



EDITH SITWELL

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HER RELIGIOUS IMAGERY

By JOHN PICK

'I... watch the dark fields for a rebirth of faith and wonder.'

The history of the poetic career of Dame Edith Sitwell is the story of her growth and development. The one thing profoundly true of her is, as John Lehman once observed, that 'Above all, she has never remained set.' Indeed, the differences between her early *Façade* and her recent *Canticle of the Rose* have tempted some critics to consider them works by entirely different poets.

When she gathered 'Some Notes on My Own Poetry' – to which we must often refer – she was really indulging in autobiography and sketching her own evolution as a poet. She herself, therefore, has laid down the main lines for any study such as this.

The very imagery of her poetry reveals her developing interests, and important among these has been an increasingly religious preoccupation.

When one turns to examine in the recently published *Collected Poems* (1957) her very earliest work, one finds the setting of 'Mandoline' to be 'Hell's gilded street' where the music is 'Tuneless and sharp as sin'.

The next poem, 'Barber's Shop', with 'Beelzebub in the chair', again is in a 'Street of Hell' and the very next poem, 'Singerie', opens with 'Summer afternoon in Hell'.

The early series of poems entitled 'Bucolic Comedies' employs frequent religious images: the leaves are 'curé-black' and starved men are

The shadow of that awful Tree
Cast down on us from Calvary.

An exception to the tendency of these early poems to concentrate in their religious imagery on hell and darkness is 'The Sleeping Beauty' with frequent images of cherubims, angels, heavenly music; in this fantastic poem the Dowager Queen 'reads Latin Missals to the peaches', the skies are 'saint-blue', lilies of the valley

Seem curls of little school-children that light
The priests' procession, when on some saint's day.

But of all the early poems the best known group – or at least the most notorious – is the poem cycle *Façade*. Behind the gay mask there is often another undercurrent. Indeed two lines from the later 'Gold Coast Customs' are applicable

Behind the façade
The worm is a jailer.

Images of hell are frequent, and the following are representative:

Her eyes –
Black angels
... the peruked sea whose swell
Breaks on the flowerless rocks of Hell
Hell
Black as a bison
When
Sir Beelzebub called for his syllabub in the hotel in Hell
Where Proserpine first fell.

There are, it is true, other religious images less hellish:

... Pierrot moon steals slyly in,
His face more white than sin
Tall houses; like a hopeless prayer
They cleave the sly dumb air
Through glades like a nun
They run from and shun.

But what comes as a surprising generalization when we examine the religious images in these early poems and in *Façade* – poems usually thought so gay – is that predominantly they concentrate on hell. No wonder that Edith Sitwell wrote in a preface to an early edition of *Façade*: 'This modern world is but a thin match-board flooring spread over a shallow hell.'

Also belonging to the pre-Gold Coast poems is such a selection as 'The Hambone and the Heart' with its

... my heart has known
That terrible Gehenna of the bone

and yet also with its image of

... the lime-tree's golden town
Of heaven.

'The Madness of Saul' takes us back in its imagery to

... some unheard wind,
Broken from Hell...

and

With those lips, red as hell, she burned the world,
The light is dead, for with her long black hair
That twists and writhes like hell's long hissing river
She quenched the light.

Among the most significant of these early poems is 'Metamorphosis' because it exists in two forms; the first, belonging to 1929, closes with the lines

Then my immortal Sun rose, Heavenly Love,
To rouse my carrion to life and move
The polar night, the boulder that rolled this,
My heart, by Sisyphus, in the abyss.
Come then, my Sun, to melt the eternal ice
Of Death...

The second version of the same poem belongs to 1946 – seventeen years later, by which time the images in the closing climactic lines have become specifically Christian:

So, out of the dark, see our great Spring begins
– Our Christ, the new Song, breaking out in the
fields and hedgerows.
The heart of Man! Oh the new temper of Christ, in
veins and branches!
He comes, our Sun, to melt the eternal ice
Of Death, the crusts of Time round the sunken soul –
Coming again in the spring of the world, clothed
with scarlet-coloured
Blood of our martyrdoms, – the fire of Spring.

Edith Sitwell has herself remarked that the course for this set of revised final lines is St. Hilary as quoted by Thomas Aquinas in *Catena Aurea* ('The Lord, having taken upon Him all the infirmities of our body, is then covered with the scarlet-coloured blood of all the martyrs.')

Looking backwards in 'Some Notes', Dame Edith saw all her early poetry as experiments leading up to 'Gold Coast Customs' as marking a turning point in her development.

As in much of her early poetry the images of 'Gold Coast Customs' are often of hell and negation:

Rich man Judas
Brother Cain

.....
Judas, mouldering in your old
Coffin body, still undying
As the Worm, where you are lying
With no flesh for warmth, but gold
For flesh, for warmth, for sheet
Now you are fleshness, too, as these
That starve and freeze,
Is your gold hard as Hell's huge polar street,
Is the universal blackness of Hell's day so cold?

But the poem rises to affirmation:

(Christ that takest away the sin
Of the world, and the Rich man's bone-dead grin)

.....
I have seen the murdered God look through the eyes
Of the drunkard's smirched
Mask...

And the poem closes on a note of confidence in a Divine Providence working itself out in the universe:

Yet the time will come
To the heart's dark slum

.....
And the last blood and fire from my side will be shed.
For the fires of God go marching on.

Edith Sitwell tells us that after 'Gold Coast Customs' 'I wrote no poetry for several years... Then, after a year of War, I began to write again.' The poetry she wrote showed a still further advance. In 'Invocation', the invitation to the Holy Ghost:

... O Spirit moving upon the waters
Your peace instil
In the animal heat and splendour of the blood

is answered

... in the night
The Holy Ghost speaks in the whispering leaves.

There is also in 'Harvest':

The universal language of the Bread –
 (O Thou who art not broken, or divided –
 Thou who art eaten, but like the Burning Bush
 Art not consumed – Thou Bread of Men and Angels) –
 The Seraphim rank on rank of the ripe wheat –
 Boldbearded thunders and hierarchies of heaven
 Roar from the earth: 'Our Christ is arisen, He
 comes to give a sign from the Dead.'

For this the source is a sermon of Thomas Aquinas ('He gives us for our refreshment the bread of angels... On the breaking of the Bread Thou art not broken, nor art Thou divided, Thou art eaten, but like the Burning Bush, Thou are not consumed.')

Similar is the imagery in 'An Old Song Re-Sung'!

Once my love seemed the Burning Bush,
 The Pentecost Rushing of Flames.

There are poems expressing God's immanence such as the one entitled 'How Many Heavens':

God is everything!
 The grass within the grass, the angel in the angel, flame
 Within the flame, and He is the green shade that came
 To be the heart of shade.

.....
 ... God is the stone in the still stone, the silence laid
 In the heart of silence...
 ... God is the straw within the straw

and the poem rises to its climax:

He is the sea of ripeness and the sweet apple's emerald core.

 He is the core of the heart of love, and He,
 beyond labouring seas, our ultimate shore.

Again the source is a sermon, this time by John Donne: '... The Stanca-
 rest will needs have God not only to be in everything, but to be every-
 thing that God is an angel in an angel, and a stone in a stone, and a
 straw in a straw.'

Following immediately upon this poem comes 'Holiday' making clear
 that this immanentism is not to be understood pantheistically:

... the Intelligible Light
 Turns all to gold, the apple, the dust, the
 unripe wheat-ear.

In a note to the poem, Edith Sitwell credits Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* as the source for 'God is Intelligible Light'. The poem closes with the emphasis on the whole of creation participating in the Redeeming Christ:

... the claws of the lion
 Bear now on their palms the wounds of the Crucified.

 Old people at evening sitting in the doorways
 See in a broken window of the slum
 The Burning Bush reflected, and the crumb
 For the starving bird is part of the broken Body
 Of Christ Who forgives us — He with the bright Hair
 — The Sun Whose Body was spilt on our
 fields to bring us harvest.

In 'The Two Loves' Christ becomes the Redeemer of the suffering world:

I see Christ's Wounds weep in the Rose on the wall
 Then I who nursed in my earth the dark red seeds of Fire —
 The pomegranate grandeur, the dark seeds of Death,
 Felt them change to the light and fire in the heart
 of the rose...
 And I thought of... Smart the madman who was born
 To bless Christ with the Rose and his people

 And of One who contracted His Immensity
 And shut Himself in the scope of a small flower
 Whose root is clasped in darkness... God in the span
 Of the root and the light-seeking corolla....

until the poem ends in confident hope:

... with the voice of Fire I cry —
 Will He disdain the flower of the world, the
 heart of Man?

A kind of *laudate Dominum* is hymned in the refrain — repeated with variations — of 'The Bee-Keeper' with its

... O bright immortal lover
 That is incarnate in the body's earth –
 O bright immortal Lover who is All!

The expression of sympathy for the poor and the outcast already seen in 'Gold Coast Customs' continued in such poems as 'The Stone-Breakers: A Prison Song':

... And we from death on death shall rise again
 To testify against the heart of Man
 That dreamed our darkness could present a dam
 To the Sea that comes – the infinite Blood of Christ.

Of the specifically war poems two have found their way frequently into anthologies, 'Lullaby'; with its image 'Under the Judas-Coloured sun', and 'Still Falls the Rain'; a poem which has claims of being the most profound and most moving poem written in English about the war. The latter opens powerfully:

Still falls the Rain –
 Dark as the world of man, black as our loss –
 Blind as the nineteen hundred and forty nails
 Upon the Cross.

The rain of bombs becomes the blood which flows from the wounded side of Christ, bringing redemption even to those who have inflicted the wounds:

Still falls the Rain
 At the feet of the Starved Man hung upon the Cross.
 Christ that each day, each night, nails there, have
 mercy on us –
 On Dives and Lazarus:
 Under the Rain the sore and the gold are as one.
 Still falls the Rain –
 Still falls the Blood from the Starved Man's wounded Side!
 He bears in his Heart all wounds ...
 Still falls the Rain –
 Then – O I'll leape up to my God: who pulls me doune –
 See, where Christ's blood streames in the firmament:
 It flows from the Brow we nailed
 Deep to the dying, to the thirsting heart
 That holds the fires of the world, –
 dark-smirched with pain
 As Caesar's laurel crown

— lines echoing Marlowe's Dr. Faustus — and the poem concludes

Then sounds the voice of One who like the heart of a man
Was once a child who among beasts has lain —
'Still do I love, still shed my innocent light,
my blood, for thee'.

A still later group of war poems followed upon the news of the atom bomb, news which had a deeply disillusioning effect on Edith Sitwell. In her 'Dirge for the New Sunrise' she watches

— The ghost of the heart of Man . . . red Cain
And the more murderous brain
Of man . . .

In 'Some Notes on My Own Poetry', explaining 'The Shadow of Cain', she contemplates 'That Second Fall of Man that took the form of separation of brother from brother, of Cain from Abel, of nation and nation, of the rich and the poor — the spiritual migration of these into the desert of the cold, towards the final disaster, the first symbol of which fell on Hiroshima'. She tells us that she uses Lazarus as a symbol 'of Poetry, now moved into a new tomb of useless gold, in which until the fire of love and spiritual rebirth reach him, he will lie dead in his tomb of mud'. For all its pessimism 'The Shadow of Cain' ends on a note of faith:

. . . When the last Judas-kiss
Has died upon the cheek of the Starved Man Christ,
Those ashes that were men
Will rise again
To be our Fires upon the Judgment Day!
And yet — who dreamed that Christ has died in vain?
He walks again on the Seas of Blood, He comes in
the terrible rain.

In 'The Blinded Song-Bird near the Battlefield' the bird sees one

. . . torn by all the nails upon Christ's Cross:
He bore the Stigmata of the sins of the whole world.

Yet during the same dark period and included in the series entitled 'Three Poems of the Atomic Age' is 'The Canticle of the Rose' where 'The Rose upon the wall/Cries 'Christ's Wounds in me shine'.

But high upon the wall
The Rose where the wounds of Christ are red

Cries to the Light

'See how I rise upon my stem, ineffable bright
Effluence of bright essence... From my little span
I cry of Christ, Who is the ultimate Fire
Who will burn away the cold in the heart of man...
Springs come, springs go...
'I was reddere on Rode than the Rose in the rayne.'
'This smell is Christ, clepid the plantynge of the
Rose in Jerico.'

She has, indeed, the vision of all things, even the humblest, sanctified by Light – even the fly

Whose wings, though sprung from the uttermost
filth of the world,
Have all the grandeurs and jewels of the Dust
about them,
And are made holy by Light.

In *Collected Poems* the final selection is 'Elegy for Dylan Thomas' in which Edith Sitwell affirms 'our Death is Birth, our Birth in Death' and where she says

So, for his sake,
More proudly will that Sisyphus, the heart of Man,
Roll the Sun up the steep of Heaven...

Her most recent poem, appearing in the May 1958 issue of *The month*, was dedicated to Rev. Martin C. D'Arcy, S.J. The very title 'His Blood Colours My Cheek' is drawn from a saying of St. Agnes and it closes Edith Sitwell's work to date with

His Blood colours my cheek –
No more eroded by the seas of the world's
passions, greeds, I rise
As if I never had been Ape, to look in
the compassionate, the all-seeing Eyes.

The religious imagery of Edith Sitwell shifts and changes from hell and negation to heaven and affirmation, from Satan and Cain to the Holy Ghost and Christ, from the fire that burns to the fire that redeems – from darkness to Light. She becomes 'an inspired voice that speaks for all the spiritual distress of an agonized generation' and hers is a voice uttering in images the goal for which the heart of man is searching and straining.

ALFREDO PANZINI

UN GRANDE ROMANZIERE DEL NOVECENTO GIÀ QUASI COMPLETAMENTE DIMENTICATO

By G. CURMI

DOPO il Pirandello, uno dei più grandi narratori del *Novecento*, è, senza dubbio, Alfredo Panzini, il quale, come osserva il Nicastro, senza abbandonarsi al turbine della modernità seppe riuscir moderno e dare alla narrativa del secolo opere le più dotate di intuito lirico e di stile. Osservatore acuto, egli esprime con garbo e finezza le cose che osserva, sia che scriva novelle, come *Le fiabe della virtù* (1905) e *Donne, madonne e bimbi* (1921), o romanzi, come *La lanterna di Diogene* (1909), *Io cerco moglie* (1918) e *Il padrone sono me* (1930), sia che scriva racconti umoristici e sentimentali, come *Il viaggio di un povero letterato* (1919) e *Il mondo è rotondo* (1921), o diari, come *Diario sentimentale* (1923), sia che tratti la storia romanzata o la narrazione storica, come in *La vera storia dei tre colori* (1924) o in *Il Conte di Cavour* (1931).

Nato a Sinigallia nel 1863 e morto a Roma nel 1939, Alfredo Panzini* scrisse sedici romanzi, otto raccolte di novelle, e sette volumi di divagazioni filosofiche e letterarie.

Il suo primo romanzo è *Il libro dei morti*, dove però lo scrittore è ancora più letterato che narratore, e dove si sente troppo l'influsso della poesia e della prosa aulica del Carducci, di cui il Panzini era scolaro, e a cui rimarrà sempre fedele nella nitidezza della parola, nella classicità della forma e nel sano naturalismo. Basterebbe dire che quando il protagonista di questo romanzo, Gian Giacomo, va alla stazione «una guardia gli prese la tessera, la forò». Più tardi, il Panzini subirà l'influsso del Manzoni, e dal grande Milanese trarrà la bonarietà, la precisione e l'umorismo. Scrive

* Il Panzini fu uno dei più fecondi narratori italiani del *Novecento*: i suoi romanzi più noti sono: *Il libro dei morti* (1893), *La lanterna di Diogene* (1907), che viene considerato come una delle sue opere più perfette, *La madonna di papà* (1916); *Il romanzo della guerra* (1915); *Io cerco moglie* (1918), *Il mondo è rotondo* (1921), *La pulcella senza pulcellaggio* (1926), *Il padrone sono me* (1930), *Santippe* (1938), *Lesbia*; le sue raccolte di novelle più famose: *Lepida et tristia* (1901), *Trionfi di donna* (1903), *Le fiabe della virtù* (1911), *Novelle d'ambo i sessi* (1918), *Donne, madonne e bimbi* (1921); i suoi libri filosofico-letterari: *Il viaggio di un povero letterato* (1919); *Il diavolo nella mia libreria* (1920), i due volumi del *Diario sentimentale della guerra* (1926) e *I giorni del sole e del grano* (1929).

in un libro: «La notte fu anch'essa spesa in consulte angosciose. La frase non è mia, ma è tolta da quell'insuperabile libro dei *Promessi Sposi*.» E altrove scrive: «Il primo svegliarsi dopo una sciagura e in un impiccio è un momento molto amaro. Anche questo dice, con la consueta acutezza il Manzoni, ed io quella mattina sperimentai la verità della sentenza.»

Il D'Annunzio, invece, non esercitò alcun influsso sul Panzini, il quale aveva un carattere diversissimo, e sul D'Annunzio ha lasciato questo giudizio: «Qual'è l'ideale dannunziano? L'uomo istintivo, brutalmente primitivo, ma con tutte le più squisite raffinatezze della civiltà. Dolore, lacrime, sentimenti, eroismi occulti, umiltà, sacrifici, religione, e tutti gli altri sublimi miti della vita, che cosa sono per il D'Annunzio? Materiale buono per fare dei *vol au vent*, delle *supremes*, dei piatti esteticamente montati come quelli che l'illustre cuoco fece per questa nobile mensa.»

Il Panzini tentò prima il racconto veristico con la *Cagna nera* e *La moglie nuova*, ma si formò subito una personalità propria, una coscienza artistica diversa da ogni altra, una forma e uno stile che differiscono sostanzialmente da quelli dei narratori della sua epoca. Perchè il Panzini pur conservando una temprà eminentemente classica, è uno scrittore squisitamente moderno, complesso e contraddittorio, e nei suoi romanzi e nelle sue novelle mescola l'umorismo all'erudizione, il moralismo al sentimentalismo, l'oppressione della vita quotidiana all'anelito della poesia, la realtà circostante alla passione degli uomini, le contraddizioni della società moderna alla esaltazione della vita naturale, semplice e modesta, il disgusto che deriva dalla ipocrisia e dalla malvagità degli uomini alla aspirazione alla serenità e al vagheggiamento dell'idillio. E i suoi pensieri e i suoi sentimenti e le sue riflessioni filosofico-letterarie sempre esprime con sapiente bonarietà e con arguzia sottile, nell'involucro di una prosa linda e scorrevole, dal periodare elegante e dallo stile leggero, benchè non di rado mescoli l'eleganza alla sciattezza e la frase corrente al neologismo. Secondo il Borgese, prima di tutte le bellezze dell'arte panziniana è questa: «che il Panzini è riuscito a dare esempi di quel che la critica vorrebbe dalla letteratura italiana: un'arte di sentimento moderno e di forma schiettamente classica e nostra. Il senso della prosa italiana gli è venuto per il tramite carducciano; ma come rinnovato e alleggerito di ogni gravame accademico. È il nostro classicismo; ma dopo un tuffo in una fontana di gioventù. E non è classicismo ciceroniano o cinquecentesco o boccaccevole; ma ha la magrezza e il candore del primo Trecento. E la sua bellezza non è di parole rare e di frasi squisite e di cocci eruditi; non è di ricami e di grovigli; ma è bellezza di tessuto».

Il Panzini ha soprattutto vivissimo il senso della natura e riesce quasi sempre artista perfetto nella descrizione dei paesaggi. Tolgo da una delle

novelle di *Lepida et Tristia*: «Solo alcune giovenche e capre, solinghe alla pastura, come al tempo di Messer Angiolo Poliziano, e riparate sotto l'ombra d'un sasso, ci riguardavano coi loro occhi solenni.» Tolgo da *Biscia*, che è la prima novellà di *Donne, madonne e bimbi*: «E quando il mattino era chiaro, si vedeva il fumo dei lunghi camini delle fabbriche scherzare nel cielo di perla come un ricamo.» E tolgo da *La lanterna di Diogene*: «Il mare vicino faceva levare i pioppi stormendo, come un respiro fresco dopo l'afa diurna. Sentii il colore della luce calda come d'oriente che il sole dona con speciale munificenza a quell'angolo ignoto di terra, e mi prese l'illusione che essa debba arrivare anche a quelli che giacciono sotto terra, e le tenebre ne siano consolate: mi parve (o sogno, dono di Dio?) che, riposando un dì sotto quelle glebe natiè, riudrò ancora il sussurro del mare.»

Le donne dei romanzi, del Panzini, anche quando esse siano la dolce e buona Berenice di *La Pulcella senza pulcellaggio*, o la capricciosa e leggera Dolly del *Padrone sono me*, o Miss Edith, la bionda istituttrice inglese di *Madonna di mammà*, portano sempre il fascino sensuale. Sono quasi sempre la donna descritta nel romanzo *lo cerco moglie*: «L'uomo delinquente porta scritto sul volto: io sono delinquenza. Nella donna, niente! Anzi, il più delle volte, la delinquenza della donna sta nascosta sotto la maschera della fatale bellezza: bellezza spesso iridata da un fascino intellettuale che può simulare l'intelligenza. Possono essere tali donne mistiche o sensuali, ma insensibili sempre, ma menzognere sempre! Non la menzogna comune, badi! bensí quella che noi chiamiamo pseudologia patologica, la menzogna cioè incosciente, che può sembrare sincerità. Sono costoro le grandi isteriche, le grandi voluttuose, sono quelle che hanno esercitato un'azione velenosa sui centri nervosi della storia... Sono le Attila femmine con angelico volto; mentre gli Attila maschi hanno volto ferino. Generalmente bruciano anche sè stesse. Ma se campano molto, ecco tu le vedi improvvisamente sfasciarsi, cadere l'intonaco della ingannevole bellezza. Ecco apparire, o la deforme pinguedine o la ributtante magrezza: ecco la voce roca, ecco il cinismo che spunta, dov'era l'intellettualità. E bada ancora: generalmente sono infeconde: e noi sappiamo che soltanto la maternità dà l'intelligenza alla donna. E i poeti esaltano queste creature, *flagellum Deil*»

Tenerissimi affetti suscita però la famiglia al Panzini, e gli desta una tenera bontà. Quella bontà che egli chiama «lirica, una forma intuitiva di lirica. La sola grande lirica.» Nel *Viaggio d'un povero letterato* il ricordo della madre morta gli evoca questo quadro: «Ah! ecco la vecchia chiesa. La casetta è lí presso... Quante volte nel dolce mese di maggio io giunsi in quella città, e bussai alla porta della casa. La mamma non c'era in

casa; e donne del vicinato dicevano che era andata alla chiesa: la ritrovavo in chiesa, lì presso, col capo chiuso nel suo nero scialle: mese di maggio; dolci preghiere, profumo tenero di primavera, e viole mammole, erba cedrina sopra gli altari... Forse è là e la ritroverò ancora! La vecchia casa elevava la fronte davanti a me. Spinsi la grave portella. E allora mi ricordai che un triste giorno d'inverno sul pavimento di quella chiesa fu posata una bara con quattro ceri intorno, e un manto nero orlato d'argento era steso per terra.»

Nello stesso libro così parla della sua bambina venuta ultima e tarda, e non desiderata: «Ma tu, pupina, bambina, piccolo raggio di sole, che dondoli, che batti il *tic-tac* spesso delle tue prime scarpine di cuoio per queste stanze; che spalanchi oramai, con la piccola mano, tutte le porte, come a dire: «Badate che ci sono anch'io», o piccola bambina, come sei venuta al mondo, tu ultima e tarda!... I tuoi occhi sono ancora colmi del meraviglioso stupore del mondo crepuscolare da cui sei uscita; e le sottilissime mani hanno accenni a cosa invisibile. Di là! Le cicogne, che ti portarono, vennero di là!... Noi ti chiameremo Desiderata, noi ti chiameremo Letizia! Ma non sai tu che non ti si voleva? Non lo sai, no? O piccolo essere ignoto, a me più caro di tutte le cose note!... Tu brontoli, tu ronzi, tu squilli; suoni acuti, suoni gravi, miagolii lamentosi, scale cromatiche, umoristiche di *eeh, eeh, ah, ah, aah*, che la casa sembra piena di piccoli genietti nascosti negli angoli. E la tua dolce lingua ignota, da cui usciranno le sillabe di domani.» E nelle *Fiabe della virtù* così parla del bambino morto: «Il papà studia, non bisogna far rumore... E io sono un bambino!... E allora il papà ti sgrida!... E io piango!... Questa mattina m'induce a concedere, che trotti pure a sua posta... Ora, in virtù tua, o Morte, non trotta più. È immobile in una città bianca. Noi ti abbiamo ben pianto, cara anima, e nella tua piccola manina io ho veduto che tu tenevi stretta un po' della nostra anima, ed io te l'ho lasciata; ho rispettato l'invisibile che tu portavi con te, come ho rispettato i fiori che erano con te. Per rivederti bisognerà fare un lungo viaggio: il viaggio avverrà certamente, ma non ti rivedremo!... Noi lo sappiamo; vi sono pensieri che non si pensano più, ma si sono pensati: vi sono lagrime che non si spargono più, ma si sono sparse. Esse incombono però con un'atmosfera di tristezza che nessuna aura di primavera verrà più a dissipare.»

Anche altrove, nei romanzi, pur non parlando dei suoi, ha, a tratti, pitture soavi di donne. Ecco con quanta delicatezza e vivacità di toni descrive i capelli leggeri della fanciulla Berenice, nel romanzo omonimo: «I capelli di lei, appena la mano li lisciava, si avvolgevano in su da per loro come fossero di elastico; e bastava poi che ella avesse dato ai capelli un piccolo colpo della mano, perchè essi, tutti ubbidienti, andassero

ad attorcigliarsi attorno alla nuca, come una serpe che si rinserri misteriosa entro le sue spira.»

Ma nonostante questi delicati tocchi di soave affetto e di lirico sentimento, il Panzini è profondamente convinto della malvagità umana, e fa da sfondo alle sue opere lo scetticismo morale e l'inutilità del progresso. In *Il libro dei morti* dice: «Credete proprio che sia cosa utile e buona il chiamare universalmente i giovani a questo grande dolore del conoscere? Oh gli antichi alchimisti che cercavano la pietra filosofale, ben riderebbero di voi, che sognate di trasmutare questo fango dell'anima umana in una gemma preziosa!» In *La cagna nera* ha questa pagina: «L'odio nostro contro tutto ciò che è più debole di noi, raggiunge un così alto grado di ferocia istintiva e di voluttà, da vergognarsi del titolo naturale di uomo. Tenete bene a mente quello che ora dico: noi potremo volare per l'aria, illuminare la notte come il giorno; scoprire tutti i segreti dell'anima e della natura; prolungare la vita per dei secoli; non lavorare più nessuno; far lavorare il sole e le maree; domare al servizio le tempeste, i terremoti; tutto è possibile; ma l'animo dell'uomo non si muterà d'una linea, come non abbiamo migliorato sino adesso. E allora, che importa tutto il resto? Io ci credevo una volta, poi ne ho dubitato, e adesso non ci credo più. Già io la avevo questa fede sublime; adesso ne rido. Pigliate le uova delle biscie e dei coccodrilli; curatele, sperate che ne vengono fuori dei colibri e degli uccelli del paradiso? Tutto è inutile; serpi verranno fuori; rettili e serpi, a grumi, vermi a fiotti, coccodrilli a schiere... Eppure sembrano uova come le altre; sono piccine piccine; lisce lisce; ci si può illudere facilmente, e poi ci si guadagna anche a fingere di credere. Esaminate i bambini, i giovanetti; così biondi, così gentili, che gemono per un taglio, che hanno una vocina così soave, dei gesti da innamorare: si direbbe che stanno per ispuntar le ali! No, è tutto seme di vipere. Mi ricordo un esempio che ho veduto a Napoli: allora non ci pensai; ci penso ora: sentite. All'ospedale, in uno stambugio del piano terreno, era esposto un cadavere, meglio, una carogna umana, per il riconoscimento: qualche cosa da far torcere la vista ad un medico positivista, tanto era deforme! Quando si pensa che la creatura umana debba ridursi così, viene da rinnegare Dio, parola d'onore. Bene; i ragazzi che uscivano dalla scuola; una cinquantina, si diedero la voce: il morto; il morto! Perchè uno era venuto a dare la notizia, e tutti a correre per vederlo, e tutti attorno: era un grido, un cinguettio allegro di ammirazione, di osservazione, di ingenuità sconce, da far maledire la razza umana; e non si mossero se non quando un beccamorto, facendo sferza del grembiule insanguinato, li scacciò.»

La perversità, secondo il Panzini, non è soltanto insita nell'uomo dalla

provvidenziale natura, ma gli è assolutamente necessaria, perchè senza di essa egli non potrebbe vivere fra i suoi simili. «La natura fu provvida: egli dice ne *La cagna nera* — ha dato alla gazzella la velocità delle gambe per poter vivere in mezzo ai deserti; ha dato all'aspide il veleno, all'orso iperboreo il vello denso, al rospo l'orrore della forma per essere sfuggito; all'uomo che nasce nudo e debole, ha dato il genio della perversità per poter vivere fra i suoi simili.» Dice nella novella *Un uomo in due* che la vita è «una serie di enormi sciarade» ed osserva in *Viaggio d'un povero letterato*, parlando delle macchine: «Però questo continuo creare macchine e macchine non può darsi che porti via un po' d'anima all'uomo per darlo alle macchine? Se la natura ha dato quel tanto e non più...»

Per il Panzini il mondo è un teatro, gli uomini dei burattini, la vita un errore interrotto da poche ore di sorriso. In *Il viaggio di un povero letterato*, dice: «Appena poche ore di sonno; poi gli occhi si aprono; e trovo il sipario alzato; e i burattini della vigilia continuano la loro rappresentazione. Guardavo fuori con stupore dalla finestra le verdi piante, il bell'azzurro, i cantanti augelletti. Via, speriamo che presto cada il sipario su tutti questi errori del mondo.»

In questo teatro di burattini che è il mondo, la virtù e l'onestà sono degli «eleganti vestimenti» di cui dobbiamo sapere abbigliarci. Dice nel *Libro dei morti e dei vivi*: «La virtù e l'onestà sono come l'abito nero, di rigore per presentarsi in società; ma voi capite che per indossarlo non importa punto di essere gentiluomini. La virtù anzi in certi casi è obbligatoria come il *frac* per i camerieri.» I realmente virtuosi, secondo il Panzini, non esistono fuorchè nella fantasia. «La nave della virtù non ha viandanti, non ha porto che la ricetti. Solo l'isola della Utopia la accoglie qualche volta nel suo eterno errore.» E nel mondo, per essere stimati e rispettati bisogna dare molto fumo negli occhi: «Bisogna darla a bere, non lo capisci? Fai il professore, fai il pizzicagnolo, fai il medico, fai l'oste, ma bisogna sempre darla a bere.»

E sempre sfiducioso del progresso, il Panzini vide nello scoppio della prima conflagrazione mondiale, il fallimento di tutti gli sforzi e di tutte le idealità umane. Scrisse nel *Diario di guerra*: «Ma che bisogno ho io di pigliarmela così calda? In fondo, questa guerra non è che il fallimento più clamoroso di tutte quelle idee di umanità, di fratellanza, di pace, a cui non ho mai voluto apporre la mia firma.»

Forse la migliore biografia intellettuale del Panzini la troviamo nelle parole del Panzini stesso, nella novella *Trionfo della morale*, che forma parte della collana *I Trionfi di donna*. «E da molti anni che io mi affatico intorno a questo antico problema, posto già nettamente da Aristotile, rinnovato in ogni tempo e specialmente nel tempo nostro: vedere cioè per

quale via si possa assicurare all'uomo la maggiore somma di felicità e di benessere, di verità e di giustizia. Ma come il chimico non può separare alcune sostanze se non col pensiero, così io, dopo aver cercato di isolarmi, di sterilizzarmi, per così dire, da tutti gli errori, le tradizioni, i pregiudizi, mi sono accorto che nel laboratorio chimico del mio pensiero non è possibile isolare nè la felicità, nè la verità. Esse vivono in quanto sono mescolate all'errore! Sono venuto sempre a questa conclusione: due e due fanno quattro, uno meno uno forma zero: gli uni hanno ragione; ma anche gli altri non hanno torto. Ha ragione l'anarchia, ma la legge non ha torto. Ha ragione lo spiritualismo, come ha ragione il positivismo materialistico: non hanno torto le masse socialiste, non hanno torto gli aristocratici del blasone e del denaro: ottima la pace, ma necessaria la guerra. Meravigliosa l'idea di un'unica umana famiglia, e pure santa l'idea della patria. Si progredisce con una gamba e si va indietro con l'altra.»

Osservando e scrutando la vita con occhio di un analitico ostile, il Panzini però non s'indigna mai. Quando s'accorge che la realtà è molto diversa dall'ideale, quando s'accorge che il mondo è teatro e retorica, non s'indigna. E non può indignarsi e condannare, perchè egli non crede in verità assolute in nome delle quali possa giudicare e condannare. Allo sdegno preferisce perciò l'ironia. Gli dice il diavolo in *Il diavolo nella mia libreria* (1920): «Perchè imprecate al destino? Considerate il mondo come un teatro di varietà, sempre vario ed uguale. Gira il girarrosto del tempo, come un caleidoscopio. Esso produce i più impensati spettacoli: sempre geometrici e perfetti.»

Animo contraddittorio come tutti gli uomini, il Panzini, che generalmente polemizza con la vita e l'esistenza, sente a volte «un gran piacere abitare in questo mondo» e riconosce le bellezze di cui Dio ci ha circondato, e si rimprovera la sua ingratitudine: «Ma che mattino rugiadoso, silenzioso, ridente! Vi sono (è debito di giustizia confessarlo) dei momenti che è un gran piacere abitare in questo mondo! È una cosa di fatto, ed io, come positivista a mio modo, la constato. Non avviene spesso, ma avviene... Come io sentivo quella mattina la carezza, l'abbracciamento, quasi sensuale, femminile, della materia!... Che lieto mattinare degli uccelli per i giardini silenziosi!» Poi si leva l'alba, e un gallo canta: «Allora a me venne una gran voglia, come a Pietro apostolo, di piangere e di farmi il segno della santa Croce: Oh, buon Signore Iddio, che bel mondo armonioso e puro hai tu creato per noi peccatori, ciechi e ostinati! E mi lavavo intanto e mi pareva che l'acqua non fosse mai assai per pulire tutte le mie colpe di misconoscenza e di ingratitudine:»

Altre volte sente la gioia delle piccole cose buone, e la quiete e la pace ineffabile della solitudine campestre: «La casa del cantoniere. Quasi

tutti i vesperi le mie gambe mi portano là... La casetta del cantoniere sorgeva presso il cominciar di quei pioppi; e c'erano intorno tutte le cose buone che sono necessarie a chi deve vivere lontano dagli altri uomini... Ma che cosa sto a cercare più nella vita?... Ma non sarei felice io qui? Ecco: sventolare la bandiera a questi piccoli treni, non veloci, salutano reverentemente la vita che passa; e godere intanto questa solitudine, questa santissima quiete, dalla quale passerei senza avvedermene, senza contrasto, a più sicura pace, sepolto qui, presso questo mare.»

Il Panzini è dotato di molto umorismo: e il suo umorismo, talvolta amaro e talvolta arguto, pervade tutte le sue opere, siano esse narrative o d'erudizione. Tolgo alcuni esempi: da *La cagna nera*; «E poi anche quel vecchio latino mi era venuto in uggia: quel latino disseccato nelle scuole con tutte quelle sentenze di virtù, di amor patrio, di eroismo, di temperanza; sentenze mummificate nei libri di testo sotto l'azione pedantesca delle chiose che vi fanno quei poveri compilatori, mezzo rosi dalla miseria e mezzo dalla presunzione:» «Le fantasie corrompono l'anima e il corpo, e rendono l'uomo pallido e trasognato; e più sono grandi e nobili e più uccidono, e non v'è corruzione di vizio che maceri più terribilmente:» Da *Viaggio d'un povero letterato*: «Approfittiamo allora del treno. Questo gran mezzo di locomozione può fornire notevoli illusioni e benefici... Sdraiato sopra un comodo cuscino, e lanciato ad ottanta chilometri all'ora, sentirò spezzarmi il pensiero, come in automobile; e niente mi vieta di credere che tutti quegli omarini in posizione di attenti al passaggio del treno siano i miei servitori; e che quella carrozza imbottita di velluto sia la mia; e che tutti quei lumi nella notte rimangano accesi per me; e che tutti quei superbi capistazione veglino per la mia incolumità personale. Nè io avrò bisogno di comandare. Oh, cosa bellissima! Essere servito e non dover comandare! Parere proprietario e non essere censito!» Ancora da *Viaggio d'un povero letterato*: «L'ottimismo non è soltanto una filosofia, ma anche un eccellente digestivo.» Da la novella *Dalla padella nella brace* (in *Donne, madonne e bimbi*): «Oh non sarà mai detto che io sia giunto sin qui, che abbia studiato tanto latino senza vedere le sorgenti del Tevere, *Tiberis*, accusativo *Tiberim*... Per chi non lo sa le sorgenti del Tevere nulla hanno di interessante: bisogna scendere a un terzo di costa del Fumaiolo, e quivi, in un terreno scosceso e giallastro, che frana, sotto alcuni magri faggi tutti incisi di nomi, rampollano a breve distanza tre o quattro vene da cui si devolve l'acqua che fu ed è declinata da tante generazioni di scolari.» *I giorni del sole e del grano*: «Allora un viaggio in Oriente; ma da quando i turchi non portano più turbante e le giapponesi si tagliano anch'esse i capelli, non c'è più gusto andare in Oriente» «Non mi è mai accaduto di vedere un contadino guardare il sole,

le stelle e la luna per ammirare la bellezza del creato; ma per sapere che ora è, e se il tempo sarà buono o cattivo. E nemmeno si fermeranno a guardare i guizzanti pesciolini dei fiumi o ad ascoltare i cantanti uccellini dei boschi, se non per veder modo di prenderli e mangiarli.» «Dante, no! È troppo divino, ed è troppo crudele: arrostisce troppa gente, Petrarca, fors'anche; ma gli piangono dietro tre secoli di lagrime false. La Bibbia, no. Lo so: racchiude tutta la sapienza prima della Bibbia e anche dopo la Bibbia. Ma troppe leggi, troppi regolamenti.» «... ho capito però che ci vuole l'elettricità. Chi glie l'avrebbe mai detto ad Alessandro Volta che la sua invenzione avrebbe servito a fare l'ondulazione permanente alle donne?» «Questo infatti è uno degli inconvenienti della ricchezza: non si può collocare nella cassa da morto, fatta eccezione per i Re Faraoni che avevano costruito casse da morto speciali, chiamate piramidi. Ma anche lì un'assicurazione vera e propria non c'è, come è dimostrato dal caso del re Tutankamen, e dell'imperatrice Tsou-chi, che venne sepolta sopra un letto d'oro fra un turbine di perle e di diamanti, ma la sua tomba venne violata quando le truppe della rivoluzione sono entrate in Pechino.» «La sai la storia delle rondini? Esse videro l'uomo che seminava il lino. Gridarono dal cielo a tutti gli uccelli: «distruggete, distruggete quei semi. L'uomo ne trarrà il lino per vostra morte.» E tutti gli uccelli a deridere le rondini. «Il lino è nato, — gridarono — ancora le rondini — strappate finchè è tempo, quei fili d'erba.» E gli uccelli a ridere ancora. «Sono poeti le rondini, non ci badate.» E il lino crebbe e furono fatte le reti e tutti gli uccelli furono presi e fu loro schiacciata la testa.... E le rondini per difendere la vita loro si fecero amiche dell'uomo e appesero il nido alle sue case. Da altri libri: «La fortuna fa come il baro nel giuoco: fa vincere qualche volta, per allettare gli altri.» «E la gloria? È poca soddisfazione stare sempre in piedi sopra un monumento, mentre la gente comune si deve accontentare di scrivere il proprio nome dove trova un po' di posto libero sui muriccioli?» «L'imperativo... è il modo del comando, e non ha la prima persona, perchè è più facile comandare agli altri che a se stesso. Gli antichi Romani, che comandavano al mondo, facevano molto uso del modo imperativo.» «I secoli sono i teli delle lenzuola tessute dal destino. Quando son nuovi sono un po' grezzi e pizzicano un po'. Poi il tempo li lava, il sole li imbianca, l'uso li ammorbidisce. Scompaiono le macchie, pare quasi che odorino e si dice: che bel tempo il buon tempo antico!» «Ringraziamo la Divina Provvidenza che ci ha fatti nascere in quell'ordine privilegiato delle bestie, che mangia tutte le altre, ed è tanto intelligente da distinguere quando è meglio mangiar vivi e palpitanti i propri simili, come avviene per le ostriche; quando è meglio lasciarli un poco putrefare, come avviene per le pernici e per le quaglie.»

Come al solito coglie nel segno il Borgese quando dice che il Panzini accetta la vita, «ma non l'ama; la conosce, la studia, la narra; ma con diffidenza.» La sua posizione verso la vita è una «curiosità attenta ed ostile di uno che preferirebbe, se potesse, vivere ancora tra gli eroici fantasmi di Leopardi e Carducci.»

Tanto dal punto di vista morale, quanto dal punto di vista stilistico, ottimo ci pare il giudizio che sul Panzini dà il Bargellini nel *Novecento*. Egli dice che il Panzini era «uno scettico nostalgico della fede; un umorista divertito in cerca d'una saggezza. Faceva l'altalena tra la verità e l'errore, come scrivendo faceva il pendolino tra la pedanteria e la spregiudicatezza. Mischiava la fede cristiana con la saggezza pagana, come sulla pagina mescolava neologismi e latinismi. Sembrava rischioso ed era soltanto estroso. A lungo andare il suo giuoco, sia spirituale che stilistico, veniva a scoprirsi e quindi a stancare. Scrisse molto, anche romanzi, i quali però non erano che un seguito di divagazioni, un insieme di «capitoli» garbatissimi nell'ironia, finissimi nel sentimento, capziosi nella morale.»

Un'ottima osservazione sul Panzini fa pure Luciano Nicastro quando dice che di tutte le sue opere è soprattutto notevole *Il libro dei morti* «perchè vi è l'analisi di due epoche fra loro contrastanti: quella che ha fede nei beni dello spirito e trae conforto dal suo continuo amore per le idee tranquille e per gli insegnamenti della tradizione; l'altra, che, volendo aver precisa conoscenza delle origini e dello svolgersi della vita, è portata a staccarsi dall'antico ed a rompere ogni rapporto con la morale dei nostri padri. Il mondo si trasforma, nota il Panzini. Noi siamo entrati nel turbine della modernità e ci par di udire veramente il grido giunto alla nave di cui si legge in Plutarco che essa veleggiava fra le isole dell'Egeo, quando nella serenità del tramonto la ferì una voce: *Il gran Pan è morto*. Pur non senza malinconia si vedono cadere tanti dolci affetti, tante gentili e buone costumanze in cui credevano i nostri antichi. Ma in tale lamento, osserva un giovene al protagonista del *Libro dei morti*, vi è piuttosto il dolore che l'avveduto giudizio dell'uomo savio. Il moderno uomo savio non si abbandona ad una morbosa sentimentalità ripugnante alla pura e fredda ragione.»

Per completare il ritratto intellettuale e morale del Panzini, dobbiamo aggiungere che pur non essendo mai stato cattolico praticante, il Panzini ha avuto sempre per la religione cattolica una forte inclinazione, talvolta sentimentale, talvolta psicologica. Egli scrisse: «Quel Battistero, quella Chiesa, quella Torre cantante, quel Cimitero, adorni dei più bei segni della resurrezione, che cosa erano? Asilo e patria; il luogo del battesimo, il luogo delle nozze, il luogo della pace. Una religione, insomma. La

speranza immensa abitava allora dietro queste porte. Oggi le nostre patrie sono più grandi, e vi sono tanti asili e tanti manicomi, con tanta igiene, che una volta non si conosceva nemmeno. Ma questi edifici moderni non sono belli. Perché? Perché non li ha edificati la pietà; e nè anche la religione. V'è bensì chi dice oggi di credere nella *religione dell'umanità*. «Ma ci possiamo fidare?» Anche scrisse: «Quando fui a metà circa della via, mi sorprese una casa nuova, dove tutta la facciata era occupata per il lungo da una scritta cubitale, con caratteri neri su lo sfondo bianco della fascia; e la scritta diceva così: «senza Dio noi non siamo nulla.» Questa curiosa scritta mi ha fermato lì per qualche tempo. Certo che non è facile dichiarare che cosa siamo venuti a fare al mondo: a far numero? a dar commercio? a godere?.... Invece quando si ammette Dio, la risposta viene bene: «Siamo venuti al mondo per amare e servire Dio, e poi goderlo in paradiso.» E scrisse pure: «Le rose del rosario mi apparvero intorno alla testa della Vergine Madre. Vergine Madre; quale sublime non senso! Io cercavo le cose senza senso.» Scrisse anche il Panzini: «Veglia nella notte Maria, Maria, di questo tempestoso mare stella?» Scrisse pure, come già osservammo: «La Bibbia racchiude tutta la sapienza prima della Bibbia e anche dopo la Bibbia.»

Il suo concetto della vita dell'al di là è troppo umano, benchè sommamente poetico. In una delle sue migliori novelle *Il concerto degli angeli*, un uomo ricco vive secondo la dottrina evangelica e si conforma alle massime della nostra religione per salire dopo morte in paradiso. E, infatti, quando muore, egli sale in cielo, e in paradiso ha un posto onorevole, ma non è felice dei concerti meravigliosi che i beati fanno lassù, perchè si ricorda del canto della sua bambina lasciata in terra, e piange. Dio lo rimprovera: «Perchè piangete, buon uomo?» domandò il Signore, «Non si piange qui in paradiso. Non vi conforta abbastanza la musica che cantano i miei cherubini?»

E l'uomo disse: «Mi ricordo, o Signore, di una cosa laggiù in terra.»

- Forse le ricchezze?
- Oh, no, Signore -
- La potenza?
- Non ci ho pensato neppure quando ero laggiù.
- La gloria?
- E quale gloria maggiore che questa di aver posto nel cielo?
- E allora, che cosa?

E l'uomo disse: «Quando ero in terra avevo una bambina, con un visetto che era un petalo di gelsomino: la sera si addormentava nel suo lettuccio con le manine in croce, e tutte le mattine, quando si destava,

cantava per l'allegrezza che ella aveva di vivere: cantava con tanta allegrezza che noi le demmo il nome di Allegra; ed era quel suo cantare cosa sì pura che a me pareva una preghiera, e ascoltando la voce della mia bambina mi pareva di pregarla. Quel canto, o Signore, mi ritorna ancora nel cuore. Oh, potessi, potessi, o Signore, udire ancora quel canto della mia bambina!

E il Signore, che è buono, e che ha leggi ben diverse dalle nostre leggi, fece cessare il concerto dei cherubini, e fece così che la vocina di Allegra sola si udisse nelle umili canzoni che essa cantava qui in terra; e i beati aprirono gli occhi, e le stelle si fermarono per ascoltare, »

A SHEAF OF EPIGRAMS

By J. AQUILINA

MADAME SOPHRONIA

MADAME Sophronia had ambitious plans
For Dick, her lazy, good-for nothing son;
But well she knew, poor boy, he had no chance;
If 'twas a race he simply could not run.

Madame Sophronia, a hard-headed woman,
Got over her anxiety and her fear;
Her son must be a great man all the same,
His one big chance — a political career.

Providence provides for the least of us:
For the-good-for-nothing and for those that fear
The hazards of the brain and competition
It provides a Political Career.

Dare politicians question Providence, alas!
If such a one there is he is an ass.

POSTSCRIPTUM

If though a politician you have brains,
Worked hard to earn your status and took pains,
You are just an exception to the rule,
So if you take offence you are a fool.

O TEMPORA!

THE poets of Arcady sang of kine and verdant trees,
Of gods and goddesses, jars of honey, buzzing bees;
The poets of today, limping with palsy of the knees,
Have changed the tune of the song, its measures and degrees.
O far-away Age of Pan piping melodies on the leas,
We who belong to a different Time-Club pay different fees.
Keep your swans for the poets of Arcady, we keep the geese:
We prefer their eggs and cackle, a Reality of bugs and fleas.

AN EPITAPH ON TWO LADIES

HERE sleeps a widow, woman without blame,
 So poor she had no money for a grave;
 Died in a Poor-house with unsullied name,
 A cheerful beggar always kind and brave.
 Here, just beside her lie the rotten bones
 Of Madame Pompadour, known for her malice;
 A titled lady who attracted drones
 And married one of them in her old palace.
 Titles and wealth distinguish us at birth —
 Two superfluities spurned by Mother Earth.

EUREKA

'WHAT is Truth?' asked Pontius Pilate,
 Nigh two thousand years ago.
 'Twas a question with one answer:
 'Pontius Pilate, we don't know!'
 'Can it be the twinge of Conscience?'
 And he washed his trembling hands.
 None replied till Freud made answer:
 'Truth and Conscience are but glands.'
 That's the Eureka of our time —
 There's no Truth and there's no Crime.

TODAY'S OBSESSIONS

MONEY and Trade Unions are the argument of the day:
 The two main obsessions, with little more to say;
 Money and Trade Unions all the time, politics and strikes
 Sum up an angry civilization of likes and dislikes.
 If Shelley, poor boy, had lived in our age of wrongs
 He might have planned for us the best Trade Union songs.

VERY DEAR

WHAT can as dear as a man's health be
 If not, perhaps, his doctor's fee?

EPITAPH ON A ZEALOT

HERE lie the bones of one whose fiery zeal
 Drove weaker clay, lone sinners, to despair;
 Who thought a holy cause turned black to white,
 And fought the Devil by means far from fair.

'How dare you mention fairness when you fight
 No less an enemy than the Lord of Hell?'
 Cried Holy Man who hounded sins and sinners.
 Where is *he* now? — That's what I cannot tell!

TIME

(*On board S. S. Bančinu*)

NEW faces but the same old sea
 On the Gozo ship:
 Scared sea-gulls flying outside time
 On life's short trip;
 Unageing sea, but ageing crew
 Is not the same:
 Time deals and shuffles cheating cards —
 New stakes, old game.

HOPE

HOPE never dies; uphill she climbs
 The steepest mountain,
 Haunted by dreams of distant chimes,
 And sparkling fountains.
 She feeds Man's heart by night and day,
 Spurning to glory
 Until a Devil bars the way
 And ends her story.

POLITICIANS

JEALOUS of God, the Devil, an aping Magician,
 Created his own likeness in a politician.

DE MORTUIS

WHEN he died (embarrassingly sudden) a formal oration,
 As usual, a colourful balloon of verbal inflation,
 Pathetically delivered, 'midst tears and sighs, honoured his name.
 But it didn't take the orator long to forget and put the blame
 On the dear departed, for a number of sins and abuses:
 Laugh it off, friend: Hypocrites' praises are worse than their bruises.

EPITAPH ON AZZECCAGARBUGLI

HE was a lawyer — one word-twister less,
 Could not help cheating, so he hated chess;
 Cheated not less his neighbour in distress,
 Conceal his faults — be generous like the Press.

EPITAPH

HERE lie the last remains of a sensitive man,
 Removed by cruel death, God's ally, out of sight,
 Who hated being shouted at, not shouting at others:
 He had his good reason: He was always right!

AN AFTER DINNER SPEECH

THE dinner was good, but the speech,
 Was the rarest rotten peach.
 'Never such dessert in all my life'
 Said cheery Charlie to his wife.

HOMO INSIPIENS

CREATIVE God made man out of Earth's slime,
 And stamped him with His image; so we read
 In Holy Writ, the truest scroll of time,
 Then man stamped with his image God and Creed.

INTERVIEWS

SILLY Miss Venus sat for an exam, with interview and passed:
 Good marks for good looks.
 Clever Miss Plaingal sat for the same exam, with interview and failed:
 She burned her books.

THE SCHOLAR

TWELVE letters of the alphabet strung after his name:
 'A fine scholar!' I thought, but when he spoke, what shame!

THE SPRING

I found the Spring dried up; I cried, went back like a chidden
 boy,
 But now the Spring flows with water again and I cry for joy.

MYSTERY

I looked into the water and saw a face I had never seen before,
 The face of Leah or Delilah — a Saint or a Whore.

FIN DE SIÈCLE

HOMO SAPIENS leaves the stage in a hurry handing over to
 Mother Night with her bats,
 Making his final bow to the new masters of the globe, the
 progeny of Rats.

FATHER RORE

FATHER RORE, proud of his voice,
 Turns his sermons into noise
 That fills the aisles with strange commotion
 And empties hearts of all devotions.

DETERMINANTS OF MONEY SUPPLY IN MALTA

By M. ABELA

THE money supply has always been a matter of concern in those economies which rely mainly on the workings of the price system to determine production and distribution. Money in its static function is a technical device to facilitate exchange. In its dynamic function, through its effect on the price level, it can influence the volume of production and is therefore a determinant of economic progress. In countries where the money supply can be varied by administrative action, we find that the monetary system represents a positive instrument of economic control. In those countries in which the quantum of the money supply cannot be regulated administratively, but is more or less automatic, we find that changes in money supply can be taken as indicators of certain economic phenomena at work within the economy. It is the latter type of countries that interest us here. In order to interpret statistics on money supply in such countries we must understand what determines this supply. It will be appreciated that the economic factors at work determining the supply of money differs considerably between countries and therefore what follows can be taken only as a case study of Malta. The background is one of economic dependence on importation, with a relatively small industrial sector.

Statistically the money supply is amenable to direct measurement. It is defined as the sum of demand deposits and currency in the hands of the non-banking public. It consists therefore of the total currency in circulation less the amounts of cash held by banks plus all deposits of business individuals and foreigners withdrawable by cheque or else on demand.¹ The institutions directly concerned with the money supply are the Currency Board which is responsible for the note issue, and the banks as repositories of bank deposits. It is pertinent therefore to describe these two institutions.

The Currency Board and Money Supply

The Currency Board is responsible for the issue of local currency and has its activities defined by Ordinance No. 1 of 1949. This ordinance established a local currency as legal tender in Malta at a rate of exchange at par with the sterling, and gave the Currency Board the onus of paying

¹Time or fixed deposits are not considered in this study as part of the money supply.

to any person sterling in London equivalent in value to the currency notes lodged with it, and to issue local currency against sterling deposited with it. For this purpose a 'Note Security Fund' was created to be credited with the equivalent of sterling of all currency issued (other than in exchange of currency already issued) and debited with sterling payments made in respect of notes lodged with the Board. The Fund can be invested in sterling securities of or guaranteed by any part of Her Majesty's Dominions other than in Government of Malta Securities. Dividends, interest or other revenue arising is credited to a 'Currency Note Income Account', which is debited with any expenses of the Board. The Ordinance also provides that any excess of the Fund over 110 per cent of the notes in circulation shall be passed to the 'Consolidated Revenue Fund'.

In order to be able to understand better the mechanics of the Board we will assume for the sake of simplicity that there are no banks on the Island. As we have seen the Board has no banking functions and therefore the money supply in such a simplified model would be equal to the notes in circulation issued by the Board. There will not be any banking deposits or advances as by law the Board is not empowered to lend or borrow locally. All transactions will have to be carried out in cash. If a national desires to import goods or services from abroad he will affect payment by lodging cash with the Board in exchange for sterling in London. The cash lodged with the Board commits suicide and is withdrawn from circulation. Similarly if a national decides to lend abroad he will exchange local notes for sterling through the mechanism of the Currency Board with which he can purchase foreign securities. From the money supply point of view there will be a withdrawal of currency from circulation. In this way a decreasing currency in circulation would reflect additional expenditure or additional lending abroad. On the other hand if nationals export goods or services they will be paid in foreign currency which can be changed into sterling and deposited with the Board's agent in London in exchange for local currency. Similarly borrowing from abroad and foreign grants will make available sterling in London which will be converted into local currency by the Board. In the case of this simplified model the money supply will be determined solely by the balance of payments. If the balance of payments will be in equilibrium the money supply will remain static. The Board is thus only a passive agency exchanging sterling into pound notes and vice versa. The government cannot pump more money into circulation by deficit budgeting, as this would entail a Fiduciary Issue² which is debarred by law. A surplus balance of payments will have its counterpart in an increased money supply whilst a deficit will cause it to contract.

² The issue of notes against local securities is known as a Fiduciary Issue.

The Banks and Money Supply

We are now in a position to complicate our model by bringing into the picture the activities of the commercial banks. The banks can be looked upon as intermediaries between savers and investors. When a person deposits money the bank can do one of three things, it can either keep the cash in reserve, invest it locally by means of overdrafts or advances, or invest it in foreign securities. By definition we know that the cash reserves of the banks are not considered as part of the money supply, and therefore any change in the liquidity policy of the banks will affect the money supply. The question to be answered is whether we can anticipate violent changes in the liquidity policies of the banks. We know that the banks have two conflicting interests. On the one hand is their desire to maximise their profits and on the other is the requirement to maintain the confidence of their customers by means of a considerable degree of liquidity. The desire for liquidity can be broadly defined as the capacity to produce cash on demand for deposits. This can be brought about if the banks keep an adequate ratio of cash to total deposits. This 'cash ratio'³ in some countries is a matter of convention (notably in the U.K.) in others it is statutory (notably in the U.S.A.). It will be appreciated that if a way could be found whereby the unproductive cash asset is invested without impairing the liquidity of the bank, the cash ratio would dwindle to negligible proportions. This is more or less what happens through the workings of the Currency Board. The Banks can invest their liquid assets in short term loans on the London Money market and when their customers need more cash, in a matter of hours, the banks can transfer their short dated loans to the Board in exchange for cash. For this reason cash holdings of the banks are expected to be negligible. The banks will keep enough cash to carry on their day to day transactions knowing that any contingencies which might arise will be accommodated via the Currency Board. It is highly unlikely therefore that there will be large fluctuations in the money supply due to changes in the liquidity policies of the banks, as there is no incentive for the banks to hoard currency.

Now let us consider what happens to the money supply when the bank decides to invest abroad the money deposited with it. Originally when the depositor lodges his money in a bank a deposit is created corresponding with an identical reduction of private cash hoards, leaving the money supply intact. When the bank decides to invest abroad, the cash deposited with it is transferred to the Currency Board in exchange for Sterling in London. The cash therefore is withdrawn from circulation and the

³ In the U.K. this ratio has been in the region of 8% since 1946.

money supply has remained identically the same as it was before the deposit was made with the bank. If banks had to decide that all deposits with them will be invested abroad then banking operations will not influence the money supply. The banking system would be another passive device working in identically the same way as the Currency Board. In such an eventuality changes in the money supply can only be in response of changes in the balance of payments position and dealings in foreign money markets. In actual fact, however, the banks can and normally do decide to invest locally. We must attempt to show what happens to the money supply when such a decision is taken. To make the exposition clearer it is important to illustrate this by means of a numerical example. Let us suppose that the currency in circulation is £20m. Let us further assume that the Banks have no deposits and no cash in hand. The money supply is then equivalent to £20m. At a point in time people decide to deposit £2m. with the banks, £1m. of which is kept as cash on hand by the banks and the other £1m. is lent to the bank's customers. In such a case we have £20m. currency in circulation plus £2m. bank deposits less £1m. cash on hand by banks, leaving us with a money supply equivalent to £21m. The £1m. increase in the money supply is equal to the advances made by the banks to their customers. From this we can state that every advance or overdraft made by a bank constitutes an addition to the money supply. Banking credit policy is therefore an important determinant of the money supply.

From the foregoing it appears that the money supply is determined by the state of the balance of payments and by banking credit policies. An increased supply would then mean either a favourable balance of payments, a running down of foreign assets, or else an increase in bank advances. With the exception of the second item these are indicators of economic progress and increased economic activity.

Limiting Factors to Bank Advances

The fact that banking credit policies are an important determinant of the money supply leads us to ask what is the limiting factor to the banks' ability to create credit. We have already stated that the banks' conflicting interest of profitability and liquidity have resulted in the practice of keeping a 'cash ratio'. In countries with an independent monetary system this cash ratio is an important limiting factor to the credit potentialities of the banks. If the banks have a correct 'cash ratio' and decide to expand their credits, a part of this credit would find itself back to the banks as deposits. The result will be that the banks' cash will remain static whilst deposits increase, and consequently the 'cash ratio' will fall. This will

induce the banks to sell some of their securities for cash in order to bring the 'cash ratio' back to its normal position. We have seen that Malta's monetary system is dependent on the sterling⁴ and we have also shown that bank cash reserves are apt to be small due to the accommodating action of the Currency Board. In this type of dependent monetary system the 'cash ratio' cannot operate as a check to excessive bank domestic credits. There are different factors at work to limit the credit potentialities of the banking system. The key to the whole problem appears to be in the concept of liquidity. We have seen that it is the requirement of liquidity which is responsible for the banking practice of holding a 'cash ratio'. Let us examine this concept in a little more detail, recalling that Malta's import bill is in the region of £26m. annually. The banks in Malta to preserve full liquidity must be able not only to supply cash on demand but also foreign exchange on demand. This can best be illustrated by means of an example. If an importer decides to import a given value of goods he can do one of two things, he can either take cash to the bank and ask to have it transferred to his creditor abroad, or else if the importer has an account with the bank he can ask to have a part of the deposit transferred abroad. In the former case the banks can transfer the cash to the Currency Board and obtain sterling in London in exchange. In the latter case the Currency Board cannot come to the rescue. The banks must have enough foreign reserves to be able to meet his demand. If the banks cannot meet the demands made on them for foreign exchange, importers would prefer to remain liquid as they know that the Currency Board will always supply foreign exchange to the value of the local notes supplied. If this happens the banks will lose most of their business. These considerations lead us to suggest an amended definition of liquidity in so far as local circumstances are concerned. Liquidity for Maltese Banks is the capacity to produce cash and foreign exchange on demand for deposits. There is then a 'foreign reserve ratio' operating in roughly the same way as the 'cash ratio' in countries with an independent monetary system. The 'foreign reserve ratio' will be the ratio of foreign reserves to deposits, and should be high enough to enable the banks to supply all the foreign currency demanded by their clients. It will be dangerous for the banks to go below this 'foreign reserve ratio'. Let us take the case that the banks have the minimum 'foreign reserve ratio' dictated by banking experience and they decide (against their better judgement) to expand their advances. Such an expansion of the Banks' domestic credit would finance either

⁴ The net gain from having a local currency instead of sterling legal tender, accrues from the ability of the Currency Board to invest the Fund into interest yielding securities. In other words private hoards of cash are invested by the Board.

domestic investment or domestic consumption. The effect in both cases will be an increase in domestic incomes. In actual fact the rise in incomes will be slightly higher than the increased advances due to the effect of the multiplier.⁵ As incomes rise, imports will tend to rise appreciably due to the fact that the marginal propensity to import is relatively high.⁶ In so far as this increased importation will be paid for out of bank deposits there will be an inroad into the banks' foreign reserves. If these reserves are not adequate the banks will start calling in their loans to have more cash available which can be turned into foreign exchange via the Currency Board. This is in effect the most important limiting factor to a local expansionary bank credit policy. The banks can only expand their credits with impunity if they have more foreign reserves, which can only be obtained if the country has an active balance of payments. It follows that if the banks have reached their minimum 'foreign reserve ratio' additional money supply can only be indicative of a favourable balance of payments.

Relationship between Balance of Payments, Bank Advances and Money Supply

The above arguments lead us to expect a functional relationship between the three variables – money supply, balance of payments and bank advances. This relationship can best be illustrated by means of a set of equations.

We have defined the money supply (S) as currency in circulation (C) minus cash on hand by the banks (C') plus total deposits on the non-banking public (D) less time deposits (T)

$$S = C - C' + D - T \quad (1)$$

We know that an excess on the balance of payments would mean that local earnings of foreign exchange plus foreign grants or loans are in excess of disbursements of foreign exchange and local lending abroad. This surplus of foreign exchange (N) can be either handed over to the Currency Board in exchange for local currency whence we would have an increase in the Currency Board's reserves (I_c) or handed over to the banks in exchange of a bank deposit, in which case we will have an increase in the bank's reserves (I_b) or else the additional earnings can be invested by private residents in foreign securities whence we will have an increase in overseas private investments (I_p), so that

$$N = I_c + I_b + I_p \quad (2)$$

⁵ The coefficient relating the increased credit to the additional income generated by it. The multiplier in Malta is low due to the high marginal propensities to save and to import.

⁶ This is the ratio between the increase in income and the increase in imports.

We have also two more sets of identities. We know that an increase in the Currency Board's reserves must be matched by an increase in the currency in circulation and we also know that increased bank deposits can be utilized by the banks either to increase their cash reserves, their foreign reserves or their local advances (A), so that we have

$$I_c = C \quad (3)$$

$$D = I_b + C' + A \quad (4)$$

Substituting (3) and (4) in (1) we obtain

$$S = I_c - C' + I_b + C' + A - T \quad (5)$$

Substituting (2) in (5) we obtain the desired relationship

$$S + T = N - I_p + A \quad (6)$$

and

$$\text{and } N = S + T + I_p - A \quad (7)^*$$

Equation (6) tells us that within a given period the increase in the supply of money and time deposits is equal to the balance of payments surplus⁵ plus increased bank advances less increased private overseas investment, whilst equation (7) shows that the balance of payments surplus is equal to the increase in the currency supply, time deposits and private overseas investment less any increases in bank advances.

Money Supply as an Economic Indicator

In conclusion then we can state with the help of our equations the economic significance of a rising money supply. If we assume no change in bank advances, time deposits or private overseas investment then a rising money supply would mean a surplus on the balance of payments. If the balance of payments is in equilibrium and bank advances show no change, then a rising money supply can only be in consequence of a running down of private overseas investment. Finally equilibrium on the balance of payments and static overseas investment require additional bank advances to increase the money supply. Alternatively if the money is falling the reverse will hold in each of the three cases. In the first two cases the increased money supply is accompanied by increased foreign exchange, and hence the ability of satisfying the increased demand through a high level of importation. In the third case the increased money supply is not matched by increasing foreign exchange, and if the banks have reached the lower limit of their 'foreign reserve ratio', administrative action will

* If the Currency Board was allowed a fiduciary issue (F) then equation (6) will be amended by adding F to the right hand side of the equation and equation (7) will have $-F$ on the right hand side.

⁵ If the balance of payments is negative it does not invalidate the argument.

have to be taken to curb imports to avoid depletion of foreign reserves. Such action will result in a demand-pull type of inflation. If on the other hand advances are financing the expansion of the manufacturing sector, the gap in demand can be made good by local supplies without inflationary pressures. Thus with the progressive expansion of the industrial sector the banks can increase their advances, or in other words they will be able to afford to hold a lower 'foreign reserve ratio'.

L'INFLUENCE DE LA FEMME SUR LA LITTÉRATURE FRANÇAISE

La Renaissance: Marguerite de Navarre, la reine mystique

By BIANCA FIORENTINI

Au commencement du XVI^e siècle, dans les cours seigneuriales de Bretagne et de Bourgogne et dans la cour de France, on trouve les rhétoriciens guindés tandis que, dans les provinces, ce sont les cyniques bourgeois qui triomphent avec leur âpre désir des jouissances grossières.

Les Grands Rhétoriciens suivent les modèles de leurs prédécesseurs et montrent une disposition à moraliser. Ils écrivent surtout des satires, des épîtres et des complaintes funèbres. Leur poésie-médiocre et insincère-fait recours souvent à l'allégorie, à l'abstraction héritées du Roman de la Rose.

A la cour de France, au temp de Louis XII, les poètes sont nombreux. Louis XII demeure pourtant un bourgeois et aime les lettres surtout comme un moyen de publicité, mais la reine Anne fait des efforts pour enrichir de finesse la vie de sa cour qui montre, toutefois, une gravité compassée. Jean Marot et Jean Meschinot y sont accueillis. Jean Marot rédige des poèmes historiques et des pièces morales sans originalité. La poésie reste vide et abstraite, pleine d'idéalisme creux. On trouve des souffles nouveaux avec Jean Le Maire de Belges — le dernier des Grands Rhétoriciens — qui mêle le Moyen Âge à la Renaissance.

Avec les rhétoriciens, l'art du Moyen Âge donne ses dernières preuves d'impuissance et sa fécondité semble épuisée. Les nobles ruinent la féodalité qui devient extravagante; le luxe des cardinaux et des évêques baisse l'autorité de l'Église. La littérature, en général, est pauvre d'idées. L'esprit bourgeois, voué à la poursuite des jouissances matérielles, triomphe et son oeuvre manque d'élévation morale: la femme ramasse toutes les possibilités désagréables; donc on la méprise, on la craint.

Heureusement, la Renaissance — dont le premier effet est celui de ramener en France la poésie aristocratique — a la force de relever le génie français. Mais cette révolution s'affirme lentement, par étapes. En effet, pendant la première moitié du XVI^e siècle, on trouve encore des oeuvres qui appartiennent au Moyen Âge et d'autres qui révèlent des tendances nouvelles. Plus tard, le XVI^e siècle, affranchi par l'antiquité comprise dans son véritable esprit, éveillé à l'art par la vision de la 'délicieuse Italie', donne les formes littéraires capables de satisfaire les aspirations nouvelles

du génie du peuple français.

Les chefs-d'oeuvre de la littérature et de l'art italiens n'étaient pas inconnus; toutefois, ce sont les guerres d'Italie qui propagent cette connaissance. L'Italie, en effet, avec l'élan hardi de sa pensée et de son art, est une révélation et une attraction pour les soldats français et pour leurs rois Charles VIII, Louis XII et François Ier. Cette attraction mystérieuse de la civilisation italienne pénètre dans l'esprit français et le profit que la littérature en reçoit est manifeste. Et le XVI^e siècle, aidé par l'imprimerie, les traducteurs, les humanistes s'abandonne à l'exaltation d'un grand renouvellement qui trouve portant des tendances divergentes avec la Réforme. L'abondance même des mots que les écrivains décalquent du latin dénonce le commencement d'un art nouveau.

Les courants qui agissent le plus puissamment viennent tous d'Italie; les principaux sont l'humanisme et le pétrarquisme auxquels se mêlent deux courants philosophiques: le platonisme et le rationalisme. Beaucoup d'étudiants français vont suivre leurs études dans les principales universités italiennes et font la connaissance de la poésie gréco-latine, de la pensée païenne et de la pensée de Platon.

L'«humaniste» devient ainsi le modèle des lettrés français. Il faut pourtant reconnaître que la théologie demeure, pendant quelque temps encore, la science des sciences. Mais, comme l'humanisme cherche l'interprétation directe de la Bible et des Pères, l'esprit critique se forme rapidement et prépare ainsi la Réforme. Humanisme et Renaissance offrent, pourtant, des aspects très différents: les anciennes traditions gauloises se mêlent à l'esprit italien; le réalisme se mêle à l'idéalisme; l'idéal chrétien à l'idéal de l'antiquité.

François Ier, le Roi chevalier, c'est le premier roi qui fait des efforts pour donner à son royaume l'éclat de la vie intellectuelle qui brille en Italie. En effet, lorsque François Ier et sa soeur aînée Marguerite¹ font leur apparition à la cour, en 1515, le changement est soudain et profond: la vie de la cour présente désormais une politesse élégante, chevaleresque, même un peu licencieuse. François Ier comprend l'importance des lettres et le pouvoir de la culture; mais il comprend aussi que le progrès de la culture dépend de l'impulsion d'en haut et forme une partie notable du décor monarchique. Il veut mériter le titre de «Père des lettres» qu'on lui a donné. Le Roi protège les écrivains; à sa table — où l'on traitetous les sujets — «le plus savant homme du monde y peut encore apprendre quelque chose». Grâce à lui, on imprime les traductions de Thucydide, de Xénophon, de Diodore de Sicile et, sur son ordre, Hugues de Salel entreprend la traduction de l'Illiade. On traduit aussi les «Amadis» qui devien-

¹ Marguerita naquit en 1492 et mourut en 1549.

dront, ensuite, le modèle des gens de cour. Le Roi ouvre sa bibliothèque — qu'il fait transporter de Blois à Fontainebleau — aux esprits studieux et aux savants et fait chercher partout des livres précieux.

Budé veut donner à la France l'éclat de la civilisation italienne et François Ier nomme cinq, puis six lecteurs royaux, indépendants de l'université. Ces professeurs, payés par le Roi, forment le « Collège des Lecteurs royaux », qui devient ensuite le « Collège Royal de France » puis, à la Révolution, le « Collège de France ». Dans le Collège Royal, ou Collège des trois langues — latin, grec, hébreux — l'enseignement se donne gratuitement. L'Université de Paris, fondée par les papes au début du XIII^e siècle est menacée. L'entreprise d'enlever à la Sorbonne le monopole du haut enseignement est hardie et hasardeuse: c'est, en vérité, l'éternelle querelle de l'enseignement. Le Roi n'est pas anticlérical, mais il tient bon. Il veut émanciper l'enseignement de la tutelle de la théologie et, pour atteindre son but, il donne même des privilèges aux professeurs de son « gros collège ».

Mais l'honneur d'avoir vraiment introduit en France la Renaissance revient à une femme et, précisément, à une reine: Marguerite d'Angoulême, soeur de François Ier et reine de Navarre. Cette reine mystique, c'est une femme exquise et très cultivée. Elle étudie d'abord le latin, l'italien et l'espagnol. Plus tard, elle apprend le grec et l'hébreux. Elle lit Dante qui l'inspire, les pétrarquistes et Platon. Composé merveilleux: Marguerite est douée d'une simplicité candide et naturelle; elle unit la poésie, le mysticisme, l'humanisme, le zèle de la morale et les plus vifs élans de la foi. La bonté, surtout, est son trait dominant et nul calcul de l'intérêt ne dégrade la grandeur de son âme pure et loyale. Un écrivain de son temps affirme que Marguerite a la « tête d'ange ».

Dans sa petite cour la Reine s'entoure de poètes et de savants qui, auprès d'elle, trouvent sécurité et liberté. Son royaume est le refuge des humanistes suspects d'hérésie: Marot, Calvin, Lefèvre d'Étaples. Elle reçoit les vers de Marot; elle correspond avec Calvin; elle protège les débuts de Jacques Amyot qui publie, en 1559, une traduction des « Vies des Hommes illustres » de Plutarque — qui est une des oeuvres capitales du siècle; — elle s'intéresse aux traducteurs de Platon. Les premières oeuvres de Platon font donc leur apparition et le platonisme agit fortement et concourt, avec la tendresse mystique et l'idéal courtois, à former la conception de l'amour idéal de la reine de Navarre.

Dans le développement de l'humanisme, le rôle de Marguerite est certainement plus important que celui de son frère. C'est une femme sans repos qui offre une individualité fortement caractérisée. Elle ne néglige rien et met en culture toutes les ressources de son esprit. Tout sujet l'intéresse:

vers ou prose, religion ou amour, mythologie ou faits naturels. Dans ses lettres — privées, politiques et même spirituelles — elle montre parfois de la préciosité, mais elle montre aussi les plus hauts élans, la flamme de sa vie intérieure, sa tendresse mystique. Plus qu'aucun autre poète de son temps elle laisse parler son soeur: voilà la caractère le plus constant et le plus général qui se manifeste dans la diversité de ses ouvrages voilà aussi la souveraine nécessité de son tempérament.

Marguerite de Navarre protège toutes les formes de l'esprit et de la science: elle ouvre sa cour aux graves éruditions, à la grande antiquité qui développe une conception nouvelle de la vie. En vérité, auprès de cette femme charmante, et la Renaissance et la Réforme trouvent une liberté qui déborde hors de tous les cadres artificiels des idées. Mais, surtout, il y a en elle une âme, un esprit de tout connaître, un programme d'éducation.

Le problème religieux se montre dans presque toute son oeuvre. Sa situation est comparable à celle des premiers réformateurs qui sincèrement et pieusement espèrent la réforme de l'Église. La religion a de nobles aspirations intellectuelles et morales: voilà pourquoi l'ignorance des moines excite son indignation. Et, à ses vers, elle confie ses doutes ses tourments les plus intimes. Sa foi est incertaine parfois mais, au fond, elle demeure toujours profonde. Elle est croyante et pieuse; elle a confiance en Dieu qu'elle aime passionnément d'une vive tendresse; elle révère l'Église mais elle hait les vices qui l'obscurcissent. Comme beaucoup de ses contemporains elle donne, sans doute, des gages à L'Évangélisme. Dans le «Miroir de l'Âme pécheresse», dans le «Triomphe de l'Agneau» on découvre, en effet, des traits évangélistes. Elle y exalte la personne humaine et l'isolement de la créature en présence de Dieu. Mais, malgré la liberté de son langage et parfois de ses idées, qui l'ont exposée à tant de dangers, on n'a pas le droit de compter la bonne reine au nombre des protestants.

Marguerite cultive certains genres (mystères, moralités, farces); certaines formes (allégories, abstractions) et certaines doctrines (galanterie chevaleresque) qui incarnent les idées principales du Moyen Âge mais, dans son oeuvre, elle fait sentir aussi l'influence des idées nouvelles, le parfum de l'esprit italien. Et c'est dans l'«Heptaméron» que l'influence italienne est bien visible soit dans l'inspiration générale, soit dans la disposition extérieure et, soit encore, dans la composition. En effet, par le fond de son oeuvre, Marguerite n'est plus du Moyen Âge: elle est moderne. Elle porte en elle le lyrisme: elle répand la plus intime sensibilité de son coeur et facilite la victoire des idées nouvelles sur la discipline du Moyen Âge.

Avec son «Heptaméron», qui est un recueil de contes en prose, issu du culte de Boccace, la Reine veut composer un «Décaméron» français, c'est-à-dire, un recueil de nouvelles originales. Mais des cent contes projetés il y en a seulement soixante-douze. La plupart des aventures sont souvent très libres et les accidents y paraissent ridicules, comiques et, parfois, même grotesques. Ce caractère comique représente exactement la jovialité française apte à produire et à goûter ces contes, mais il ne faut pas oublier que chaque récit donne lieu à une discussion que dirige Mme Oisille, «veuve de grande expérience», sur un «cas de conscience.»

Dans ces discussions, la Reine examine des points de morale galante ou les théories platoniciennes de l'amour. Souvent les observations marquent la puissance de son esprit et contiennent des réflexions morales exactes. Marguerite veut analyser toutes les formes du sentiment amoureux. Elle tente de montrer en lui, non plus un élément comique tel que peut le faire un joyeux esprit qui, par convention, élimine toute notion de moralité mais, bien au contraire, la source de tragédies douloureuses qui naît du sentiment de l'humaine fragilité. Ses personnages parlent d'amour qui représente l'un des problèmes sur lequel on discute sans cesse: chaque récit fournit une leçon, une règle pour l'avenir car, derrière chaque vérité, la bonne reine sent se lever les émotions de son cœur. «La plus grande vertu, c'est de vaincre son cœur», affirment les dames. Mais Marguerite sait que la fidélité est un rêve car l'amour passe «comme la beauté des fleurs.» Son mari ne l'aime pas, mais elle est trop chrétienne, trop mystique pour concevoir l'amour à la manière de ses contemporains: elle fait même des efforts pour défendre l'amour conjugal; elle cherche à concilier christianisme et platonisme.

L'«Heptaméron» de la reine de Navarre n'est certainement pas un livre immoral. Bien au contraire, il s'agit d'un livre de haute civilisation qui contribue même, par son idéalisme, à la formation de l'«honnête homme» du XVIIe siècle. En effet, il faut bien le remarquer, dans son recueil de mésaventures conjugales, de contes licencieux et de drôleries, Marguerite commence à affirmer le sérieux, le tragique. Ses récits sont, sans doute, à la mode de son temps et la Reine a subi l'influence de son milieu, a suivi le goût du jour. Seulement des mêmes passions, du même moyen, l'un tire du comique et l'autre du tragique. Comme j'ai déjà observé, elle réagit contre le goût du Moyen Âge: ses récits ne sont plus une surface, mais le fond de la nature humaine.

Dans la gaucherie de la plupart de ces contes on remarque parfois une légèreté aisée et les dialogues des personnages sont remarquables de vivacité et de finesse. Le récit concernant les amours de son frère pour une jeune fille d'humble condition nous offre même des accents d'une

finesse touchante. Le doux refus de la jeune fille à l'amour du beau prince pour lequel elle serait pourtant « heureuse » de donner sa vie, n'exprime-t-il pas des traits bien délicats de grâce pudique ?

L'« Heptaméron » de Marguerite de Navarre montre sans cesse une puissance intime de sa personnalité, une franchise d'accent, une simplification hardie et juste des éléments moraux et des passions humaines, un effort considérable pour ramener les âmes à la dévotion, pour affiner les mœurs de la société rude et grossière au milieu de laquelle elle vit et pour que chacun — à travers le chemin de la vertu — tâche de s'améliorer. Par certains traits de ses idées elle devance donc Bossuet.

La bonne Reine montre toujours du bon sens ainsi qu'un ferme jugement pratique et moral. Tout en elle tend au mysticisme, au naturalisme, à la vérité. Elle n'invente pas les faits. Elle raconte : elle veut être, en son temps, une sorte de journaliste qui dépose sans crainte et sans flatterie, avec une entière sincérité. Dans ses récits nous trouvons, en effet, elle-même, son mari, les personnages de son temps : des pseudonymes cachent leurs noms réels. Le Roi même, son frère, n'est pas à l'abri de la censure. Elle raconte ce qu'elle voit et chaque personnage parle selon son caractère. On peut établir le réalisme des faits et le réalisme des mœurs ; on peut identifier presque tous ses personnages. C'est la vie de son temps ; c'est la vie noblesse, surtout, qu'elle connaît bien — avec ses passions, son instinct, son égoïsme — et sur laquelle elle donne des détails exacts ; c'est toute la vie mondaine dont les mœurs sont brutales.

L'« Heptaméron » est donc une peinture de la vie humaine qui contient un mélange de tristesse, d'amertume et même de gaieté, qui donne la marque décisive, impossible à contrefaire, de la sincérité. Il s'agit d'un effort pour évaluer une partie de la vie réelle sans tout le mécanisme compliqué du style intense. Et si certains détails, épisodes immoraux nous frappent, il ne faut pas oublier le sens hardi et profond de l'ensemble. Les aventures sont parfois scabreuses, mais Marguerite fait pardonner l'audace de la peinture avec beaucoup de délicatesse et de grâce et, d'un conte grossier, elle fait une leçon morale qui a une saveur particulière et qui tourne parfois au sermon. Les moines — oisifs et orgueilleux — y sont attaqués mais, au lieu de s'amuser de la débauche des moines, elle les condamne au nom de la morale.

Dans l'« Heptaméron » de la reine de Navarre on remarque un naturalisme primitif, mais réel. On remarque aussi une mixture hardie d'impudeur, de dévotion et de morale. Parfois elle met à nu les sentiments intimes marqués d'expressions précises : Cette noble femme imite Boccace : le récit devient un instrument d'analyse et d'observation qui veut plaire et ins-

truire et certains de ses récits représentent l'éveil — chez les écrivains français — d'un sens d'observation qui donnera origine à tant de chefs-d'œuvre. Plus que Boccace, pourtant, elle désire instruire; voilà pourquoi les faits la retiennent moins que le sentiment et, au service de ses idées et de ses sentiments, Marguerite met un talent original. Toutefois, elle a le souci de la vraisemblance et de la simplicité. En tout sujet elle cherche la vérité; la morale tourne en images mais c'est toujours le fond de son cœur qu'elle nous révèle. Et, pour la première fois, la Reine fait entrer la tragédie dans la littérature française.

Son œuvre révèle la complexité de sa nature, de sa pensée, le fond de son spiritualisme, les délicates vibrations de sa personnalité intime. Mais il y a plus et mieux: elle a trouvé le lyrisme à sa vraie source, c'est-à-dire, dans l'émotion qui s'épanche de tout son être avec une grâce charmante. Et c'est dans un élégant naturalisme qu'elle trouve le principe de toute beauté et de cette pure émotion dont la simplicité touche puissamment.

Marguerite de Navarre est certainement un grand esprit: goût pour les idées, goût pour les considérations générales; psychologie parfois pénétrante. Avec sa forte intelligence, elle demeure pourtant toujours une âme candide, presque naïve. Malheureusement, son style est d'un art bien insuffisant et révèle l'inculture esthétique du Moyen Âge. Mais, à côté de certains défauts incontestables on remarque — surtout dans la prose — certaines qualités qui rachètent les insuffisances et les défauts de sa poésie.

Il est aisé de voir l'importance de Marguerite dans l'histoire de la littérature française. La reine de Navarre et son frère François Ier favorisent la grande révolution de l'humanisme, le mouvement des idées, le contact des races étrangères. Cela donne lieu à des forces nouvelles, à des éléments nouveaux qui modifient le génie français et à toute une armée d'ardents esprits — théologiens, philosophes, traducteurs — qui traite les plus graves matières. Marguerite et son frère donnent aussi un caractère tout à fait particulier à la Renaissance, c'est-à-dire, un caractère social. En effet, grâce à leur impulsion, l'édifice social est construit. La littérature propage la communication des esprits, l'art d'entretenir. Voilà une preuve d'intelligence car l'échange et la discussion des idées ne sont pas seulement un signe de civilisation, mais aussi, un moyen de la faire avancer. De plus, la reine de Navarre et son frère ouvrent l'ère de la vie mondaine de la société polie: de là, cette perpétuelle conversation des hommes et des femmes les plus illustres; de là, le goût des discussions sentimentales, des analyses psychologiques, des conclusions morales qui éveillent le goût de la politesse mondaine et de la vie des salons — ce qui fera le caractère du XVIII^e siècle et qui contribuera puissamment à la formation

de l'idéal classique, au juste équilibre de la vérité et de l'art.

Il est bien certain que Marguerite, Marot et Rabelais sont les plus grands écrivains de la première période du XVII^e siècle. Il y a, sans doute, des traits très différents dans leurs caractères et c'est surtout son mysticisme qui sépare Marguerite de Marot et de Rabelais. En effet, tandis que Marguerite, toute mystique, revient aux pratiques du catholicisme qui éveillent en elle les ardeurs de la foi, Marot s'engage dans la Réforme. Mais la Reine de Navarre et Marot inaugurent la poésie moderne, dont la loi est vérité et sincérité. D'autre côté, Marguerite et Rabelais se révèlent, à des titres différents, des moralistes. Leurs oeuvres, il faut le remarquer, ont un caractère vraiment moral et forment, entre la composition lyrique et la composition narrative, un corps de composition didactique.

On doit ajouter que Marguerite de Navarre et Hélienne de Crenne — la femme écrivain qui a donné « Angoisses douloureuses qui procèdent d'amour » — sont les premières, presque en même temps, à comprendre, au lieu des passions grossières, le véritable amour. Ces deux femmes ont le mérite de découvrir la vraie passion de l'âme; cette passion sincère qui permet de composer les actes en parfait accord avec le sentiment et qui pousse la pensée humaine à la recherche de cette forme simple et exquise qui va au coeur, qui s'était perdue depuis tant de siècles. Voilà vraiment un grand mérite car, jusqu'alors, on n'avait chanté que la passion brutale des conteurs bourgeois ou la passion idéale et abstraite de la théorie courtoise. De leur esprit se dégagent bien des idées profondes et fécondes. Ce sont les premiers élans, les premiers cris sincères de la poésie française; ce sont ces accents qui manquent à leurs contemporains; c'est la passion de l'âme dont l'accent rappelle Racine. Le petit livre d'Hélienne de Crenne et l'« Héptaméron » de Marguerite de Navarre rendent de grands services à la littérature. Ils donnent naissance à un système dramatique, à une nouvelle conception de l'amour: la conception du XVII^e siècle. La poésie se rapproche de la réalité; elle apprend à puiser à ses vraies sources; elle est capable de chanter toutes les vérités des multiples infirmités de notre nature. L'amour devient ainsi une source de plaisirs touchants, mais il devient aussi la cause de tragi-ques douleurs. Et voilà la naissance du roman sentimental français et le succès extraordinaire des « Amadis » et, plus tard, de l'« Astrée » qui offre un idéal de vie distinguée et charmante dont la société précieuse en sera la réalité.

Enfin, à un autre point de vue encore, il ne faut pas oublier le rôle que la Reine de Navarre joue dans le mouvement d'émancipation de la femme et, surtout, de son génie. Le développement de la vie mondaine augmente rapidement l'influence des femmes qui, grâce aussi à l'école lyonnaise,

commencent à donner des oeuvres remarquables. Pourtant, presque partout, on débat le problème de la femme, le problème de l'amour, le problème du mariage. Ces problèmes deviennent fort à la mode grâce au platonisme et à la vie de cour. Le modèle italien de l'amour ajoute un élément nouveau aux modèles médiévaux et concourt à former un type d'amour galant d'un caractère tout à fait français. D'autre part, les traductions du «*Courtisan*» de Balthazar Castiglione éveillent le goût des discussions sentimentales. Plusieurs écrivains, poètes, hommes et femmes, prennent leur position pour ou contre la femme. Amaury Bouchard écrit en faveur de la femme. Un ami de Marot, Bertrand de La Borderie montre, dans l'«*Amye de court*», le contraste entre la mystique platonicienne et la coquetterie naturelle des dames. Charles Fontaine, Almanque, Papillon défendent l'amour pur; Héroet exalte l'amour conçu comme le bien suprême. Et, pendant deux siècles, le problème de la femme oppose les écrivains.

Je parle, à ce propos, avec un peu de vivacité car c'est justement l'influence de la femme qui forme l'objet de mon étude. Et l'influence de la femme est déjà, à cette époque, un fait considérable qui ne peut être passé sous silence. On sait que l'oeuvre de Rabelais, qui pourtant offre une originalité unique, ne trouve pas un large accueil dans la société de son temps tout simplement à cause de son grave préjugé contre la femme à laquelle il n'accorde pas de place. Et cela au moment même où l'influence de la femme est croissante, irrésistible!

Dans l'oeuvre de Marguerite de Navarre on doit, donc, reconnaître son goût d'italianisme, sa naturelle religiosité, sa nature presque naïve et, surtout, sa profonde et délicate sensibilité de femme qui sait comprendre les éternelles tragédies de la vie réelle avec tant de misères et de bassesses. Par son goût du vrai elle manifeste déjà sa communion avec les artistes classiques. Elle éclaire tout le mouvement intellectuel de la Renaissance; elle révèle les aspirations nouvelles; elle est généralement et justement regardée comme l'incarnation de ce qu'il y a de plus noble, de plus personnel, de plus intime dans la pensée de la Renaissance.

THE RANSOM OF THE PEASANTS

(A Dramatic Poem in Five Acts and a Tableau)

By A. CREMONA

(Translated by MAY BUTCHER from the Maltese Original)

THE AUTHOR

Anthony Cremona, our authority on Maltese Grammar, the author of *Il-Fidwa tal-Bdiewa* (The Ransom of the Peasants), who has distinguished himself in several linguistic fields, was born in Gozo on May 27, 1880.

His earliest interests were literary, mainly Italian literature. It was not before he was thirty-two years of age that, after the encouragement he received from the leading novelist and poet of the time, Ġużè Muscat Azzopardi (1853-1927), he began to take literary and philological interest also in the Maltese Language, with the assistance of the Maltese grammarian Ġanni Vassallo (1862-1937), himself an authority on Maltese orthography.

When in 1920 'The Association of Maltese Writers' (*Għaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti*) was set up to study and recommend a uniform orthography which suited the linguistically mixed nature of Maltese, he was appointed member of the Commission. The result was a book published in 1924, now of historical importance, known as *Tagħrif fuq il-Kitba Maltija* (An Outline of Maltese Orthography), in the compilation of which he had a prominent part. The system of orthography established in the *Tagħrif* is now the system officially recognized by the Government and taught in the schools. All Maltese educational and political papers use this system.

For several years Mr Cremona was editor and translator of Government Publications, the first Teacher of Maltese in the Government Lyceum, first for evening classes and later on the regular staff. During the last war, he was asked to offer his services in the Department of Agriculture where he filled the post of Translator for the Maltese publications of the Department.

At the request of the Director of Education he compiled two Maltese Grammars for the Government Primary Schools and the Lyceum, which are still prescribed as text books in Government and private schools. In 1929, he published also *A Manual of Maltese Orthography and Grammar*, but the system is that which prevailed before the official recognition and general adoption of the *Għaqda's* system. He devoted much of his time also to the study of Maltese Folklore especially from the linguistic angle, as also to verse and prose writing some of such literary works consisting of lyrical poems, short stories, essays and dramatic sketches published in book or booklet form.

THE TRANSLATOR

May Butcher (1886-1950), born in Great Grimsby, Lincolnshire, the daughter of Colonel Henry Townsend Butcher of the Royal Field Artillery killed in action in 1915 in the First Great War, and Annie Susan Dalrymple-Hay, was one of the very few English residents who took serious interest in the Maltese Language. She spent eighteen years in Malta, compiled a Maltese Grammar for English students (O.U.P. 1938) and translated into English A. Cremona's *Il-Fidwa tal-Bdiewa*, *Vassalli u Żmenijietu*, and several of Mgr. Dun Karm Psaila's poems.

SUBJECT-MATTER

The main story of Cremona's pastoral-epic five-act play turns on a memorable historical event which happened in 1427-29. Malta at that time formed part of the Kingdom of Sicily ruled by a Viceroy in the name of his Sovereign, Alphonse V, King of Aragon and Sicily. At that time, feudal lord of Malta was Gonsalvo Monroy who held the Island on long lease on payment of 30,000 gold florins. In order to have his money back at usury interest he taxed the impoverished Islanders who, one day, unable to endure more oppression rose up in arms against him; held his wife, Donna Costanza, as a hostage till they forced the Viceroy of Sicily to agree in the name of King Alphonse to the redemption of the Island and its reunion with the royal demesne, on the refund of 30,000 florins to Monroy. The money was collected from house to house at great sacrifice and so the peasants could pay their ransom. To be fair to Monroy, we must say that Monroy on his death-bed directed by his will that the price of redemption paid by the Maltese should be returned to them and that the sum of 10,000 florins still due should go into the Treasury for the defence of their Islands.

Il-Fidwa tal-Bdiewa illustrates the lexical wealth of the Maltese Language and the author's command of it as a medium of literary self-expression.

J. AQUILINA

Note:-

The following characteristic Maltese letters: *ċ*, *ġ*, *ħ*, *j*, *x*, *ż* and *għ* used in personal and local names stand for the English sounds of: *ch* (in *church*), *j*, *b* (in *horse*), *y*, *sh*, *z* (in *buzz*), and, only etymologically, the Arabic *ʿayn* respectively, as in fact *għ* is silent except where it precedes pronominal suffix *h* ('*ha*') or closes the last final syllable and is preceded by *ie*, *i*, and *u* when it is sounded like *h*.

THE RANSOM OF THE PEASANTS

PROLOGUE

To reach the forgotten graves on Bingemma's heights, ascend
from Fiddien near the caves to Ġnejna Valley's end,
I recall not where exactly, for centuries have passed
and demolished walls and cottages, now buried by Time's blast.
From the lips of Ġnejna's singer, I took the song and then,
with modern words adorned it, as I wrote with thoughtful pen.
Rough was the swing of the music, simple the words he spoke,
derived from the way of life of those unenlightened folk.
I tell it as I feel it; it pleased me; therein revealed
lay beauty of hill, of valley, the verdure of each field.
Strong as flint I sensed it, like the sound of a vesper-bell
borne down on silent sunset through vast land like a knell.
In my heart I felt it speaking this story of peasant-woe
as, to her child, a mother reads a tale of long ago.
'Twas midsummer; with the reaping and the harvest at their height
when, fluttering over some well, a bird is a common sight.
Earth parched, the threshing-floor baked, One evening, when I was bound
to Ġnejna from Fomm ir-Riĥ, myself on a path I found
pacing along with mind adrift on waves of vagrant thought
which, lulled by that hour, in the most entrancing book is taught.
From field to field the trees have, each, some memory to recall
and one will often hear that song beneath the cottage-wall.
The water bubbles from the rock, lamenting even yet
those simple peasants' cruel deaths by tyranny beset.
The sunset-glow outlines the hill and marks the close of day,
the darkness fast approaches; in the distance far away
(drawn by the sound of tinkling bells) the straining eye descries
the flock returning homeward from the field as evening dies.
Hair winnowed by the wind, upon the threshing-floor there stands
a singer veiled in a cloud of dust and straw. The cow expands
her nostrils to the evening dampness as she feels the rope
loosed from her neck. With truss of hay on head, comes down the slope
the shepherdess. From Fomm ir-Riĥ go fishermen from hence

descending to the shore. Dogs' barking dies to quiet intense,
 save for some buzzing fly which on the field-wall still is found
 and, as if it were a spinning-wheel, circles round and round.
 A sparrow, silently passed over my head, drops down
 to peck at corn remaining still among the stubble brown;
 it seems as though to drive away my somnolence it sought.
 I fancied myself day-dreaming, I, shameless, confess my thought,
 for I suffer from this folly and this you must understand.
 But I am not alone in this, you'll find in every land
 that Thought, with poets wandering, at a tangent flies away,
 romping hither and thither, with all whom it meets to play.
 With the birds of heaven you find it stopping at a tree
 or, from the heart of the roses, sipping beside a bee;
 in the curls of some little maiden playing with the breeze;
 then, flashing, like lightning in darkness, on the waves of the seas
 or, in a flurry of leaves, off down the valley it sails;
 the children's loving playmate — with mother, with maid, it wails.
 You will meet it today, almost dying of sorrow,
 and then, bubbling with joy at its rebirth, tomorrow!

In a valley of this island, seated alone I mused
 on that small home, so pure and good, by tyranny abused.
 Here, where spring-plants seeded, I recalled where I had heard
 at sunset on the threshing-floor, that song like voice of bird.
 Down through the centuries sounding, lost between breeze and breeze,
 it echoes sweetly in my ears like a whisper from the trees.
 A country story was it and of every foot it tells
 of the land around Gnejna, of its hills and of its dells.
 The song begins by telling of the thrifty, kindly folk,
 sturdy and good, their simple lives by penury bespoke;
 of some farm-girl's sunburnt face and look, it reveals the charm,
 whose modesty enshrouds her, be her work in house or farm.
 It sings the story of a Love by cruelty oppressed,
 from longed-for heart far separated and, by grief distressed.
 Sons of the soil, their spirit, by yoke's oppression trained,
 the daily lashes of the master felt, yet dumb remained;
 bred without malice, unmaliciously rose wrath at length
 for their dear land and, to the conflict, hearts brought granite strength.
 And how much the peasants suffered, the singer tells with tears,

and how, for their redemption, bore slavery, famine, fears,
 how the blood of themselves they gave, and of their sons, to flow
 from the galley-sweeps at sea; how they, to destroy the foe,
 went forth with bastion-hearts, Poor house! near thy wall a sheep, alone
 feeds in the lonely meadows by acanthus-covered stone,
 seeking some stump or some leaves which the withered vetch has left . . .
 The cottage's few steps are bare of plants. From cot, bereft
 comes mateless pigeon, pensive, quiet, seeking her lorn brood;
 up to the eaves she flutters then, as though she searched for food.
 On the wall, some ivy-branches (which intertwine and roam)
 still clothe the ruined terrace of this dead, deserted home.
 And silence reigns: rustling, as after some strong wind, the tree
 murmurs in solitude to rocks in that vicinity.
 All sounds have died away within behind the cottage-door:
 faces in peace and happiness, the mind's eye, pass before.
 Smiling fathers with tear-filled eyes, in the closing days of life
 that joyful tale of victory repeat to the old wife,
 and how their children's children's valour overthrew the foe.
 Young men with tumbled hair from their homes obliged to go;
 with ploughs in their hands today and the leaded club tomorrow;
 their savings they have left and the weeping bride in sorrow.
 O that fair countenance with white hair curling on the brow;
 poor mother who, on this day of holy union, must see now,
 amid the wedding-guests in finery, the daughter-bride
 with the beloved, chosen of heart, torn from her side!
 O that face of the maiden in mother's bosom hidden,
 reft from thy best-beloved, O heart to weeping bidden!
 Pure for our Land, O Love, didst thou, in God's Faith, remain
 and, under that cruel oppression, waxed stronger in pain —
 joined like the branches of the locust-tree. Today we find
 Thy Deed engraved upon the memory of the peasant-mind.
 That simple maid inbreathed thee; absorbing thy peace, she would
 engraft thee in the children of her future motherhood.
 That maiden held thee dear; by sweat of brow, by loss of rest
 gained wealth for thee, for nuptial vow and for a Love more blest
 her dowry, her gold, in the hands of the tyrants she laid.
 O sacrificed wealth of our homes, our ransom-price you paid
 and to that self-denial you, the strongest witness, stay —
 formerly cherished in thought. But memories are short today;
 we have forgotten you. Some maiden will recall you when
 reading some dusty tome of ancient history and, then,

with these words stamped upon her mind, will lift her eyes and say; _
"To those ransomed sons, the Greeting of Dawn's Joy was that Day!"
Who knows how, on the threshing-floor, would gather round at eve
the loitering peasant boys and girls to hear some old man weave
the ancient tales of victory, and picture every scene,
dreaming of blood and conquest and of all the Past had been!...
— Those children's spellbound eyes would then keep open till the dawn...!
O nights of heartbreak on the threshing-floor, weeping till morn,
O barren fields, destruction by one hour's fury wrought;
O prayers of oppressed, O weepers of ruined homes distraught!
O hunger, O moaning, O tumult of peasants' unrest.
Singer's Greeting, pot of basil, each joyous wedding-quest,
O sails bringing tidings from far, O hearts that are broken
with anguish; O bond of the kerchief, enduring-love's token;
O quiet moonbeams, on rampart, on sentinel falling;
in the book of its records, this Island today is recalling
that here are you buried, each one in a grave of the dead.
One night I dreamed of you; dim burned the lamp... risen from bed,
I wrote down this tale, to me, by Gnejna's Singer told:
this tale, with modern words adorned to you I now unfold.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

PIETRU, *Sailor*
 GAWDENZ, *Merchant*
 ENZO
 GUERRINO *Bodyguard of Don Carlos*
 ĠANNI OF QERRIEDA, *Son of*
 MATTI, *Farmer*
 ĊIKKU, *Muleteer*
 PEPPU, *the Idiot-boy*
 PEDRO, *Servant of Don Carlos*
 DUN SIDOR, *the Village Priest*
 DON CARLOS, *Owner of the estates*
 DON JOSÉ, *Comrade of Don Carlos*
 Priest of the assembly
 Peasants
 Sailors
 A Singer
 Men
 ROŽI, *daughter of*
 ANNI OF QERRIEDA, *mother of Roži and wife of Matti*
 KOZZI OF L-ACĊAJOLI, *mother of*
 ZOLLI OF L-ACĊAJOLI, *mother of*
 BETTI OF L-ACĊAJOLI, *friend to Roži*
 MARI, *wife of Majsi the fisherman*
 BALDISKA,
 XANDRA, *wife of Pedro*
 PEASANT WOMAN
 VOICES

Period of the rule of Consalvo de Monroy (1427-29) under the kingdom of Alfonso of Aragon. The events take place on the slope below Imdina, from Fiddien to the end of the Bay of Bur-Marrad and il-Pwales.

INCIPIT TRAGOEDIA RURALIS

ACT I

In the foreground on the right of the field stands Farmer MATTI's cottage, shaped like a farmhouse facing the sun setting behind the hill in the distance. Five or six steps lead up to the terrace, ornamented by stone troughs of basil-plant and mint, on to which opens the door of the upper room. Under the steps is the door of the cattle-pen with its wooden wicket. In the angle between the wall of the steps and the wall of the field, the trunk of the vine climbs upwards with its tendrils and leaves intertwined and covering the whole background as far as the fields thickly sown with grain crops which, here and there, show green from an occasional fig-tree. Below, opposite the steps, is the water-tank. Behind the rubble-wall, a field green with the leaves of garden vegetables. Beyond the fields of cultivated crops winds a field-path to the end of the valley. In the far distance, locust-trees, a farmhouse or two, some threshing-floors, then hills and the reddening horizon which will darken over the silence of the land.

Period of scarcity and oppression for the peasants under the power of their masters; they are going home thoughtfully with their draught-animals, hopeless of the dawn of any reprieve.

ROZI comes down the steps from the upper room to fill the pitcher in her hand with water from the tank. She looks up and notices PIETRU coming along the path with his comrade GAWDENZ. She pauses, lowers her head and goes softly down the steps. PIETRU and GAWDENZ stand looking towards ROZI who, after filling the pitcher, sets it on her shoulder and goes up to the upper room.

In the background, ENZO and GUERRINO can be seen standing among the fields.

GAWDENZ: This is Matti's daughter, our Rozi,
the loved girl of Fiddien.

PIETRU: Truly as yet
never have I seen her equal, neither here
in this wild place where I grew up a child
nor abroad, in Sicily, Naples, or beyond
the river where was drowned our Ruler's
greatest enemy. Never have I seen,

the truth I'm telling you, so sweet a face as this.
 Gawdenz, I used to dream of her each time
 I spied some maid and lad at plough or pasture
 together in a field; overcome with sorrow,
 I felt so lonely that it made me wish
 to rush out into battle and be killed . . .
 I remembered this dear land, remembered Rozi;
 I will live, said I, for Rozi, for this land.

GAWDENZ: I sympathize with you, my friend. Your pure great heart
 could never forget us; chosen by the great King
 from all us peasants of this island small,
 you proved your heart and courage on his foes;
 this tiny rock is ever bound to you
 in thoughts of home . . .

PIETRU: And home was, in my eyes,
 a star shining through black darkness on the waves
 on the oceans I was sailing. Far, far away
 on the shores of that blood-drenched land, I met
 with men of diverse colour, divers tongues,
 under one banner all and one command,
 though some were bought as slaves to take the sword.
 After the battle at the river-mouth,
 I went ashore to break my fast and drink
 from the valley. I saw a man approaching,
 elderly, pensive. And he spoke to me:
 'Tell me, my son, what brought you to this river
 of tears and blood and whence have you come here?'
 I looked up and replied with voice disdainful:
 'Be you who you may, old man, I tell you
 one thing only brought me here — the King's command.
 Question no further. You asked me whence I came;
 I answer you and this is my reply:
 from the smallest land of Sicily's great King,
 a land near Syracuse, the isle called MALTA'.
 I asked him: 'Who are you, friend or enemy?
 — Enemy, I am not. To you I speak
 as father. Poor is this land and, with it, yours;
 we too are poor who, in them, have grown up.
 The days of the yoke have come to steal from us
 our sweat, our health, the life and happiness of home;

into the forefront of the battle, these lords
 would drive us, who have loaded us with swords.
 The Queen Giovanna, then her ally,
 then her enemy our Alfonso, who
 by ship is proceeding to Naples,
 who seeks that city to attack and take;
 on the other hand, Andrew the mercenary,
 known as the "Ram's Arm", together with his friends,
 is going to be the ruin of us all.
 My sons have gone, taking away with them
 the water-mule. Go home, my son, go home,
 said that old man to me, 'go you home again
 to your own people; who are, it is said,
 as a flock of sheep ready for slaughter
 in their master's hand, whom King Alfonso
 intends to sell away a second time.
 Men, the King intends to buy, men by the sale
 of your lands, of your island. Go back home,
 O brave young lad, go home, preserve your life
 for the sake of your family and your home.'

GAWDENZ: From a Sicilian, we, your story heard
 one night on the Imdina Square, how, on the shore,
 our beasts you left, because they said to you:
 Embark with all the sailors on that ship
 which sails to Naples.

PIETRU: Off I went in haste,
 earnings and cattle leaving in the hands
 of the merchant Gaspru . . .

GAWDENZ: 'That Maltese lad
 seems strong and brave', said they, 'we'll take him with us!'

PIETRU: With them I went and with them I remained
 to give the Kind my life.

GAWDENZ: How did you leave them?

PIETRU: In the confusion of battle, I fled . . .
 The bravest man of all — our people's right hand —
 was slain by his kinsman's hand, left lying
 among the bloodstained swords of all his comrades.
 On a tartana I escaped.

GAWDENZ: Tell me,
 what do you think of this country of ours?

PIETRU: You know well, Gawdenz, never has it been
 rich and happy. Grasping are its masters
 and this is known to all.

GAWDENZ: And said by all.
 Nothing is heard but grumbling: on the lips
 of every peasant is but one lament –
 Poverty . . . Misery – these words alone.
 Everything from Fiddien till inland
 is in the hands of Don Carlos. They say
 his overlord, a harsh and cruel man,
 is now in Imdina going round all farms
 to choose, for Aragon, the best beasts.
 They say that to Imtableb he has been,
 and raised the rent on each ten acres
 of land that has been sown; that he intends
 to reduce the selling price on cotton
 which, for his people, is exported hence.
 The price is raised of corn and cattle-fodder
 which is imported here from Sicily

PIETRU: The Governor on Kemmuna wished to build
 a watch-tower and thick ramparts to erect
 around the Castle, lest the Berbers yet again
 should these shores invade. Now, as time has passed,
 all this I think was done in subterfuge
 so that with our money might be bought
 the foreign mercenaries for the war
 between the Kings, which (regardless of us)
 has in the bigger countries broken out.

GAWDENZ: This island has been always very small
 and lived content though trampled under feet.
 Insensitive to pain, she always ate
 her piece of bread, licking the master's hand.

PIETRU: And why, Gawdenz, why do we not throw off
 this slumber from us? why do we not, as men
 and not as beasts, feel our blood surge within us?
 Have we not courage to resist this tyranny?
 and, with a single shout, bring to an end

the tyrant's cruelty and break our chains?

GAWDENZ: My friend, because the flesh has now been tamed!
Thus once told me the father of my wife,
the fisherman who lived a hundred years
and more, with oar in hand, at Fomm ir-Rih.

PIETRU: [*looking up towards the fields*]
Ganni is not yet in sight, nor Baskal,
nor Toni.

GAWDENZ: From Imdina came just now
a poulterer; he said that on the Square
were assembled all from those villages
who, by our farmers, had been summoned there.

PIETRU: From dawn this morning peasants have I seen,
from Wied il-Liemu to Fiddien, coming down.

GAWDENZ: They will at il-Ballut meet you to-night.

PIETRU: That wife of the island's lord, whence comes she?

GAWDENZ: From the house of the landlord, Don Carlos,
from the ridge of l-Ahrax.

PIETRU: Rozi came not.

GAWDENZ: She left her mother with Kozzi, threshing.

PIETRU: And about me, what was it that they said?

GAWDENZ: As soon as I stopped near, they fell silent.

PIETRU: You heard nothing?

GAWDENZ: I only thought I heard
the name

PIETRU: Whose?

GAWDENZ: Of the landlord, Don Carlos.

PIETRU: Here are his guards coming towards this cottage.

GAWDENZ: I will tell you about him, let us go
into the cottage

Rozi peeps out stealthily on to the terrace. She looks fearfully at the departing peasants and, as soon as she sees the guards approaching, she waters the plants in the stone troughs from the pitcher and goes indoors.

The growing darkness – in the evening hour – brings with its silence frightening thoughts of the country people.

ENZO and GUERRINO come a little nearer like two prison-guards.

ENZO: That young peasant is the man she loves.

GUERRINO: He came from Sicily and, to Kozzi
the go-between, he brought the seeds.

ENZO: Our Pedro's old woman has cast a spell
on that wicked hag that hates the Spaniards.

GUERRINO: And when she goes to him to sell her eggs
she gives away (they say) the private life
of the Governor; and incites against him
peasants and nobles.

ENZO: Her daughter Zolli,
lovely Zolli, once she sent as maid
into Vaccaro's house.

GUERRINO: Don Carlos,
the master, wants her. . .

ENZO: And the mother says No. . . .

GUERRINO: A curse on the increased wine-tax! [*whispers*] Look behind you,
that old woman is spying on us –

ENZO: [*Looks about*]
There is no one here. . .

GUERRINO: That girl is coming down.

ROZI comes down very slowly with the basket of fodder. Her gait is that of one who seeks to escape from somebody and searches for a hiding-place. She lays her hand on the wooden gate of the cattle-pen under the shed above and then stops suddenly, halted unexpectedly by GUERRINO who comes up to her.

GUERRINO: Good evening, peasant maid! Do not hide;
although it is dark, I could see you child,
with those beautiful eyes of yours, about
to run away to hide you from my eyes.
Where are you going, say?

ROZI: To feed the goats.

GUERRINO: I saw you, my pretty, watering the basil,
I saw you peeping out on to the terrace;
though bashful, they tell me you can love . . .
Where is your mother?

ROŽI: At the threshing-floor
I left her.

GUERRINO: Your brother has not come yet,
nor your father?

ROŽI: They said they were going
to Imdina.

GUERRINO: With whom did they go there?

ROŽI: I do not know. With whom they went or why
they went, I do not know. And so, good-night.
[*She moves forward to enter the goat-pen*]

GUERRINO: Come, now, my girl, listen to me; although
your answer is discreet, I forgive you
as I forgive the bird inside the snare.
Wait, my girl, I wish you well indeed
and your family as well.

ROŽI: I must feed the animals.

GUERRINO: There are those here who love you, those who loathe you.
You poor little thing, you will yet . . .

ROŽI: Good night!

GUERRINO: And those who wish you well.

ROŽI *goes in, shuts the wooden-gate and disappears.*

GUERRINO: [*Stands at the door with his face at the wooden bars*]
I understand you,

I understand you, you little ferret,
You have run away from me for nothing.

ENZO: [*who had remained behind, sitting with clasped hands on the rubble-*
wall]

That girl's discretion surpasses the Queen's;
she has a tongue of gold . . .

GUERRINO: And a shrewd woman's head.

ENZO: She is true to the blood of her people
and her cunning she gets from the Arabs.

GUERRINO: These peasants know but Don Antonio
and him alone. Don Antonio
in their poverty, was to them a friend.
His name is still upon their tongues, in the blood
of their children's children because he was loved
by the old woman who received him in her house
on the first night of her daughter's wedding,
because, from him the dowry came, the field
and ploughing-cattle. Kozzi will tell you.

ENZO: That decrepit hag who (or so they say)
was the sorceress here and the support
and the mainstay of the island's rulers.

GUERRINO: That decrepit hag who to the Accajoli,
pawned, of her youthful blood, each single drop
and still among her folk their surname lives.
Oh, how enamoured of the lustful Queen
Giovanna, was Frederic, Nicholas too,
and Angelo, how madly in love were they
when, spurned from her feet and those of her companion,
she sent them here, rebels from Sicily,
to this island where they have left behind
their starving progeny, as Kozzi knows.
When she speaks of this, Kozzi holds her head up
haughtily, because she bears the name
of the Accajoli, and, her grandchildren
that of the friend Cardona.

ENZO: In the days of Moncada, she acted as a spy
and, to the King, her own folk she betrayed
and for this service she received from him
their lands, their farms, their flocks.

GUERRINO: For having been
false to her own people, the Governor
brought jewels for her that she might appease
the peasants' hatred towards the island's lord
for having raised the rents.

ENZO: She would destroy
Consalvo and our folk.

GUERRINO: Because they took
from her what she had stolen.

ENZO: [*goes to look towards the fields*]
I've just seen
those peasants from the cottage coming forth
and going down into the valley.

GUERRINO: [*goes to look*]
I can see four peasants coming towards them.

ENZO: With a heavy knapsack.

GUERRINO: And in their hands
a number of implements.

ENZO: This morning
I saw them all going towards the town
because, as Pedro told me, they had been
summoned for the gathering.

GUERRINO: I see more
and more people gathering in the meadows
with their dogs.

ENZO: Anni with Dun Sidor,

GUERRINO: And the old woman with them.

ENZO: They are coming
very slowly

GUERRINO: Enzo, let us move off...

ENZO: Kozzi!

GUERRINO: Kozzi!

ENZO: She will see us!

GUERRINO: That old hag
knows us and knows the master who sent us.

The guards go out through the wooden field-gate and conceal themselves behind the wall of the farmhouse. Darkness is falling rapidly and the silence grows. Coming along talking appear ANNI and KOZZI, laden with trusses of straw, and DUN SIDOR and an ELDERLY MAN with a knapsack on his back. ROZI comes out of the cattle-pen, terrified and trembling; with bewildered eyes, she looks all round about. No sooner does she catch sight of her mother with the others than she cheers up and her face lights up again.

DUN SIDOR: Fear not! To our loving Father let us
 ever pray, for He is above all enemies.
 Let us pray for the crops from which come life
 and our daily bread, as you all tell me.
 Let us pray for compassion in the hearts
 of the grasping masters of the land
 from Him Who holds the keys of hearts and thoughts.
 Let us pray ever for the soul's good: Love.

ANNI and KOZZI, laden, walk on with their heads still bowed. ROŽI approaches very slowly, takes the trusses of straw from the heads of her mother and KOZZI and lays them aside near the gate, she goes down on her knees and kisses the hand of DUN SIDOR.

ANNI: [to ROŽI while she is lifting the bundle from her head]
 Have you been waiting long? Gather up this straw
 for the fodder and bedding. Have you watered them?

ROŽI: I am going to.

ANNI: Have you been waiting
 for your brother all this time?

ROŽI: Yes, I have.

ANNI: Water the animals.

DUN SIDOR: [to ROŽI as she kisses his hand].

Bless you, my child.

May God's hand over you keep you from harm.

ROŽI rises crimson, as her eyes encounter those of old KOZZI who is going to fill the pitcher from the wall.

KOZZI: Ten acres of land, a flock of seven sheep
 with a calf and a mule have I for you;
 the field are Pietru's at il-Qammieh
 — the calf and mule come to you from the Governor
 grieved at the loss of Pietru in Sicily,
 for you must be told, my child, disaster
 has befallen him. Gawdenz has told us
 that cargoes and cattle and twenty sacks
 of seed have been lost at sea.

ROŽI remains standing by the well-curb, with wide-open eyes fixed on the filled pitcher beside her.

ANNI: [*to DUN SIDOR while she lights the fire with the flint and adds some fuel; fans it and gets it ready for cooking supper*]

We have had losses in the crops; small was the harvest,
the payments for the rent are very high,
We had hard time, and we may not recover
the rent that we had to pay . . . The daily misery
and want has reduced us almost to naught,
for month by month and week by week,
we had little by little to sell
our belongings.

DUN SIDOR: May Heaven give light
and make His Voice heard in the heart of him
who rules the poor. Let us trust in Him. —
What news has arrived?

ANNI: Kozzi can tell you.

KOZZI: [*in a choked whisper*]
All are terrified, because this morning
men rode up at a gallop to the house
of the Governor.

DUN SIDOR: What did they say about us?

KOZZI: The lips of all are sealed: riots are expected
from all this misery, from all this want.
They say that, as soon as the overlord
heard of the rising in the villages,
he shut himself up inside Imdina,
surrounded by his own people. The Captain
of the Dejma wants to crush with violence
this dangerous rioting.

*From inside the goat-pen are heard the bells round the necks of the goats
after ROZI has picked up the pitcher of water and carried it into the pen.*

DUN SIDOR: This is bad for us
and for those who come after us.

ANNI: The tears of his agony, within himself,
the poor man buries, that his children's heart
he may not break, Dun Sidor, you know well
how our poor children rose each morning starving.

They asked bread; we answered: famine is here;
 pray ever to Heaven! This foreigner,
 as you know, Dun Sidor, has stripped us of all
 our property that he may, through us,
 enrich himself; adorn, with our wealth,
 his women and, for his people, he
 has carried off baskets piled with sheep's wool,
 combed cotton, jars of honey, and has left us
 without bread, without covering, ever
 toiling on the ruined earth. How hard it is
 that one is not allowed to live in peace
 upon one's earnings under one's own roof!
 Trouble is pressing on our hearts, Dun Sidor,
 and we want space to breathe, space, or we die...
 Tell me, Dun Sidor, who can bear all this?

ROŽI comes out of the goat-pen with the empty pitcher in her hand.

DUN SIDOR: To Pwales, this morning came Don Carlos:
 he was seen in the chapel.

KOZZI: Before dawn
 he and his fellows came down from l-Aħrax tal-Mellieħa.

DUN SIDOR: He went to hear mass with the peasants, they say.

ANNI: [*to ROŽI who had stopped to listen*]
 Bring a stool from indoors and that sack
 of wheat hidden in the coffer...

KOZZI: Last night
 from leeward of Mosta to Wied il-Għasel
 there appeared, shining bright in the moonlight,
 four of the Argonese in armour.
 They were spies, 'tis said, sent by Don Carlos
 as soon as the insurrection broke out...
 Early in the morning, all their comrades
 were afterwards seen coming out of the woods
 round about the fields and farm-houses.
 [*looks at ANNI*] Roži saw them this morning as she came
 from Mass; standing at the end of Ġnejna,
 she saw Don Carlos and, to Baldiska,
 she said: 'Tell me, Baldisk, that man,
 Lord of the land, what does he want of us?
 Daily, in church, I see him watching us!

DUN SIDOR: Last week when, on the mule, I was going from Wardija up towards Wied Qannotta to collect the tithes, I saw Don Carlos walking with his friends, pensive and silent. He came up and threw sixteen silver coins into my wallet, then, all smiles, spoke thus: 'Pray on our behalf for these poor sons of woe, for often in the west we see the foe spying round about these parts.'
 Don Carlos always was a great-hearted man. He loves the poor and, to this stricken land he wishes well.

Rozi comes bringing the stool and the sack of wheat. The ELDERLY MAN lowers the knapsack from his back and opens it, so as to receive the wheat of the tithes. DUN SIDOR sits down to rest on the stool.

KOZZI: [*goes up to ANNI and whispers to her. ANNI, thoughtful and angry, remains twisting the fan in her hands, she looks round covetly at DUN SIDOR*].

More than week ago
 Zolli was going with your Rozi to visit
 our Lieni who had had a baby.
 On the Mosta road they saw Don Carlos
 standing with his men. Rozi trembled
 and turned away her face, for Don Carlos
 laughed and winked at her.

ANNI: [*remains listening thoughtfully. Silence. Then she starts speaking and watches DUN SIDOR*]

All is not gold that
 glitters. The face deceives as hope deceives,
 and the eye that spies on other men's affairs
 prefers to watch the great before the small.
 Gossip is pitiless and, in all ears,
 Don Carlos is the name it whispers now.

KOZZI: They say Don Carlos spent two days last week up there at l-Ahrax where, sick with fever, the wife of the overlord had gone. He spent last night at l-Ahrax laying rabbit-traps with his friends.

ANNI: That woman soon will bring on us, from Heaven,
the enemy — the pirates of the sea . . .

She moves away from the soup-pot to help her daughter to pour into the knapsack of the ELDERLY MAN. KOZZI stays whispering to DUN SIDOR; calls ANNI and the two remain talking to DUN SIDOR in low voices.

ROZI: [*to the ELDERLY MAN*]

Listen, old friend of ours. We have brought
this barley from the field of the olives
and the corn from the end of the Valley
from that field which, my mother's mother says,
was fumigated by an old man, the hermit
of that place of desolation, who although
holy, was said to be a sorcerer.

ELDERLY MAN: And damage was wrought by evil spirits.
At night-time they used to rise from the earth
and, the destroying sickle in their hands,
reap as with a knife.

DUN SIDOR sits with bowed head listening thoughtfully. KOZZI and ANNI continue attending to the fire and supper.

ROZI: In their hands were knives
of flame. That holy man made the sign of the Cross,
and censed with the leaves of the olive-trees
from that field, while reading in his book.
The evil spirits fled from the valley
and groaning was heard, together with screams
inside the whirlpool of water, crashing
of thunder which was most terrifying
and a raging wind. Then the sun came out,
purifying the valley and the sky;
and the Fiddien was all green with crops,
and corn and barley in the after years
flourished in the valley, censed and blest for ever.
So says Grannie, because this field is ours.

DUN SIDOR: Blest be God's compassion!

ROZI AND ANNI:

For ever blest!

ELDERLY MAN: [*boisting the sack on to his back*]

Fiddien, O Fiddien,
Your corn gives full measure
Your cotton gives full weight.

ANNI: Poor has this year's harvest been; our profit
almost naught, scarcely could we pay the rent.
Forgive us, Dun Sidor.

DUN SIDOR: [*rising*]

May God reward you
for your charity! that the thirst be slaked
of this perched land from the conflagrations
of the enemies for ever; that these
may be removed from you, I ever pray;
because you have welcomed the shepherd of
God's flock and, with your bread, have nourished him;
because the silent grief of the kindly
heart, by prayer, is comforted and that heart
is innerly consoled by the pure happiness
of the Hope which dies not with all else.

ANNI and KOZZI: That so it may be, we shall always pray.

ROZI goes reverently to kiss the hand of DUN SIDOR

DUN SIDOR: May Heaven's Hand be over you, my child,
that your pure eye may never clouded be
by the blindfolding through earth's vanities;
may the happy laughter of your mouth
be never stilled by sorrow. My daughter,
tonight think on the Love of him who loved
you first and rise tomorrow in the thought
of him. Good-night!

ANNI, KOZZI and ROZI: Good-night!

DUN SIDOR and the ELDERLY MAN set off for the field-path. The guards
come out from behind the farmhouse wall and appear at the end of the
path. ENZO stops at the rubble wall and GUERRINO approaches DUN SIDOR.
The latter suddenly raises his head and stops.

ANNI and ROZI lean over the fire under the saucepan and add more fuel.

ANNI:

I am blinded

by this darkness. The lamp is in the stall.
Go and fetch it, Kozzi, that I may light it.

KOZZI goes into the stall, hands out the earthen lamp to ANNI while she observes the guards talking to DUN SIDOR.

GUERRINO: Hail and Reverence, Dun Sidor. Our master,
Don Carlos, invites you to his house to-night.

DUN SIDOR: Don Carlos! . . . your master? . . .

ENZO: [*coming forward*]

Yes, our master.

GUERRINO: By my mouth he acquaints you with all:
he invites you to dine with him tonight;
there will also be Xabika, Pellegrino,
and the beloved Costanza, the wife
of Consalvo, sweet Lady Costanza.

DUN SIDOR: A saintly woman is that Costanza
of ours. May Heaven grant her a long life!
They say she has returned from l-Ahrax cured
through the prayers we offered up. To Heaven
be praise!

ENZO: She has left some money for the church
in Wardija.

DUN SIDOR: May her great kindness of heart
be ever blest. Be God Almighty
over all and over each one! Good-night.

The guards kiss the hand of DUN SIDOR. DUN SIDOR goes away while the two guards walk slowly towards the farmhouse. KOZZI extinguishes the light. ANNI mounts to the upper room, after by word and look coming to an understanding with the old woman; she draws her daughter after her.

GUERRINO: [*comes up to KOZZI engrossed with the fire*]

Do not let that spark of fire extinguish
if you wish your people to sup before,
with to-morrow's sun, they are looking out
for her light of mercy . . . Be careful, Kozzi,
with those few ambers which are left to you
for these people of yours.

ENZO: From Kozzi's cauldron,
there comes a very appetizing smell;
in famine like today's, ah, how that smell
comforts one!

KOZZI: Our food is lentils, oil,
and grass such as the goat eats. . . We know well
you all would not stoop to taste it. The beast,
fattened on the best fodder of our field,
piece by piece is found upon that table
where the beloved wife of our lord,
that saintly woman after illness long,
that kindly heart, who to the church has given
her wealth, beside Don Carlos, your master,
sits awaiting the blessing of the priest.

GUERRINO: Remember the wealth with which we found you
had enriched yourself; remember the days
when, through your people's toil and your children's
honour, you obtained land and hoarded up
much money in the coffer, — You shrivelled hag,
your viper's tongue alone is left to you,
and not even your teeth of former days
wherewith to bite nor enchanting beauty
to allure Nikola and his son.

ENZO: Kozzi is friendly and, to the king's friends,
has always shown respect.

KOZZI: Except to those
who bought us for a song.

ENZO: [*with a laugh*]
Tell us, Kozzi,
how much are you all worth?

GUERRINO: You are worth more
than that black slave sent to Queen Giovanna
by Nikola, by Angelo your friend,
and by his brother Robert, as quit-rent?

ENZO: More than the grey mule which Marija
your other daughter is using in the field
of Bahrija on the property of
Pellegrino, your old friend who loved you
as a girl?

GUERRINO: Tell us, Kozzi, whether you
and all the other islanders are not
worth all the flocks and acres which you stole
from your brethren through the feudal lords?

KOZZI: Go seek for the past from him who brought you
into this land which never aught but thieves
has seen around it. Hence we have been trained
in robbery and in cruelty, hence
our breasts are sick and can give nought but milk
soured by your great curse, in the blood
of our offspring. And the seed of the field
has sprouted only nettles ever since,
into the hands of your race, by Sicily
this pearl was given over.

ENZO: O Kozzi,
why do you speak thus to us, dear Kozzi?
Kozzi who was always friend of the King.
Withered with time, how has time softened
your flinty heart and, for these slaves, your flesh
and blood, given you compassion. You loathe
Consalvo.

KOZZI: I have no reason for that,
my friends.

GUERRINO: So you have no reason, you say!
We know the reason for ourselves; it is
because you never saw in your pocket
so much as one farthing from Consalvo
the lord, taken from your plundered people;
because Consalvo is not Artale who,
in the insurrection at Imdina,
gave ear to you about the enemies . . .
Tell us how many faces, how many
hearts and tongues you, for your own profit, changed.
Tell us, be not bashful, for how many
acres of land did you sell your brethren
to Peralta's people, and how many
pieces of gold and stuffs were brought to you
by your lord from out of the houses of
those unfortunate brethren of yours, slain

in prison. Your people know, for they said so there in Paternò where they engendered hatred for our sovereign, Queen Marija, because she exchanged them for the two bowls and white horse, quit-rent given by your friend. How many bushes of barley, tell us, did you steal from the fields of Fiddien for that horse, and from how many ear-rings and rings were made those silver bowls?

KOZZI: From the King's Knight, your master, you had best acquaint yourselves, asking him: 'By what right have you taken the land from the peasants and have made them serfs in their own homes? How many thalers did you pay for this? The enslaved heart of the Maltese asks you this question today. Who are you? — We want an immediate answer, otherwise clear out!'

GUERRINO: Hold your tongue, woman! Beware of the wrath and anger of Monroy. A viper's tongue you have, we know, and you much resemble your own people. Even yet, in your old age, do you crawl along the ground, from your breast spitting the venom of the past; today you do not dare to show your teeth, Your wealth is now in our hands. Learn with your race that, in order to eat, from our heels must you lick the dust. Consider yourself today, Kozzi my dear, and keep yourself calm, lest you be crushed beneath our feet.

ENZO: Oh, we wish you well.

GUERRINO: Listen to what I
am going to say to you.

ENZO: Look after
your own skin; (and that once more you may see
your property in your own hands, open
your heart to us).

GUERRINO: [*pulls her roughly towards him*]

Tell me, to Imdina.

wherefore went the peasants?

KOZZI: I have seen naught
of them . . . and I have been threshing all day
on the threshing-floor since early morning.

GUERRINO: Tell me, Kozzi, what is their intent? what
is their aim?

KOZZI: I do not know . . .

ENZO: Remember,
woman, your own tongue spoke it . . .

GUERRINO: Among all
the women of this peasantry which is
about death's dagger to unsheathe, you were
the first to raise your voice in anger.

ENZO: Your voice spelt hatred, great hatred for us.

KOZZI: I hate you?

ENZO: Our master and all his people
do you hate.

GUERRINO: Reveal everything to us
or, in our hands, you shall remain a corpse.

The two guards crowd her towards themselves and seize her hands.

KOZZI: O good people! think of your souls, my friends,
of my soul also. Why should you wish me
killed? Have you the heart to do so, say?

GUERRINO: We have the same heart as had your daughter
Zolli who, because he hated Vaccaro,
strangled her husband Peppi in a sack
and then, with a heavy stone, crushed his head.

KOZZI: Let me go, I know nothing . . . [*starts shouting*]

ENZO: Tell us!

GUERRINO: *Puts one hand over her mouth.*

KOZZI: [*Indicates her willingness to speak. GUERRINO removes his hand
from her mouth, just as ZOLLI and BETTI are seen coming along*]

Yes,
I will tell you. Let me go for the sake

of your dead ones' souls. My breath is failing!
Oh, here come Zolli and Betti. Silence,
leave me, I will see you afterwards at home.

ENZO: Expect us at midnight in your house tonight.

GUERRINO: Wait for us at the bottom of the yard
under the fig-tree just inside the door.

ENZO and GUERRINO start off down the road, glancing towards the steps which lead to the terrace. The door of the upper room is shut. They go round behind the farmhouse. KOZZI goes over to the pile of fuel for the fire, adds some wood and fans it. Watches covertly until she sees the guards disappear. ZOLLI approaches, a kerchief wrapped round her head, her rosy face still shows its former beauty.

BETTI: Mother, how dark it has grown!

ZOLLI: I have come,
mother, because I was anxious about you;
from the threshing-floor, I saw the upper room
was dark; I knocked at your door but no one
answered, except the dog from the courtyard.

KOZZI on tip-toe, terrified, with her forefinger on her lips, comes towards ZOLLI.

ZOLLI: None of them back from Imdina? . . . they say
the Governor was disturbed this morning
about the insurrection. All the peasants
this morning wished to speak to the Captain
of the Rod and, among them, I saw Ganni,
going in shouting: 'I will kill him if
he does not listen to me!'. . .

KOZZI: Be quiet!
[goes to look behind the wall of the field from where the guards left]
The guards of Don Carlos have been here.
They frightened me to death and I am still
trembling, Oh Zolli, my daughter. Betti
what brought you here?

ZOLLI: I brought Betti with me
because she was crying when she saw Ganni
going to Imdina. She waits for news
of him.

KOZZI: Stay here tonight with Anni, with Rozi,
all of you together, for I expect
danger from the enemies of the peasants.
Oh my daughter, what has happened to us!
Oh, days of the past of those kindly folk,
the masters we had before this tyrant.
How, alas, you have left us for ever!

ZOLLI: And where are Anni and Rozi? I saw
Pietru with Gawdenz, first asking for Ganni.
Then he asked me: 'And Kozzi?' — 'O Pietru,'
I answered, 'you have come from Sicily
and have not yet seen my mother? Nor Rozi?
Rozi loves you, as the apple of her eye,
loves you that maiden; my mother has told me
Anni is pleased about it, and Matti
her father also, and when in August,
the peaches change colour and the apples,
blushing, seem to burn like flames in the sky,
Rozi will show you her face with the light
in her eyes shining with Love's blossoming;
for she will be all yours, yours utterly.'
Tell me where they are, mother, for I wish
to let them know that I have seen Pietru...

KOZZI: Anni and Rozi are both there, locked up
in the upper room, having seen the guards
of Don Carlos coming into the field
at sunset as night fell. Rozi's betrothed
has promised to give me two yearling rams
and a fine calf with twelve pieces of money,
as soon as the ring arrives in the mouth
of the fish, following the betrothal word,
from her beloved Pietru. I said to him:
'For the sake of your dead parents, help us
with Betti who is fatherless; she lacks
a bridal dowry.' And Pietru replied:
'We are of one blood, Kozz, and my duty
will I do that, to my brother-in-law
Ganni, she may be wedded.'

BETTI: My heart's wish
and that of Ganni is that we may both

live together by our own ability,
 sharing the profit from his father's field
 through the labours of our hands.

ZOLLI: His father,
 under the yoke of toil in this hard land,
 has suffered: thus, today, heavy in his hand
 he feels the spade. Worn-out, at the loom sits
 Anni.

KOZZI: I agree with you and prudence
 is worth much; misery has, all at once,
 fallen on us today, life is very hard. . . .

BETTI: This I know, for dearest Ganni told me;
 also to his father did he say so,
 to his mother, to his sister Rozi,
 and to me he said: 'Don't be disheartened.'
 Ganni and I have one great wish: that we
 may live together by our own labours
 in health and strength and, because God wills it,
 blessing will come.

ZOLLI goes softly up the steps to the upper room and knocks at the door.

KOZZI: May it be blessed, my child,
 this pure desire of your heart! Maintain
 that intent, my child, for evil will not come
 save with hunger and with misery.

ZOLLI: [*knocking*]
 Anni, I am here.

ANNI: [*within*]

Who is there?

ROZI: Who's there?

ZOLLI: It is I, Zolli, the daughter of Kozzi
 of A ććajoli.

ANNI: I am coming.

KOZZI: [*Uncovers the pot and ladles out the soup into the bowls*]
 Blessed be God for ever for this food
 which He has given us today, because,
 on evil times, O Betti, have we fallen!

The children of my children yet shall weep
when they see the faces of their own babes
pale as death . . .

BETTI: Heaven is over poor and rich
alike; and feeds the birds of the air,
so Dun Sidor has told us. I have made
a vow, so that our love may prosper
and live in happiness, unstained by tears.

The door of the upper room is opened. A light appears.

ANNI: Are you alone?

ZOLLI: I came with Betti
to fetch my mother, for darkness has fallen
and I must start early in the morning
to take the Governor his provisions.

*ANNI and ROZI come out with frightened looks. They peer here and there
in the distance. Anni has the earthen lamp in her hand.*

ANNI: Who is here?

ZOLLI: The guards of Don Carlos
were here a while ago.

ROZI: Have they gone?

ZOLLI: And are far away. I saw Xandra just now . . .

ANNI: This morning she came to my house at dawn
and Pedro was with her, also risen
early; he had brought a sack for those fowls
bred by Rozi for the August Feast.

*They come down slowly and go towards KOZZI. They seat themselves on
the ground.*

ZOLLI: At the other end of the field just now,
I saw Xandra and she said to me:
'We are expecting the wife of our lord
from l-Ahrax, for she is coming here tonight
invited to dinner by Don Carlos.
At sunset there rode forth his guards, taking
the road to Pwales. Did you see nothing,
Zolli, of any of our people going down

towards Fiddien? for the guests at table
with our beloved master are uneasy.'

KOZZI: [*rises to silence ZOLLI, she peeps over the wall, returns to pass
round the soup and says softly*]
I think the invitation came to grief.
Tell me, Zolli, what news
from the Governor?

ZOLLI: I do not quite know yet;
from what they say . . .

ZOLLI continues to whisper in the ears of KOZZI and ANNI. BETTI and
ROZI talk together by themselves.

BETTI: With his eyes shining
and with his face aglow, I saw him
and, coming from his lips, I heard these words:
'Land of beauty, whence a single flower
from amid many thorns begot in me
the life of the heart which ages not,
because Love in the blood of this our race
is greater than the power of that thief
who has robbed us of all our possessions!
For a maiden of thine, Love has been born
in me and this rose, which thou hast given me,
in my heart have I hidden as the most
precious jewel of my whole life . . .'

ROZI: [*stays listening, wide-eyed, absorbed in delight and with a smile on
her lips*]
Of whom, darling Betti, do you think that
Pietru was speaking?

BETTI: O Rozi of you.
He loves you dearly, as my mother said.

ANNI: [*while talking to ZOLLI and KOZZI*]
We will all eat together as one family, [*helps in passing round the food*]
And, in our room, we will all spend the night
together until, at dawn, our men return
from Imdina.

ZOLLI: With the Mosta peasants,
I saw Pietru and Gawdenz this evening

going along with bludgens in their hands.

KOZZI: Our Toni too, also Martha's husband,
Čikku: they all had to assemble
in Našlija Valley.

ANNI: And Pietru with them.

ZOLLI: Yes, for Pietru is a brave man.

ANNI: Poor Roži!

KOZZI: No doubt, my friends, the meeting will be held;
By sunrise they will all be back with us.

ROŽI: [*meanwhile is talking to BETTI*]
Tomorrow morning, for the betrothal,
with my mother and my father Matti
and your grandmother Kozzi . . .

BETTI: What will you wear
tomorrow?

ROŽI: A short kilted skirt, woven
in all the colours of the rainbow,
the work of Mari, Falka's wife; on top,
a stomacher of deep red like cow's blood,
a greenish pleated kerchief on my blaits,
and the wife of Majsi, the fisherman
has brought the honey and the myrtle-spice.

BETTI: Oh how I wish that I might share the joy
of your wedding-day! I will come with you
to dig the field with Ğanni and to reap
in Qammieħi and gather up the sheaves
in armfuls.

KOZZI: [*rising and looking up the valley*]
I am sure I heard the voice
of Ğnejna's Singer.

THE SINGER [*is heard singing in the distance*]
Smiling fathers with tear-filled eyes,
in the closing days of life
that joyful tale of victory
repeat to the old wife,
and how their children's children's

valour overthrow the foe.
 Young men with tumbled hair from
 their homes obliged to go;
 with ploughs in their hands today
 and the leaded club tomorrow:
 their savings they have left
 and the weeping bride in sorrow....

 their savings they have left
 and the weeping bride in sorrow.

ROŽI and BETTI *get up and climb on to the wall to listen.*

ROŽI: [*as the voice dies away*]

Up from the lonely valley is coming
 the song on the wings of the night, with news
 of our Lord it comes; for it seems as though
 the peasant is speaking through the rustling
 of the trees in the darkness....

THE SINGER: [*in a far-off voice*]

O, that face of the maiden
 in mother's bosom hidden,
 reft from thy best-beloved,
 O heart to weeping bidden!....

 their savings have they left
 and the weeping bride in sorrow.
 [*silence*]

A VOICE: [*in the distance*]

Rise, my brethren,
 rise, my sons, and you, woman, rise with them.
 This news have I brought: 'Drive out this tyrant
 of a master from our homes and ransom
 the Island.'
 [*silence*]

A VOICE: [*in the distance*]

In the light with her mother, the daughter
 stands waiting for bridegroom, for brother
 and for her father beloved.

ALL THE WOMEN: They're coming!

They're coming!

A VOICE: [*near at hand*]

Still wakeful the mother,
anxious for husband, for bridegroom of daughter.

KOZZI: Here come the peasants, your Matti, your Ganni.

ROZZI: Martha's husband, your son-in-law, Cicku.

BETTI: Gawdenz is with them.

OLD MATTI *arrives panting with exhaustion, in one hand a stick on which he leans, clutching his son GANNI with the other. GAWDENZ the Merchant and CICKU the Muleteer with the other peasants are walking in advance.*

MATTI: Oh let me go,
why bring me home? Let me go with my son,
with Ganni, my place is with my countrymen.

GAWDENZ: O you dear old man, death awaits you there!
Spend with your family your latter days.

CICKU: For, bound up with theirs, is your life and death.

MATTI *sits down to rest. — GANNI looks at his mother brokenheartedly and goes to embrace her and his sister.*

GANNI: O mother mine! and you, my sister dear!
O fellow-workers of the soil, come now!
See where the sweat of your brows is going
in the loss of your possessions. Listen,
O mother, to the wailing of your sons,
stripped bare and cast starving on the dry ground . . .
Hearken to the reason why these tears
never, from the King, meet aught but laughter.
Because he, to adorn his crown, needs all
you have, and to magnify himself in Naples.
He, for thirty thousand golden pieces,
has given this our Island to the Lord
Consalvo de Monroy up in Imdina.
The people know this and the Governor
stated how we had been given over
into the hands of the Lords, saying to them:
I will give you these in pawn and their lands,
themselves as slaves and as beasts of burden,

And the fertile land water by the sweat
of their brows . . .

CIKKU: Thus spoke to them the great King
of Aragon. This was acknowledged
by Dun Katald, our priest, in the Cathedral
of Imdina and a great riot ensued.

GANNI: All the peasants shouted: 'To the Governor,
Let's go to the Governor! Justice, we want!
Justice, we ask! Justice!' 'We will ask him',
Gamri, son of the learned lord Desguanez, ,
said to them, 'where is the money collected
for the fortifying of Imdina,
and the money from the wine-tax, wherewith
observation-towers was to be built
on Kemmuna to give early warning
of the coming of the Berber pirates?'

MATTI: My sons, all, all has been taken from us.

GANNI: To tie our hands they brought with them their guards,
their ropes and swords they gave them to beat and kill us.
To meet the foe they loaded us and your children
with firearms while they enjoyed themselves on table
and freely indulged in their obscenity.
Where is now the strenght of your valiant arms
that often put the Berbers to quick flight.
And where is our good sense-children of fierceness?
Come ye out of those cottages and huts,
come out my brethren peasants for behind Birgu,
from the Castle sea-shore came up a great shout.
From there comes up to you the burning flame,
and all our ships and craft lie captured there,
Maltese ships and craft. Towards Xaghret Mawwija
the people hastens now to quell the enemy
to take from them their galley ships and crew.
Let us, my friends, go to the landlord now
and take back from him our own stolen property,
take out our goods and throw him out of Malta.

*Everyone remains looking, drinking in the words from the lips of the
Rebel. ROZI presses up to her brother, with one arm round his waist in*

embrace, her tear-filled eye, fixed on his: flushed crimson, drawing comfort from the fervour of his speech.

ROZI: All have we given to those grasping men,
all we had, Ġanni, oh brother Ġanni, —
so that Love, jewel of our poverty,
might be left to us untouched by them.

BETTI bursts into tears and covers her face.

ĠANNI: Love cannot live in those who are enslaved,
stripped bare, in misery and in famine.
from the priest in the Cathedral, these words
did I hear: 'Rise, God wills it by our right!'

ROZI releases ĠANNI, who goes and sits down. His mother, silently but with tears in her eyes, places the bowls of food in front of him and his father. ĠANNI gets up and glances towards his betrothed BETTI. She looks at him covertly, raises her head and, sobbing, throws herself into her mother's arms, crying as though her heart would break. ĠANNI sits down again thoughtfully.

MATTI: Weep not for yourselves, women of this land
of teats, weep for your children! Terror
is drawing very near.

All the women go towards the wall of the field. The men follow them. ĠANNI remains seated, ROZI shakes her head like one awaking from sleep. She continues to listen alone, standing motionless. She waits.

THE WOMEN: Pietru the Sailor!

ĊIKKU: From the west of Ġnejna are coming
Bringing good news the people of the village.

GAWDENZ: Toni Baskal with the Ballut herdsmen.

KOZZI: Tell us, Gawdenz, what news is being brought
by your friend Pietru, destroyer of the foe
in the foreign seas?

GAWDENZ: On Mount Xiber Ras,
old woman, there has been seen a blazing
beacon-fire to sum up on all of us.
Pietru is coming now to give us all
exact account of what has taken place
and of how our masters are all embroiled.

ČIKKU: [*with a shout*]

Let's follow Pietru!

THE WOMEN: A beacon-fire is burning
on the Mosta road!

THE MEN: Away! Let's go!

PIETRU *comes running up with his companions. A great crowd of Peasants bearing pickaxes, sticks and mattocks arrive shouting.*

THE PEASANTS: Away, brothers!

PIETRU: Let's go, rise, brothers all! Let us away!
for our comrades, at the Marsa need help.
And this time it is not the sovereign King
who calls: it is the Maltese Beacon calling.
Militia of the Peasants! Let us show
our ferocity! Let us shed our blood
for the Sacred Ransom, for so God wills!
There in Ballut still wallow in their blood,
the tyrant's guards, by this your Pietru's hand,
and the woman have we kidnapped!

THE PEASANTS: The woman?

PIETRU: The wife of our overlord, Donna Costanza,
is in our hands: she had been invited
to dine with Don Carlos and from I-Ahrax
was coming down.

ROŽI *remains standing, her head bowed and her hands hanging slackly.*
GANNI *springs from the bench and roughly pushes away the bowl of
food from his lips.*

ANNI: [*picks up the bowl from the ground*]

Finish your meal,
my son. Stay here with us and rest tonight
until tomorrow's dawn.

GANNI: Before the sun
rises on my head and yours and its glory
shines down on our troubles, must we arise
because the uncertainty of tomorrow has killed us,
because the broken heart... Let me go,
my mother. The food you gave me is bitter

on my tongue until this land, the graveyard
of all her sons, shall be set free . . .

The mother clings to her son. GANNI releases himself, snatches up a weapon from the ground and joins the crowd of Peasants. BETTI starts towards him, but GANNI, with a stern look, seizes her with both hands and throws her into her mother ZOLLI's lap.

The Peasants and the Men set off. The Women and old MATTI remain silent and thoughtful.

KOZZI: [*goes to look down the field-path. She returns and whispers*]
The guards
are coming upon us!

ZOLLI: [*runs to look*]

They are quite near!

KOZZI: Towards the cottage are their steps directed.

*MATTI gets up and goes up the steps with the WOMEN.
They enter the upper room.*

SILENCE: *The barking of dogs is heard in the distance among the farm-houses. Darkness. After a little, what seems like a rustling is heard among the trees. The door of the upper room opens. ROZI and BETTI appear on the terrace. ROZI holds the earthen lamp in one hand and with the other hand she embraces her girl companion. . . . The rustling of the trees grows louder and nearer. ROZI lets go of BETTI, takes the lamp in her left hand and peers over down into the field from among the branches of the locust-tree.*

The GUARDS appear, walking along wrapped in their black mantles, and come out from among the trees. They jump over the field-walls into the path.

ROZI whispers to her companion and points to the passing GUARDS. She extinguishes the lamp.

END OF ACT I

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