



Professor Guzè Aquilina

INTRODUCTION

When Professor Guzè Aquilina assumed the onerous responsibilities of the 'first' Chair of Maltese and Oriental Languages almost forty years ago, he immediately became the doyen of Maltese Language and Literature. Even when his immediate environment presented him with manifold problems taxing enough to engage all his energies, it was to his lasting credit and Malta's benefit that he broke through a traditionally closed island culture to make his own valid contributions to intellectual cross-currents in Europe.

Professor Aquilina's long tenancy has possibly been the most fruitful of all in the University of Malta, and it is almost impossible adequately to stress the indelible mark which he has made on Maltese and Arabic Studies by his great distinction in, and complete dedication to philological publication and research, his attempt to educate the masses, and his incessant defence of the Maltese language. He also possessed the foresight to create links with universities where Semitic languages are taught and studied. Through his cooperation and collaboration with scholars of note he started, and planned the extension of, a programme of Arabic studies that is even now gathering momentum.

The learned papers and articles by local and foreign scholars in this Festschrift edition of *The Journal of Maltese Studies* are some indication of the high esteem in which Professor Aquilina is held. His withdrawal from administrative duties (he is still engaged full-time in research on what will probably be his most significant contribution to Maltese linguistics - his Maltese-English Dictionary) has deprived the Department of Maltese and the Faculty of Arts of one of the most formative influences. This is going to prove a period of change and painful transition, necessarily so

because the progress of departments, just like the development of language and literature, hardly ever runs smoothly along rigidly predetermined lines.

As we look towards the future we guess that the new emphasis will probably be on the team rather than on the man, a team dedicated to the fostering of a community of culture that is not itself a threat to either individualism or personal distinction.

In a fast-changing Faculty of a post-Dahrendorf University where the key-words have become *relevance* and *renewal*, the best strategy may be a courageous inter-departmental cooperation that provides a multiplicity of options, flexible enough to test radical alternatives and allow new syntheses to emerge from the clash of old and new.

One possible line of expansion is the development of our own line in Semitic studies where the spoken dialects of Arabic and the living traditions of popular and contemporary Arabic literature receive far closer attention than they do from European Orientalists.

Another is to initiate a careful method of exploring our young literature in terms of structural analysis, critical realism and other theories to relate it both to our immediate and our wider socio-cultural context of its development. We must transcend the either-or mentality. Any system that polarizes absolutely becomes dysfunctional and counter-productive, because it contradicts the very way ideas work to achieve change.

There is one thing that must not be allowed to change, and that is the continued dedication to the energetic development of the Maltese language and literature. This is of the essence for relevant education and cultural renewal. Unless this continues to be actively promoted, knowledge and culture will not spread to the people, and creative energies will not be released.

We shall not release these energies, however, by weakening either the bi-culture or the study of international languages. World-knowledge is growing at a tremendous rate, and the Maltese must not only keep up with this growth within a reasonable time-scale, but should make their own significant contributions to it. They must strive to ride across cultures.

It is to the man who has already done so that this Festschrift is dedicated.

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