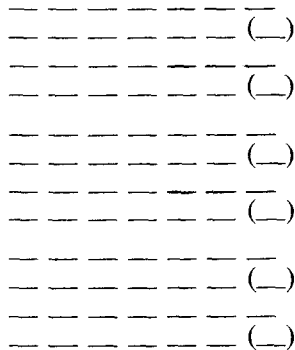


ANALYSIS OF A POEM – ‘DAN L-UNIVERS ITEKTEK’
THOMAS BONNICI

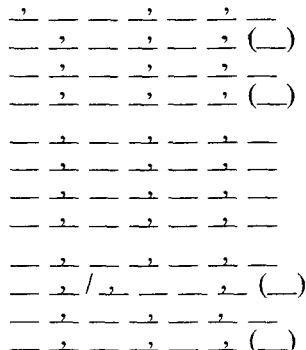
The object of this critical analysis of Oliver Friggieri’s poem “Dan l-univers itektek” is twofold. Literary criticism frequently considers the phonic structure of a poem as something parallel to its interpretation and theme. Friggieri’s poem will be analyzed to denounce ~~this false parallelism~~ and to prove the convergence of the poem’s phonic structure with its theme and interpretation.

In the first place we will examine the phonic structure taking into account the metre, intensity, tone and melody. Syllable counting will give us the following picture:



All the lines of the poem have the same syllabic count giving it an isopolar rhythmical axis and producing, as a consequence, the isometric and isorhythmic characteristics of the stanza.

With regard to stressed accents, we have:



There is a constant incidence of stressed accent on the 6th syllable in all three stanzas. In the second stanza stressed accents comprise the 2nd and 4th syllables too.

With regard to tone, the syllabic points of the tonal climax are:

(and long) ones in each. This suggests a highly difficult situation in which the contracting phase in the process of the birth of poetry is much stronger than the dilation phase, making its birth painful and distressing to the author. On the other hand, the stressed vowels of the last stanza are proportionately equal: six open vowels to six closed (and long) ones, suggesting a relative balance, albeit ambiguous, between the painful release (birth) of poetry and the existential dissatisfaction that remains therein.

Stressed vowels/diphthongs counts accompanying the poem's theme are confirmed by consonant variants. In the first stanza there are 21 occlusive consonants to 19 constrictive ones; in the second stanza the number of occlusives practically remain the same (20), while the constrictives have a slightly lower count (15). The third stanza exhibits a proportion of 13 occlusive consonants to 21 constrictive ones. This may suggest a highly violent and painful situation (poetry's difficult birth) in the first stanza with a diminishing factor curve towards the last stanza where we have a minimum of occlusives and a maximum of constrictives: the ambiguous partial release of the work of the creator in a poem. This ambiguity in the pangs and relief factors is enhanced by the high proportion of nasals (10) in the last stanza suggesting existential unhappiness and frustration because of the difficult artisan work of the poet to materialize (in words) an element of the spirit (poetry).

Syntactically the poem begins with a main clause connoting pregnancy: the universe's beating compressed in a miniature pulse, like a foetus, ticks time off and awaits its delivery. A development scheme ensues:

Line	Hypotaxis			Parataxis		
	Conj.	Verb	Complem.	Verb	Object	Complem.
3,4	jekk	tkellimha	lil qalbek	jispunta	d-dmugh	ghajnejk
5,6	jekk	tinbixhom		tasallek	mistoqsija	mill-kwiekeb
7,8	(Apheresis of condit. cl.)			titrabba	poezija	mill-petali ta' hajtek.
9,10	jekk	jizzarrat das-skiet	bil-kelma	ma jintemm	xejn	
11,12	jekk	tizvina		inixxi	bahar dem	mill-kelma

Arbitrariness cannot be an explanation for the existence of five alternating sequences of conditional subordinate clauses and main clauses (in pairs) giving, once more, a suggestion of contraction and dilation, of constant pulsation in the course of which painful delivery is the logical terminus. This is confirmed by the strategically placed "if" clauses with their two stressed accents (*jekk tkellimha*; *jekk tinbixhom* etc) occupying, without exception, the second part of the trimeter verse. The alternating hypotactic and paratactic

clauses produce the pulse beating foreshadowed in the first main clause complex.

This painful delivery of poetry lurks around the complement *kelma* in lines 9 and 11. The first *kelma* seems to evoke the Biblical *dabar* with its creative force and its everlasting effects when pronounced (*xejn ma jintemm*). Perhaps that is why there is a trochaic foot instead of and in opposition to the constant iambic scheme of the whole poem. Moreover, these concise lines make one remember Emily Dickinson's poem (J 1212) about the omnipotence of the word. On the other hand, the creation and delivery of poetry (the second *kelma*) produces such painfulness that it can only be expressed by the image of *baħar demm*.

Lexically the poem concentrates itself on few nouns and verbs. The first paratactical clause, pregnant with meaning, gives rise to two polarities: a cluster of cosmic orientated words (*univers, kwiekeb, pétali*) versus a group of existentially impregnated ones (*dmugh, mistoqsija, poežija*) placed as cause-effect units producing, once more, alternating and systolic results. In the last stanza *kelma* presents the polarities of an everlasting creation (*xejn ma jintemm*) and infinitive sorrow (*baħar demm*). It is interesting to note that the three verbs of the last stanza (*jizzarrat, tižvina, inixxi*) hold a large percentage (almost 25%) of fricatives suggesting both the joy and the pain underlying the birth of poetry.

In this short analysis of the poem *Dan l-univers itektek* we have tried to show how the meaning of the poem can be grasped also through its sonic structures. Arbitrariness and coincidences cannot explain the fact that meaning has a series of underlying phonic substrata supporting it. The poet's achievement is his total dominion and manipulation of word and sound even though he knows that, in the words of Archibald MacLeish, "A poem should not mean/but be".