6th. ed., Malta, 1959, p. 62, "... *ningdew bil-particella 'ghad' meta l-futur ikun Indefinit*..." and E. F. Sutcliffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 70 - 71, "The future is expressed by means of the imperfect with *ghad 'yet'*."
8. The imperfect tense conjugation of this verb is *nkun*, *tkun*, *jkun*, *tkun*, *nkunu*, *tkunu* and *jkunu*.
9. This form of the verb implies habitude too, as in English. *Issoltu nkun Spanja* would mean that 'usually I am in Spain'. The habitude or futuristic sense may be taken from the context or some other marker. The adverb *issoltu* for 'usually' in this case indicates habitude.

Still, *kien* may be used as an auxiliary, always in the imperfect tense form and, preceding an adverb, a participle or another verb (also conjugated in the imperfect tense) conveys the future concept. This may be seen in the following examples: a) *inkunu flimkien* 'we shall be together' and *meta tkun tajjeb* 'when you will be well'; b) *tkun magħruf* 'you will be well known'; c) *ikunu jafu meta rrid jien* 'they will know at my leisure'.

In *ikolina mmorru* 'we shall have to go' and *ikollhom jieklu* 'they will have to eat' *ikolina* and *ikollhom* too play the part of an auxiliary to help express the future of *mar* 'to go' and *kiel* 'to eat'. However, their main function is to convey a sense of compulsion.

One observation about these forms. They are also used, although colloquially and perhaps in an idiomatic way, in a narrative style, to express an action in the past. Such are *mela darba jkun hemm raġel* 'once there was a man' and *dan ir-raġel ikollu kelb kbir* for 'this man had a large dog'. This is true of any verb in the imperfect.

The future concept may be denoted in two other ways. In both cases, again, the verb is always in its imperfect tense forms.

The second method, again involving the use of the verbal forms

10. The forms *jkunli*, *jkunlek*, *jkunlu*, *jkunilha*, *jkunilna*, *jkunilkom* and *jkunilhom* still exist in the Maltese language and are used to convey the sense of 'it is to me, to you, to him, etc.'

of the imperfect, needs the help of one of several particles that immediately precede the verb. However, there seem to be diverse and, in some cases, mistaken opinions with regard to these future concept auxiliary particles and their use in both spoken and written Maltese. One may find some conformity in their use (or lack of use) in literary works because, I believe, the more popular and generally accepted grammars are strictly adhered to. Yet there is a contrast between the use of these particles in daily speech and "uncontrolled" and possibly "unconditioned" written Maltese and the use of the same particles in "grammatically correct" written Maltese. This confusion derives from both historical and linguistic factors.

THE RADICALS OF THE PARTICLES

In fact we make use of two quite different particles, one with an *h* radical, the other having an *s* as the important radical. In the course of this paper it will be explained why I have qualified *s* as the important radical in the second particle. The former is more often met with in the vernacular, rarely in the literary language. The latter is the particle generally accepted as that grammatically correct as an auxiliary preceding the imperfect tense to convey the future mood.

THE *h* RADICAL

H is the radical of a particle generally accepted by grammarians as being the shortened form of the verb *ħalla*¹¹ 'to leave' or 'to allow'. Cp. *ħalla l-kotba l-iskola* 'he left the books at school' and *ghalkemm kienet ix-xita, is-surmast ħalla t-tfal jil'agħbu fil-biħa* 'although it was raining the headmaster allowed the children to play in the yard'. Grammarians maintain that this is the nearest etymological affinity of the particle in question — *ħa*. This is simply not correct.

THE *s* RADICAL

On the other hand *s* is the radical of a set of various particles which present quite a perplexing situation in the ensuing phrasal com-

11. Cfr. E. Serracino Inglott, *Il-Miklem Malti*, Vol. IV, Malta, 1977, sub *ħa* "part. awż. verb. inv. (mill-verb *Halla* ... *bħala taqsira ta' 'ħalli'*)" Clearly the apostrophe indicates that the word is in a shortened form as maintained by most of the grammarians. In fact the first example of its use by the lexicographer is "*mar ħa' jara*" for 'he went in order to see'. Still, later, the author includes a second meaning; "... (2) *tingħad ukoll, għad li m'ħux tant tajjeb, f'xi nħawi, bit-tifs. ta' imperf. (futur qarib jew mistenni), flok ser' jew 'sejjer', dejjem ma' v. iħor fl-Imperf., bħala awż. tiegħu: eż. Aktarx ħa' tagħmel ix-xita flok ... Se' tagħmel ix-xita.*" In short, the author is pointing out 'the incorrect use' ("*m'ħux tant tajjeb*") of the particle *ħa'* as an auxiliary to help the imperfect indicate an 'immediate future' ("*futur qarib jew mistenni*"). Neither A. Cremona, (*Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, I, Great Britain, 1936 p. 56; *Ibid.*, I. 3ed. ed., Malta, 1970, p. 58; *Ibid.*, II, 6th. ed., Malta, 1959, p. 62;) nor E. F. Sutcliffe, (*op. cit.*, pp. 69 – 70,) when referring to auxiliary words used to express other tenses, mentions the particle *ħa* in either form.

bination. Which is the correct grammatical form *ser*, *se*, *se'*, *se'r* or *sa*?

The following are some tentative conclusions I have arrived at after observing the usage of all the above mentioned particles in daily spoken Maltese, in unprententious written Maltese and in literary Maltese. Several methods of observation have been employed.

During the last five years the diverse use of these particles in daily speech all over Malta and Gozo has been noted and studied. Several young people coming from different towns and villages in Malta were asked to put down in writing first the way they would "naturally" express themselves in their mother tongue and secondly how they would "grammatically" translate

am about to
"I am going to write a letter."¹²
will/shall

Later still, a direct question was put to another group of students coming from Forms IV and V of both government and private secondary schools, again coming from all over Malta. The question was:

"Which of *ha*, *sa*, *se*, *ser*, *sejjer/sejra* do you make use of at home to fill in the blank of the following sentence — *Għada naqbad naħdem?*"¹³

In both cases statement and question were delivered orally. The answer to the latter question was also given in writing.

The frequency of each particle when used to denote the future tense in the journalistic language of the local newspapers in Maltese, namely, *Il-Hajja*, *L-Orizzont* and *In- Tagħna* (all three of the same day of issue 7.12.79), was also noted.¹⁴

12. The group consisted of 100 and the frequency of the particles used in both spoken and written Maltese is shown hereunder.

	<i>ha</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>ser</i>	<i>sejjer/sejra</i>	<i>other</i>	<i>total</i>
Spoken	20	11	31	32	5	1	100
Written	6	11	20	35	27	1	100

Of course, this is more indicative of the confused idea of the use of the various particles than of their percentual usage.

13. The number of students who helped with this test was 104. 14 of these used only *ha*, 30 — *se*, 9 — *sa* and 10 — *ser*. The following made use of the two particles: 10 — *ha/sa*, 15 — *ha/se*, 3 — *ha/ser*, 3 — *sa/se*, 1 — *sa/ser* and 3 — *se/ser*. The rest showed that they make use of three particles: 1 — *ha/ser/sa*, 2 — *ha/ser/se* and 1 — *ha/se/sa*. One student put down *ha/sen* and another made use of other words.

This results in the following recurrences:-

se — 54 or 36.5%, *sen* — 1 or .7%, *ser* — 20 or 13.5%, *ha* — 47 or 31.7%, *sa* — 25 or 16.9% and *other* — 1 or .7%.

The high percentage of the usage of the particles *ha*, *sa* and *se* is immediately noticeable.

14. The following is a table showing the frequency of the different particles used in the journalistic Maltese of the three newspapers mentioned:-

	<i>ha</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>se'</i>	<i>ser</i>	<i>sejjer/sejra/sejrin</i>
Il-Hajja	—	—	49	—	1	—
In- Tagħna	—	—	34	6	16	3
L-Orizzont	—	—	71	—	1	3

Besides this, the different ways in which the future sense was expressed in various publications which have appeared since the freedom of the press in 1839, were recorded and studied.¹⁵

15. a) The following are several phrases including the use of the future particles found in different publications.
Il-Malti, 19.8.1843, p. 12, "*Uliedi minni ser icolcom biss taħbit*"; *Ibid.*, 4.11.1843, p. 30, "*u seirin tħallu ir-raba*"; *Ibid.*, 6.1.1844, p. 45, "*it-tabib biss jistagh jara jech it-tifel li sejjer icun imlukkam*."
- b) *Il-Hajja u il Vinturi ta Robinson Crusoe* (a translation of C. Dickens' *Robinson Crusoe*), 2nd. ed., Malta, 1857, p. 5, "*u wiehed minn shabi kien sejjer imur Londra bil-baħar*"; p. 106, "*kif giet illi tħomt dil holma li sejjer ngħidilkom ...*"
- c) A. Preca, *L'imitazioni ta Cristu* (a translation of T. A. Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*), Malta, 1868, p. 45, "*Min s'er jiftacar f'ich uara meutech?*"; p. 207, "*...u tara li sejjer tincoria ...*"
- d) A. Ferris, *Tagħim Jdid u Hafif tal Lsien Ingliz*, Malta, 1883(?), p. 197, "*x'sejjer tagmel? — what are you about to do?*"; p. 202, "*Imma, gidli, lil min sejyer tikteb? — But, tell me, to whom are you going to write?*"; p. 202, "*sejyer nikteb lizzju tigi — I am going to write to my uncle*"; p. 202, "*sejyer nitui il-littra — I am going to fold my letter*."
- e) A. Ferris, *Third Book of Lessons*, Malta, 1889, "You will be late for school — *Inti sejjer tmur tard l'iscola*"; p. 88, "I am going to mend my gown — *Seira inseuui il-libsa tighi*."
- f) H. Stumme, *Maltesische Studien*, Leipzig, 1904, p. 16, "*sennistieg*" (Valletta); p. 18, "*jēna sentik hāga*" (Valletta); p. 19, "*fēi senniehok*" (Valletta); p. 20, "*sengaudi ma-din*" and "*fēi seikun jāf li-thalt?*" (Valletta); p. 60, "*hannēklek*" (Victoria, Gozo); p. 62, "*mōr essōt osāp skūna hat-tētlek*" (Victoria, Gozo); p. 63, "*sa tmūl-limfern*" (Xagħra, Gozo).
- g) *It-Tieni Ctieb tal Kari Malti* (with a literal English Translation for use in the Government Elementary Schools), Malta, 1912, p. 15, "*Surmast, x'sejjer takrālha? — Sir, what are you going to read to us?*"; p. 15, "*Coni sejra nidhol ... I was about to come in*"; p. 51, "*chien sejjer jegħrek ... was about to drown*."
- h) G. N. Letard, *Nuova Guida alla Conversazione* (Italiano, Inglese e Maltese ad uso delle scuole), II, Malta, 1931, p. 11, "how much will you charge me — *chemm sejjer iġġiaghni inħallas*"; p. 16, "I am going to begin — *sejjer nibda*"; p. 39, "I am going to bed — *sejjer immur fis-sodda*"; p. 90, "I am going to send for some — *sejjer nibghat nixtri*"; p. 90, "to whom are you going to write — *lil min sejjer tictēb?*"; p. 181, "I am going to lounge a little — *sejjer immur inħatta ftit taż-żmien*"; p. 181, "I am going to leave Paris — *sejjer insiefer minn Pariġi*"; p. 187, "I'll go to bed — *sejjer norkod*."
- i) "In-nassab sa jtir bil-ferħ...", T. Zammit, "In-Nassaba" in *Lehen il-Malti*, 5, Malta, 1931, as reproduced in T. Zammit, *Stejjer u Kitba Ohra*, III, Malta, 1961, p. 71.
- j) "*Sejjer nibagħtek isfel halli tiftakar*", T. Zammit, "*Aħlef u Ghid is-Sewwa*" in *Lehen il-Malti*, 1, 1931, as reproduced in T. Zammit, *Stejjer...*, p. 47.
- k) V. Busuttill et T. Borg, *Dizzjunariju Enciclopedicu*, Malta, 1932, sub *sejjer* "*sejjer jispiċċa — it is about to finish*."
- l) *Ir-Religjon Imghallma liż-Zghar* (Maltese script seen by E. B. Vella), Malta, 1934, p. 15, "*li aħna sejrin nieklu*."
- m) *Gabra ta' Ward*, ed. E. B. Vella, 14th. ed., London, 1965, (1st. ed. 1936), p. 54, "*x'kien sejjer iġħid wara*"; p. 67, "*kien ser jiddobba*"; p. 94, "*X'sejjer*

All these were compared with the various grammatical conclusions and rules inferred by the important grammars of the Maltese Language published since De Soldanis' *Della Lingua Punica* ... in 1750.

HA (or ha'¹⁶) for HALLI?

In colloquial Arabic "ha is a future prefix and usually relates to impending action and to the firm intention of doing something; ha- is used in, say /haktíblak bagħdi yoméen taláata/ I'll write to you in two or three days' time."¹⁷ The Maltese equivalent may be expressed in a form almost parallel with the Arabic in *ħa niktiblek fi żmien jumejn jew tlieta*.

This future particle is still profusely used in the vernacular all over the islands.¹⁸ In Maltese, however, no attention has ever been drawn to the fact that the particle should, or at least could, be attached to the verb it immediately precedes. In the spoken language it is

tagħmel?"

- n) *Minn Xtut in-Nil*, ed. A. G. Said, (a collection of 12 short stories written by Maltese-Egyptians), Port Said, 1937, p. vi, "*ħrafa Għarbiġa li sa ngibuha kif kitibha*"; p. vii, "*l-ewwel wieħed aktarx sa jkun*"; p. 61, "*u issa x'sejjer tagħmel ?*"; p. 63, "*l-affari sejra tisewwa tajjeb wisq*."
 - o) G. Galea, *San Gwann*, Malta, 1939, p. 74, "*mħux sejjer ma jsibx*."
 - p) *Id., Meta Nħaraq it-Tejatra*, Malta, 1946, p. 103, "*int ser toħroġ bis-sewwa*."
 - q) A. E. Caruana, *Ineż Farruġ*, Malta, 1947, p. 156, "*ma basarx min sejjer isib*."
 - r) K. Vassallo, *Graġja ta' Żewġt Ibliet* (a translation of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*), Malta, 1950, p. 89, "*x'sa tghidli issa?*"
 - s) "*Sa ngibilkom xi siltiet*" and "*Dun Karm, aħna ser nibdew noħroġu perjo-diku bil-Malti*," Dun Karm "*Taħdita fuq il-Poeżija Maltija*" in *Lehen il-Malti*, 1, 1960, as reproduced in *Antoloġija ta' Proża Maltija*, I, ed. G. Aquilina, Malta, 1977, pp. 95 and 100 respectively.
 - t) G. Cassar Pullicino, *Kitba w Kittieba tal-Malti*, I, Malta, 1962, p. 60, "*Id-djalogi li sa ngibu hawnhekk*"; p. 61, "*sa nislet hawnhekk*" and p. 66, "*nisingħu l waħda tghid li sa toħroġ miegħu*."
 - u) F. Ebejer, *Hitam*, 2d. ed., Malta, 1975, p. 64, "*Qatt mhu se jieqaf*"; p. 79, "*se nersaq aktar għall-kenn*" and p. 80, "*kemm-il mistoqsija se ssaqsuna*."
16. As may be seen *infra*, I do not accept this spelling for the simple reason that there is no relationship between *ha* and *ha'*. The latter is merely shown in the sub-title because it is sometimes represented in place of the former.
17. T. F. Mitchell, *Colloquial Arabic* (in the Teach Yourself Books series), New York, 1976, p. 82. Mr. G. Doublesin, lecturer in Arabic at the New Lyceum, drew my attention to this important supporting reference. Earlier, I knew from Mr. Ismat Ali, an Egyptian who, up to 1980, used to lecture in Arabic at the same New Lyceum, that "*ha* is used as a prefix and joined to the verb helps express the future concept in dialectal Egyptian". Mr. Ali gave me /ħanżuruħu/ for 'I shall visit him'. The initial /h/ sound seems to vary in different parts of the same country. Cp. also, "Various means are employed to indicate the Future tense of the Imperfect [in Arabic]. In Egypt we may hear (*ħawwa*) *ħa yimshi*...", J. A. Haywood et H. M. Nahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 500.
18. This is taken for granted by A. Borg, *A Historical and Comparative Phonology of Maltese* (Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy to the senate of the Hebrew University), 1978, p. 210, "Future simple: ... *ħa-yiktep* 'he will write'."

sounded as if it were part and parcel of the verbal phrase.¹⁹ However, whenever used in the written language, *ha* is never joined to the verb.²⁰ Besides, its use in Maltese does not actually express the same sense as in "the living language of Egypt". It does not express any difference between an immediate or remote future either. *Ha* conveys a simple future as may be noted in the following examples: *ha mmur* 'I am going', *ha nagħmel eżami f'Ġunju* 'in June I am going to sit for an exam' and *sena ohra ha nsiefer* 'next year I am going abroad'.

When written in isolated form this particle is indistinguishable from the verb *ha* 'to take', the root form of an irregular verb with another radical *d* which is dropped when in final position. Hence *nieħu*, *tieħu*, *jieħu* and *tieħu*, but *nieħdu*, *tieħdu* and *jieħdu* in the imperfect tense. *Ha* may also be the dialectal variant of the imperative second person singular form of this same verbal stem morpheme instead of *hu* 'you take' as in *ha din* 'take this', *ha dan l-ilma w ixorbu* 'take this water and drink it' and *ha l-flus li trid u itlaq iġri* 'take the money you need and leave quickly'.

It has been suggested that *ha* may in fact be an offshoot or shortening of the form *halli*,²¹ an invariable verbal particle. I find this unacceptable and do not feel that *halli* could ever replace *ha* and leave the sense of the future tense unchanged. If it did, *ha* would naturally be the short form of *halli* and written *ha'*.²²

In the phrases *ha jitlaq* and *ha jiddeċiedi*, the particle may have the value of a future marker and in that case conveys 'he is going (to leave)' and 'he is going (to decide)'. The particle could easily be replaced with the supposedly original form *halli*. But, of course, any student of Maltese would point out a difference in sense expressed by the new formations *halli jitlaq* and *halli jiddeċiedi*. An English translation for the latter phrases would be 'let him leave' and 'let him decide' respectively. True, this latter sense could have been conveyed by the shortened form of *halli* — *ha'*, as may be observed in both spoken and written Maltese; cp. "*ha* (sic) *nibnilek*",²³ *ha' ngħidlek xi trid tagħmel* 'let me tell you what you have to do' and *ha mmur ha' nara x'qegħdin jagħmlu* 'I am going (in order) to see what they are doing'. Here the particle should be accompanied by an apostrophe when written. In the vernacular the value and function of /*ha*/ would be realised from a "study" of the context.

19. Cp. "*hamnieklek*" for *ha nieklek* as transcribed by Stumme, *vide* n. 15: (f), *supra*.

20. Cp. "*Issa ha nħallik*" for 'now I am going to leave you', F. Sammut, *Il-Gaġġa*, 2nd. ed., Malta, 1973, p. 128.

21. Cp. "*ha nibnilek*" (where *ha* is the shortened form of *halli*) for 'so that I can build for you' in *Il-Ħajja*, 7. 12. 79, p. 4. G. Aquilina once suggested that *ha* seems to derive ("*donnha gejjja minn*") from Arabic '*akhad* 'to begin', cfr. G. Aquilina, "*Filologija*" in *Lehen il-Malti*, April-Gunju, 1950, p. 67.

22. Cfr. the written form *ha'* in n. 11 *supra*.

23. *Vide* n. 21 *supra*.

I infer that the future marker *ħa* is the residue of colloquial Arabic. Its origin is lost in the remote past and the vocable has consequently been confused with homophonous morphemes. It has survived as an obscure linguistic fossil used extensively and naturally in various towns and villages in both Malta and Gozo. But it has undoubtedly nothing to do with *ħalli* or any other word.

The following examples are given as further proof that *ħalli* can never replace *ħa* in the future tense.

Jiena ħa niekol 'I am going to eat', *jiena ħalli niekol* will have to be read in a rising tone — *jiena* 'I' in one and *ħalli niekol* for 'let me eat' in a higher tone. *Is-sajjieda ħa joħorġu fuq il-baħar il-lejli li ġej* 'the fishermen are going out to sea tonight'; if *ħalli* were to replace the future marker *ħa* in this sentence, it would bring about this sense: 'may the fishermen go out to sea tonight (and not any other night)'.

Unquestionably, *ħalli* is a verbal morpheme which is the imperative sing form (pl. *ħallu*) of the stem morpheme *ħalla* 'to let' or 'to allow', and when attached to the pronominal suffixes expresses the full emphasis of the Arabic Jussive mood, e.g. *ħallih jitkellem* (*ħalli* + *h* 'him') 'let him talk', *ħalluha torqod it-tarbija* (*ħallu* + *ha* 'her') 'let the baby sleep'. It also expresses the Energetic mood which is also lacking in Maltese, as in the e.g. *ħalli jibki kemm irid* 'may he cry as much as he likes'. Again, this sense, as in Arabic, may be expressed without the help of this form. But this is irrelevant to the subject of this paper.²⁴

SER, SE'R, SE, SE' or SA?

The principal radical of the other particle that helps the imperfect tense to express a future action is *s*. Emphasis is laid on the fact that this is the important radical because the present writer has come to the conclusion that *s* is a radical common to particles similar in form and function but originating from two different and quite distinct morphemes.

The various offshoots of this root result in *ser*, *se'r*,²⁵ *se*, *se'*²⁶ and *sa*.²⁷

24. One final note about *ħa*. In written Arabic there is a particle which may be associated with this particle in Maltese. This is *ħal* and is used to introduce a question. This is not found in Maltese. When *ħa* is used to introduce a question in Maltese it always conveys the simple future tense.
25. "The conversational abbreviation of this word [*sejjer*] is written *se'r* or even *ser*." E. F. Sutcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 70. "... ningdew bil-partiċipju preżent *sejjer* jew b'din il-kelma mqassra *se'r* ..." A. Cremona, II, 6th. ed., Malta, 1959, p. 62. Cp. also *se'r* used by A. Preca in 1863, *vide* n. 15, (c) *supra*.
26. Cfr. E. Serracino Inglott, *op. cit.*, *sub ħa'* where *se* is transcribed with an apostrophe, *vide* n. 11 *supra*. The latter transcription is used very rarely. Cp. *Il-Mument*, 25. 11. 79, p. 10. But cp. also *se* (without the apostrophe) in *ibid.*, p. 1.
27. This is the only other future marker, other than *ħa*, accepted by A. Borg, *op. cit.*, p. 210; "Future Simple: *sa-yiktep* .." Cp. with n. 18 *supra*.

Both Sutcliffe and Cremona maintain that *ser* (or *se'r*) is the contracted form of the present participle *sejjer* 'going' which, together with *sejra* for 'she is going' and *sejrin* 'they are going', is the only remnant of a verb, the other imperative, imperfect and perfect forms of which have been lost in Maltese.

Neither the tests nor the discernable patterns in journalistic Maltese provided me with a single case of *se'r*. *Se* and *sa* were the particles that provided the highest percentage in use in both cases, although the latter was used less in the newspapers. *Ser* was the future marker that these seemed to prefer. *Sejjer*, *sejra* and *sejrin* were used profusely by the young people.²⁸

Where do the inconsistency and diversity of opinion in the use of the different particles to express the future tense come from? The reasons might be historical and linguistic. This is what I have concluded and what I shall try to confirm here in the second half of this paper.

THE RADICALS S - R

In Classical Arabic there are two verbs which in Maltese are written with the radicals *s* and *r*. These are Arabic *sar* 'to go' or 'to travel' and Arabic *sa'a* 'to become'. In Maltese we have lost the emphatics of the mother language and we sound and write one *s* for both Arabic *sin* and *sad*. Because of this, the verbs in question are both represented as having one common initial *s* radical, both *s* - (*j*) - *r*.²⁹ In fact, in Maltese, we have kept the verb *sar* 'to become' and preserved only the present or active participle of the other *sar* 'to go', 'to travel', in the forms *sejjer*, *sejra* and *sejrin*, mentioned above.

Each of these participial forms imparts a sense of an action equivalent to that of 'to be going', the present continuous of the verb 'to go'. Hence *jien sejjer id-dar*, *dik il-mara sejra s-suq* and *it-tfal sejrin l-iskola* simply render the meaning of 'I am going home', 'that woman is going to the market' and 'the children are going to school' respectively. Cp. also an important phrase which will be referred to later, *ahna sejrin nieklu* for 'we are going to eat' as an answer to the question 'where are you going?', in Maltese *fejn sejrin?*

These forms may also be used as future markers in the Maltese language. In this case they convey a meaning and have a function parallel to that implied by the English verb 'to go' when helping another verb to express an action 'going to (or about to) take place' in the immediate future. In Maltese, it must be observed, there seems to be no immediacy implied.

I recall once hearing a scholar pointing out that in *ser nitkellem*,

28. Cfr. ns. 12, 13 and 14 *supra*.

29. Sutcliffe attempts to reconstruct the various stages of development from *sejjer* in *op. cit.*, p. 70.

the auxiliary particle implies that 'I am going to talk' with an immediate future in mind. He underlined the fact that for a remote future sense the particle *sa*³⁰ would be used instead.

I cannot but feel that the scholar's assertion must be considered artificial and arbitrary since common usage does not support it. Indeed I doubt if any speaker or writer, be he a student or scholar of Maltese, is ever conscious of the possibility of differentiating between the immediacy or remoteness of the future.³¹ Notwithstanding this, grammarians accept the fact that, shortened or not, *sejjer* helps the imperfect tense forms of verbs to express an action which is about to take place in the future.

Is this perhaps the result of the influence of the English language on Maltese syntax?

Both English and Italian, the former present in the Islands since 1800, the latter since the Norman conquest of the Maltese archipelago as early as 1090 (if not even much earlier in the Latin/Low Latin form),³² have left their mark on the phonetics, phonology, vocabulary, morphology and syntax of the Maltese Language. Consequently it is not rash to hypothetise an English way of expressing the future tense in Maltese.

One must nevertheless point out that *ser*, undoubtedly one of the shortened forms of *sejjer/sejra/sejrin*, is, more often than not, used in the spoken language by students of Maltese, students who are conscious of most grammars' emphasising its use in the correct grammatical future tense of the language. It is thus not a natural, environmental, spontaneous particle and is at once noticeable as strange, unfamiliar and obviously pedantic. Whereas if *se* were its variant, it seems to fit better.

E. Serracino Inglott asserts that *se* should be written *se'*.³³ I agree that if the particle were the shortened form of *ser* or *sejjer/sejra/sejrin*, it should be accompanied by the apostrophe usually placed to indicate an elision, or the omission of a letter or letters.

My contention, however, is that *se* is a dialectal variant of *sa* and therefore needs no apostrophe. In fact, in what one might call virgin territory, in areas where the inhabitants speak the vernacular as they

30. Cp. and observe:

i) "*sa nitgharrsu*" ('we are going to get engaged') — remote future in contrast with "*issa ħa nħallik*" ('now I am going to leave you' — immediate future — in F. Sammut, op. cit., p. 128. ii) "*issa sa nħallik*" ('now I am going to leave you') — immediate future — in A. Cremona, II, 6th. ed., p. 62.

31. It has been pointed out to me personally by Mr. E. Mifsud, lecturer in Maltese at the New Lyceum, that in some areas *ħa* is used for an immediate future while *sa* for a remote one. Cp. this opinion with the use of the same particles in n. 30 *supra*.

32. In 218 B.C. Malta was added to the Roman Empire and remained under the Latin influence of the rulers officially until 870 A.D. P. P. Saydon wrote about a possible pre-Arabic Latin element remnant in Maltese (*Orbis*, V, 1, 1956). This was contested by G. Aquilina in a paper "The Constituent Elements of Maltese" in *Papers in Maltese Linguistics*, Malta, 1961, pp. 8-9.

33. Cp. with ns. 11 and 26 *supra*.

have picked it up from their fathers and mothers and not at school or from book, *se* and *sa* are interchangeable and the most popularly used. I believe that these are the actual, original future markers of the Maltese language. I am of the opinion that their use in literary Maltese is restricted because the student of the language is "conditioned" by the grammars and because their precise meaning, etymology and function are lacking. Besides, a possible confusion with a homophonous and identically-spelled particle may add to the vague and uncertain ideas about the particle in question.

The vocable *sa* in Maltese means 'up to'. It is one of the prepositions. Cp. *ejja sa hawn* 'come (up to) here'. *Sa* may also mean 'even' as in the case *kelb bil-ġuħ sa l-ġhadam jiekol* for 'a hungry dog will eat even the bones'. The particle may be used in such a way as to express the meaning of 'until' as in *dam ifittex sa ma sab li ried* for 'he went on searching until he found what he wanted'.

The fact that *sa* (and its variant *se*) is not related to the lost verb /*sa:r*/ 'to go' or 'to travel' is quite evident from the following examples: *sa/se nsiefer*, *sa/se mmut bil-ġuħ* and *sa/se nqum* for 'I shall go abroad', 'I am going to die of hunger' and 'I am going to wake up/ stand up'. *Sa* could be replaced by the dialectal variant *se* as may be seen. Even the abbreviated form *ser* could be used and the future concept would not be disturbed. But cp. *sejjer insiefer*, *sejjer immut bil-ġuħ* and *sejjer inqum*. *Sejjer* here sounds strange and incongruous. Of course the most awkward would be *sejjer immur* and *sejjer nigi* for 'I shall go' and 'I shall come', perhaps as strange as 'I am going to go' and 'I am going to come' in English. Evidently *sa/se* is at once natural and grammatically correct.

Prof. J. Aquilina provides two instances where *sa* is used immediately preceding a verb to express the future tense. Cfr. "*jeħk jitla' l-mewġ id-dġajsa sa tegħreq*, 'if the waves rise, the boat will sink' "³⁴ and "M[altese] *sa* is the only inseparable particle which indicates the future that is common to Maltese and Arabic. Ex. *sa nidhol* 'I shall enter'."³⁵

Hence *sa*, as in Arabic, is a particle that helps the verb express a future action. It is to be considered an important part of the Semitic element which must have found its way into the language of the Islands during the rule of the Arabs and established itself within a syntax which gradually gave way to a Romance, and later still to a Teutonic, influence with the change of historical, cultural and linguistic ties.

In Arabic, *sa* indicates an immediate future tense. Like *ħa* in colloquial Arabic, the particle is a prefix and, joined to the verb, it helps convey a futuristic action. Arabic makes use of another prefix /*sawfa*/ to convey a remote future.³⁵ There is no trace of this in the

34. J. Aquilina, *Maltese Arabic Comparative Grammar*, Malta, 1979, p. 174.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

Maltese language.³⁷ Moreover, like *ħa*, *sa* remains an independent particle in Maltese.³⁸

Questions that may be raised after a reading of the above considerations are a) Do the Maltese actually distinguish between the use of *ser* (or its variants) for an immediate future and that of *sa* for a remote future? (*Se* cannot be included in this argument as a variant of *sa* because it has always been considered to be a variant of *ser*. b) How is it that *sa* for an immediate future in Arabic comes to convey a remote future in Maltese, if it really does, as suggested or pointed out by the scholar? c) Is the usage of *sejjer* (and its variants) as future markers a result of the influence of the 'going to' future auxiliary in English (cp. "...which we are going to receive..." in the Grace before meals translated into "*illi aħna sejrin nieklu*" in Maltese mentioned earlier in this paper)?³⁹

These differences do not really exist. There is no difference in shades of futurity in any of the examples studied, including those found in the newspapers. As may be observed, a general sense of uncertainty and confused opinions persist throughout the general usage of the particles playing the part of future markers. An ear attentive to the speech of our "unconditioned" Maltese inhabitants would notice the natural and profuse usage of *sa* and its variant *se*.

CONCLUSION

Ha and *sa* are Semitic particles that used to and still help us express the future in the absence of a specific tense in the Maltese language. *Ha* remained more colloquial because it has never been "prescribed" by the grammarians. *Sa* was not properly studied and hence is sporadically mentioned as a future marker in grammars. On the other hand, the dialectal variant *se* has been confused with *se'* (if there ever existed such a form), and the shortened forms of the participles *sejjer* / *sejra* / *sejrin*, without ever being identified as affinite to original *sa*, etymologically and morphologically.

36. "The imperfect in itself denotes only unfinished action, but it may be made to indicate the future by putting the independent word *sawfa* before it or prefixing the contraction *sa...*", J.A. Haywood et H.M. Nahmed, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

37. Only the contracted form remained in Maltese. Cf. n. 36 *supra*.

38. But cp. *se* represented as a prefix in the phonetic script by Stumme in n. 15 (f) *supra*. *Sa* is also written as part of the word in a certain way by P. P. Saydon, *Ktieb il-Genesi*, Malta, 1929, p. 58; "*Jagaw sas-saltan fuqna ...*" ('Are you going to rule over us ...') (Gen. 37, 2). After the official recognition of the *Alfabbett ta' l-Għaqda* and the grammar in 1934, Saydon writes "*ara int sa tiled iben ...*" ('You will conceive in your womb and bear a son ...') in *L-Evanġelju ta' San Luqa*, Malta, 1954, p. 3 (Lk. 1, 31).

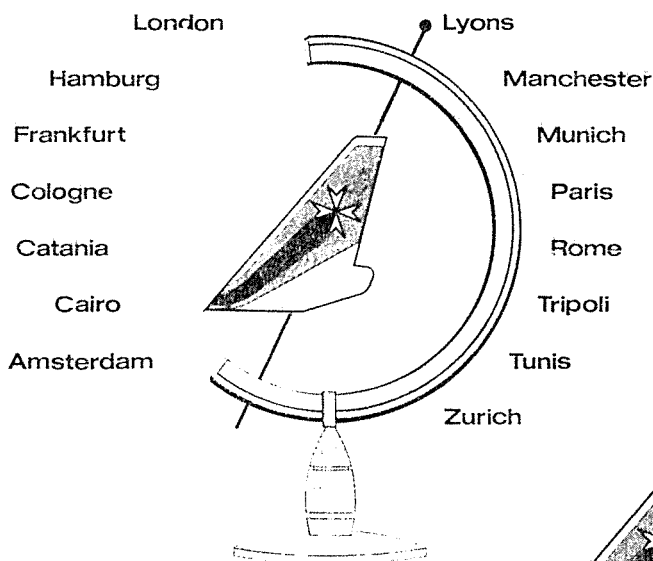
39. Cp. also the literal translation of *sejjer/sejra/sejrin* for English future 'I am going to' in the phrases quoted in n. 15 (c), (d), (e), (g), (h) and (k) *supra*.

From my observations I have concluded that both *ha* and *sa* are particles that help us express both immediate and remote future actions. More immediacy may perhaps be implied by the "English form" *sejjer* (and its variants). The former are used naturally and should be accepted as belonging to the Maltese language. Besides they provide us with more, and very much needed variety in the expression of the future concept in both spoken and written Maltese.

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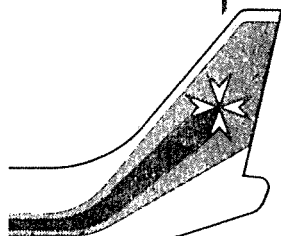
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