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BLURRING THE LINES

THE historical concept of higher education in Malta is being obscured by new crude mental attitudes of people without a sense of tradition and history who are disregarding the very *raison d'être* of every university, which is, research and teaching.

The emphasis on technological education is not without its justification, especially in a rapidly changing society that is seeking its economic survival in industrialisation. We not only feel the need for this new orientation, we heartily support it because, after all, we cannot afford to live in an ivory tower.

As we ourselves have enjoyed the benefit of a liberal education, which we would like others to enjoy for their own good, we have been so mentally conditioned by this educational background that, luckily, we can appreciate the need for a two-pronged type of education, differently graded and differently inspired within the framework of a broad national education. We still believe in a liberal education because it is this type of education that liberalises the human mind, opens up new horizons and provides wider terms of reference for comparative thinking and evaluations which is so essential for mature value judgements.

We support a well planned educational programme which will strengthen the traditional subjects described as the humanities for leadership and enlightenment (education for life) and, at the same time, support an utilitarian education for the practical purposes of material living. Polytechnics, more than the degree conferring institutions known as universities, have to concern themselves mainly with the latter purpose, precisely because their subject-matter is technological and hardly ever speculative. The problem is how to convince some policy-makers that what Malta needs is not the

elimination or even the demotion of the humanities, as if these were the hall marks of an élite, (what nonsense), but the parallel promotion of these two types of academical and technological education without any blurring of the line of demarcation.

Maltese society, like any other progressive society, needs the knowledge that comes from a university proper, largely intellectual, and that which comes from technological institutions, which is largely mechanical. While the liberally-trained scholar who has an open mind understands the need for a parallel promotion of academical and technological education, the man with an illiberal mind, mainly because he himself received an illiberal or mechanical education, concentrates on technological education as an exclusive priority at the expense of an academical education. This is where the red light is. This is where the bungling begins.

We have to be on our guard all the time against the erosion of the status of a university proper lest the line of demarcation between it and a technological institution will be so blurred that in the process the university in its traditional and historical sense will disappear and we shall be left with one type of mediocre so-called higher education. This is perhaps not only Malta's problem but, as we live in Malta, we must face our own problems and solve them without having to wait for the rest of the world to solve its own problems or for our bunglers to mess them up!

THE EDITOR

NIETZSCHE'S BIRTH OF TRAGEDY AFTER A CENTURY

(A lecture given at the Royal University of Malta, Friday 29 October 1971)

by HANS S. REISS

It is a great honour to have been invited to give three lectures on German literature and thought. I am particularly sensible of this privilege since these lectures, so I understand, are the first public lectures ever to be delivered on a theme from German studies in this ancient university which, by a happy coincidence, was founded at the same time as my own *alma mater*, Trinity College, Dublin.

The subjects on which I am going to talk are 'Kant's Political Thought', 'Politics and Drama in Present-Day Germany' and 'Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. After a Century.'¹

* * *

Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* is a classic. But like many classics it is little read. This is not surprising, for it is not a readable book. Although it contains some most impressive passages, it is confusing and at times even confused. A most perceptive contemporary critic recognized these features when, less than fifteen years after its first publication, he called it:

an impossible book ... badly written, awkward, embarrassing, with a frantic and confused imagery, sentimental, in parts sugary

¹It is, of course, the last of these three lectures given on October 25, 27 and 29 respectively, which, at the very kind request of Professor Richard J. Beck, of the Royal University of Malta, I have written up for publication. The text printed here does not entirely correspond to the lecture, but has been revised with a view to publication. I am indebted to Dr. H.B. Nisbet, Mr. M.C. Morgan and Dr. Estelle Morgan for their criticism and scrutiny of my text. A longer version of this lecture was published in German in the *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie*, XIII, 1973. This article also contains more comprehensive notes. I should like on this occasion to acknowledge my appreciation of the splendid, indeed, royal hospitality offered to me by the Royal University of Malta during that last week in October, 1971 for which I am most grateful.

to the point of effeminacy, uneven in its tempo, not revealing any intention to logical neatness, and it is so self-confident that it feels no need of supplying proof for its argument, even worse, it suspects the very notion of proof... an arrogant and enthusiastic book ...²

Who was this critic who condemned it so radically? None other than Nietzsche himself, for who else could have written so brilliantly at that point in time. However just some of these strictures may be, the book still repays reading. Not because Nietzsche had solved any problems or developed a new, consistent approach to scholarship or art, but because it is the prelude to a new period of twentieth century German writing, and because it raises central problems for our understanding of the nature of art and of scholarship. As Nietzsche himself put it:

He [Nietzsche] had been the first to tackle the task of seeing scholarship from the point of view of art and art from the point of view of life itself. It seemed to him a new problem, for the first time 'scholarship' was seen to be a problematic, indeed, dubious enterprise, considered against the background of art, for the problem cannot be considered against the background of scholarship itself.³

Such are, however, Nietzsche's later, mature reflections on his first philosophical work. When he wrote it his primary concern, so it strikes the reader, was to trace the rise and decline of Greek tragedy and to proclaim its impending rebirth in Germany. Probably its most memorable part is the myth of the antithesis of the Apolline and Dionysian forces in art, a myth involving a new view of Greek art and culture. In the wake of Nietzsche, Greek art and culture were, in popular German estimation, no longer held to be serene,⁴ as the German classical writers had believed ever since Winckelmann spoke of 'the noble simplicity and calm greatness'⁵ of Greek art. Nietzsche fought against this widely held classical

²Nietzsche, *Werke* (ed. Karl Schlechta) 2nd ed., Munich, 1960, (quoted as W), I, p. 11.

³W, I, p. 10.

⁴cf. E.M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany*, Cambridge, 1935, p. 307ff.

⁵J.J. Winckelmann, *Sämtliche Werke*, Osnabrück, I, 1965 (reprint of the 1825 edition), p. 30.

conception of the Greeks; for he believed that Winckelmann and Goethe had misunderstood the Greeks because they did not take account of the Dionysian, orgiastic element in Greek art and culture.

Nietzsche's views were accepted by many twentieth-century German writers and artists, but not at all by scholars. The work itself alone can tell us whether their rejection was just.

I

What kind of book, then, is the *Birth of Tragedy*? The admixture of scholarship and cultural propaganda is peculiar, but more peculiar still is the metaphysics on which the whole argument is based. On first reading, the purpose of the work seems clear: to vindicate art at the expense of scholarship, to condemn the scientific outlook for its essential hostility to art and, consequently, even to life. On further reflection, however, Nietzsche's attitude towards these problems appears much more ambiguous, and the work is seen to be full of loose ends.

How does Nietzsche seek to make his point? His strategy is determined by his training and profession as a classical scholar. He starts by writing about one of the major themes of Hellenic scholarship, the rise of Greek tragedy. His argument runs as follows: art in general and Greek tragedy in particular depend on the interplay between the Dionysian and Apolline elements. These two terms were for the Greeks no mere concepts, but real experiences. Apollo embodies the element of the dream which finds its purest expression in the art of sculpture. Dionysus, on the other hand, represents the element of ecstasy, of which music is the purest manifestation. Whenever Apollo prevails, man's individuality, the *principium individuationis*, rules. If Dionysus prevails, however, man's individuality is destroyed and the individual is re-united with all other individuals, the primordial condition is restored, in which individuality does not exist and the individual is part of primordial unity. — Nietzsche's debt to Schopenhauer is here obvious; for Schopenhauer assumed that the world of appearance in all its varied manifestations is illusion. The world is not 'many', but 'one'. According to Nietzsche, primordial unity (*das Ureine*) is the real being of the world. It gives birth to the world as a work of art. By way of analogy with this primordial creation, the artist creates works of art. He dreams of experiencing the 'one' (*Ureine*). He knows that the

world, in reality, is a dream, i.e. mere appearance or semblance, and that art created by him from this dream is the semblance of semblance.

Art, thus, springs from the interplay of the Apolline and Dionysian elements. As he crisply formulates the problem:

How does art arise? The pleasure of appearance, the pain of appearance, the Apolline and Dionysian elements which continuously force one another to exist.⁶

Greek tragedy itself arose from the chorus, which was originally composed merely of satyrs who worshipped Dionysus. Tragedy thus grew out of the Dionysian mysteries where dithyrambs were sung exalting the passion of Dionysus, which was the central theme of tragedy. Music is the appropriate means for conveying the experience of the world of Dionysian ecstasy. Music preceded the word, but the original worship of the suffering Dionysus was inchoate. Only Apollo, however, was able to give form to this experience. Tragedy is thus only possible if Apollo transcends the Dionysian mysteries, i.e. if man is saved from the destruction of his individuality by a reconciliation of the two gods, Dionysus and Apollo. Tragedy is the representation or recreation of this reconciliation:

Conscious of the truth once perceived man sees everywhere only the terrible and absurd nature of being – he is disgusted. But in this greatest danger to the will, a sorceress comes, capable of saving him and knowing how to cure him – that sorceress is *art*. It alone is capable of turning these thoughts of disgust with the terrible or absurd nature of being into imaginings with which we are able to live.⁷

Art is, thus, necessary for living. It is necessary both for the individual and for mankind. The Dionysian experience itself is barbarian. Only Apollo has the power to create the balance without which there could never be any culture. The Greeks – and they alone – possessed a true culture; for in Ancient Greece art ruled over life.⁸

⁶ Nietzsche, *Werke, Grossoktavausgabe*, Leipzig, 2nd ed. 1901-26, (quoted as *WGr*), IX, p.190.

⁷ *W*, I, p. 48f.

⁸ *WGr*, X, p.245.

When Greek tragedy flourished, in the days of Aeschylus, a true culture prevailed. The aim of a true culture is the production of a great work.⁹ The people recognized the quality of these great works, and it was seen to be the purpose and the function of the state to create great art. The study of Greek tragedy thus leads to the very core of Nietzsche's early metaphysical conviction, summed up in the trenchant phrase:

Only as an *aesthetic* phenomenon is existence and life in the world for ever *justified*.¹⁰

Such is Nietzsche's judgment on what he regarded as the greatest achievement of the greatest culture so far created by man, a culture not belonging to the few only, but to a people as a whole.

This great era did not however last. How and why did it perish? Nietzsche's answer is unexpected and provocative. 'It committed suicide'.¹¹ How could this come about? Euripides was to blame. He brought about its agony.

As a poet Euripides felt superior to the mass of his spectators, but not to two of them.¹²

Who were these two spectators whose judgment Euripides was alone prepared to respect?

Again, Nietzsche's answer is startling:

the first is none other than Euripides himself, but Euripides the *thinker*, not Euripides the *poet*. Endowed with 'a critical mind' he sat 'pondering' in the theatre and thought that 'he did not understand his great predecessors'.¹³ Consequently, he was dissatisfied with his dramatic work, since it could not be justified at the bar of his intellect which, in his view, was 'the only root of all enjoyment and creation'.¹⁴ Understandably he looked round for a companion to share his despondency and found the only other spectator who did not understand tragedy and so did not respect it.

Who was this second spectator? Once again Nietzsche's answer is unexpected. None other than Socrates! In company with him

⁹ *WGr*, X, p. 124.

¹⁰ *W*, I, p. 40.

¹¹ *W*, I, p. 64.

¹² *W*, I, p. 69.

¹³ *W*, I, p. 69.

¹⁴ *W*, I, p. 69.

Euripides dared to be 'the herald of a new art.'¹⁵

Socratic Aestheticism is, thus, the murderous principle on which Greek tragedy foundered. How did Socrates succeed in triumphing over Dionysus and in driving the all-powerful god to retreat? He was able to do so because he stood for theoretical man, for the scientific approach, and because he was the representative of optimism and reason. This intellectual attitude is hostile to art. Unwittingly it destroys the soil that true art needs. As a theoretical man Socrates was not moved by Dionysus nor did he understand his world.

Socrates' teaching prevailed, however. The ideal of Greek youth is no longer the dying Dionysus, but the dying Socrates. A shallow, 'enlightened' optimism replaced the profound pessimism of the pre-socratic era. The triumph of scholarship and the glorification of knowledge inevitably spell the death of tragedy. For a work that has become estranged from the primordial basis of being cannot be a great work of art. Theoretical man, i.e. the scientist or the scholar, still pays homage to an illusion, viz. to the belief that he is able to understand the world and its meaning. But this assumption is mistaken; for the intellect and its products, science, scholarship and logic, do not suffice to apprehend the world. The triumph of logic is a Pyrrhic victory. For in contradistinction to the pre-socratic artist, theoretical man does not know that his activity is an illusion, that he can never attain his aim of understanding the world. His self-deception makes it however impossible for him to create tragedies. They can be created only if the poet is aware that the world is semblance, that art is the semblance of semblance.

So far Nietzsche has proceeded as a historian, though, in tune with his basic approach, it is history steeped in philosophy, though admittedly a philosophy of a peculiar metaphysical brand. But, as he argued passionately in the *Use and Abuse of History*, history for history's sake, however philosophical its character, is not enough. It is valuable only if it can be put to use for the present and for the future. History must lead to artistic action. Great periods of history – and they are defined as those periods which have a great culture – have to serve as an example for the contemporary world. Even more, the historical study of a great period should tell us how a renaissance of a great culture could be

¹⁵ W, I, p. 75.

achieved in Nietzsche's own time:

We have to learn from history that what was once great was possible and could be possible again.¹⁶

But where and when would that come about? Again, Nietzsche's answer is provocative. It is to be in the Germany of his own day, and it will be an even greater culture than that of Ancient Greece:

The new stage of art was not to be attained by the Greeks: it is the German mission.¹⁷

To prove the truth of this claim he appeals to, and propounds, his enthusiasm for Wagner's opera. Wagner, influenced by Schopenhauer like Nietzsche himself, had been able to create the dream-like, illusory world of art, steeped in a pessimistic awareness of suffering. He was thus the harbinger of a new age; for if the view of the world and art were generally accepted, a new genuine culture would arise, hitherto unknown in Germany. (Even Goethe had been only a promise of future possibilities, no more.). Relying on his knowledge and insight as a classical scholar and historian, on his appreciation of Wagner and on his conviction as a cultural prophet, Nietzsche proclaims the rebirth of tragedy in Germany and, as a result, prophesies a cultural renaissance in Europe.

These ideas are striking, but are they true or at least reasonable? Several questions have to be asked. Firstly, is Nietzsche's historical interpretation of Greek culture securely grounded in scholarship? Secondly, is his work philosophically fruitful and does his theory of art carry conviction? Thirdly, did his cultural prophecy come true?

II

To answer this question we have first to consider Nietzsche's aim and the reception his work had with classical scholars.

Although classical scholarship and cultural propaganda make unusual and uneasy bed-fellows, one of Nietzsche's aims was undoubtedly to write a scholarly work; but his overriding intention was to strike out new paths in the field of Greek studies, and in his masterpiece to transcend the conventional limits of scholarship, and this

¹⁶ W, I, p. 221.

¹⁷ W, I, p. 88.

in turn was to inaugurate a new era in German Culture.

How could a young scholar, only in his late twenties, be so bold? The answer lies in his attitude to the studies he had been pursuing during the previous decade. Nietzsche was a classical scholar, but with a difference. His ability was great, indeed, outstanding, but he was profoundly dissatisfied with classical studies. They were for him the prototype of the humanities, indeed, of all scholarship and science, but he doubted their value. His early success only seemed to reinforce his doubts. His first scholarly publications had attracted attention, and through the support of his eminent teacher at Bonn and Leipzig, Friedrich Wilhelm Ritschl, then at the height of his fame, Nietzsche had been elected to the chair of Greek at the University of Basel at the age of twenty-four before he had even taken his doctorate. This might have been thought an achievement to gratify any scholar, but as Nietzsche began to teach, earlier doubts about his subjects came to the fore again and he became convinced that previous classical scholars had misunderstood antiquity and thus not only ruined their own lives, but those of their students, and what was worse, their misunderstanding had warped the whole appreciation of antiquity and thereby the cultural and spiritual life of the whole nation.

But why should dissatisfaction with scholarship as it had been practised in Germany have led Nietzsche to the conviction that it was his task not only to reform, indeed, to revolutionize scholarship itself, but also to promote a new European culture? Nietzsche entertained these high hopes because he held that scholarship ought to emulate art and inform the whole body of cultural life. In this belief Nietzsche was, however, only continuing a well-established German tradition. Classical studies had become a kind of secularised theology and claimed the same intellectual primacy theology had enjoyed in the Middle Ages. This claim was, moreover, not a mere will-of-the-wisp of unworldly professors, but was widely accepted by the educated public. Nietzsche's own teacher, Ritschl, may serve as a telling example. When he wanted to leave his chair at Bonn to go to Leipzig because he had quarrelled with his colleagues and with the minister of education, the King of Prussia, William I, was unwilling to accept his resignation. It was necessary for his principal minister, none other than Bismarck himself, to intervene, to try and dissuade Ritschl from resigning

and when this failed, to advise the King to give his consent.¹⁸ Ritschl was in many ways the prototype of the eminent classicist of that period. Nietzsche's attitude to classical scholarship was influenced by his admiration for as well as by his rebellion against his teacher. Although Ritschl had literary and artistic taste he was entirely devoted to scholarship. For him scholarship meant primarily to adopt the historical approach. He insisted on a rigorous standard of historical scholarship, but, unconsciously rather than consciously, he believed in scholarship for scholarship's sake, in history for history's sake. To ask the question – which for Nietzsche mattered above all – why the ancients should be studied and what they could mean for contemporary art and culture would have been an unscholarly and hence illegitimate question. The greatness of Ancient Greece was accepted without any further ado. It was for Ritschl:

the eternal bourn of world culture to which we have to return again and again with living sensitivity.¹⁹

This attitude smacks of an over-weening confidence in one's own calling. Nietzsche was aware of this defect in his teacher whom he greatly revered. His gratitude and personal liking for Ritschl did not however obscure his awareness of possible failings. He wrote in his *Autobiographical Notes* 1856-69:

he [Ritschl] held his subject undoubtedly in too high an esteem. Thus he was opposed to classical scholars taking an interest in philosophy.²⁰

In the *Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche attacked this attitude of mind, and in so doing attacked his own early scholarly writings in which he had followed Ritschl's example. He now demanded scholarship with a philosophical slant, and in writing about classical scholarship he thought he was tackling the problems of scholarly and scientific disciplines. In Nietzsche's view, a fundamentally different approach was needed. The new *Wissenschaft* was to pro-

¹⁸ Cf. Otto Ribbeck, *Friedrich Wilhelm Ritschl*, II, Leipzig, 1881, p. 541 and p. 371.

¹⁹ To Nietzsche, 15 February 1872; *Gesammelte Briefe*, 2nd ed. (quoted as *Ges.Br.*), Leipzig, 1903 ff., III, p. 143.

²⁰ *W*, III, p. 139.

vide an insight into the nature of being; armed with this philosophical brand of scholarship literature and history would be interpreted anew. They would no longer be treated as dead matter, but would be seen as a part of life and with a view to living. In this respect, they would be analogous to art. Indeed, a philosophical artist's (or – artist-philosopher's) touch, such as Nietzsche believed himself to possess, was needed to bring the whole undertaking to life. Thus, Nietzsche's aim was:

to infuse my scholarship with this new blood, to inspire my lecture with the Schopenhauerian seriousness which is imprinted on the brow of this sublime man – this is my desire, my boldest hope. I want to be more than the teacher of competent classical scholars.²¹

Nietzsche's words sound as if he, the heir of a long tradition of Protestant pastors, wanted not merely to preach to the faithful, but also to convert the very infidels whom he was chastising. For he wanted to win over classical scholars, like Ritschl, to his cause, although at the same time he argued with passion that their limited outlook prevented their understanding his higher philosophical approach. He was therefore pained by the silence of his colleagues, from whom he had impatiently been awaiting approval of his revolutionary ideas. A few friends – Richard Wagner, Franz Overbeck, an ecclesiastical historian, and Erwin Rohde, the only classical scholar of standing among them – applauded him. And Rohde, a close friend of Nietzsche's from his Leipzig days, was far from impartial, for though in later years when he had become an eminent scholar himself he took a different view, at the time he believed that Nietzsche and himself were making common cause. Only one outsider, Hermann Hagen, Professor of Classics at Berne, wrote a letter of congratulation.²²

Nietzsche felt that the leading scholars greeted his work with a conspiracy of silence. Not a word even from his master, Ritschl. Undoubtedly Nietzsche was most impatient and could not wait. Within a month of publication he wrote a letter to Ritschl revealing

²¹ To Carl von Gersdorff, 11 April 1869; *Historisch-Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke und Briefe, Abt. Briefe*, Munich 1933 ff. (quoted as *Briefe*), II, p. 310.

²² To Nietzsche, 1 February 1872; *Briefe*, III, p. 462.

as much self-confidence as desire for approval:

it should be by this book; for it brings hope to our classical studies, it brings hope to the German character even if a number of individuals were consequently to perish. As you will readily believe, I have not written this work for the sake of personal ambition or consideration, as I do not wish to further my own career. I hope to do something for others. I wish to get hold of the younger generation of classical scholars and I should deem it a shameful sign if I were to fail in this task. But I am somewhat disturbed by your silence.²³

It is not at all surprising that Ritschl, on receiving this letter, noted in his diary (on 2 February 1872):

'Phantastic letter from Nietzsche. Megalomania'.²⁴

When he had read the book he wrote even more drastically: 'a brilliant fraud'. But he reserved these thoughts for his diary and wrote him a temperate, friendly letter, although he was unmistakably critical of his ideas. He came to the heart of the matter when he wrote:

I am too old to look for entirely new ways of life and of the mind. And what matters most. By nature I am so entirely wedded to the historical approach, and to the historical consideration of human affairs that I have not been able to discover the salvation of the world in any philosophical system, that I have never been able to describe the natural fading away of an epoch or of a phenomenon as suicide, that I do not consider the individualisation of life to be a retrograde step nor have I been able to believe that the intellectual achievement of a gifted, through historical development especially privileged nation could ever be the measuring yard for all nations and periods. It can be that just as little as one religion suffices, has sufficed and will ever suffice for the different national individualities. You can never expect from the 'Alexandrine' scholar that he condemns knowledge and take art to be the force which shapes, saves and liberates the world. The world is something different for every one.²⁵

Ritschl was clearly also worried about the impact the book might

²³ To Ritschl, 11 April 1869; *Briefe*, III, p. 201 f.

²⁴ Quoted in *Briefe* III, p. 461.

²⁵ To Nietzsche 15 February 1872; *Ges. Briefe*, III, p. 141.

have on susceptible minds. His words sound prophetic when he wonders:

whether the great mass of contemporary youth might not, by following Nietzsche's example, be led to an immature contempt of scholarship without exchanging it for a heightened appreciation of art – whether instead of fostering poetry we did not run the danger of opening the door for a general dilettantism.²⁶

Nietzsche's old teacher was disappointed and unwilling to follow his pupil on his metaphysical mountaineering. For him, scholarship was a much more modest, limited, rational undertaking and he benevolently hoped that Nietzsche would eventually find his way back to traditional scholarship.

Almost all other classical scholars reacted much more extremely to Nietzsche's provocation, uninhibited as they were by any benevolent, paternal friendship for Nietzsche such as Ritschl felt for him. They were plainly horrified, but, for the time, kept silent. When Rohde asked Zarncke, the editor of the *Literarische Zentralblatt*, a man of scholarly repute, to publish an enthusiastic review of Nietzsche's book,²⁷ his request was turned down. To offer to review a friend's book in a learned journal without being first approached was unusual, but Rohde's next step even more blatantly offended against traditional scholarly etiquette; he published a eulogising review in the Sunday supplement of the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*.²⁸ He should have known better and realised that by writing for a newspaper, even for its literary supplement, he was harming his friend rather than helping him. The offence seemed to be the more grievous since by defending his friend he appeared also to propagate his own cause. His action was bound to provoke a rebuttal. Rohde's review appeared on 26 May 1872. Not long afterwards the attack came and it was devastating. A young man, younger than Nietzsche himself, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, at that time only twenty-three and an unknown Ph.D. of a very recent vintage, but later one of the greatest classical scholars of all time, savaged Nietzsche in a pamphlet with the sardonic title *Zukunftts-*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

²⁷ Reprinted in Karlfried Gründer (ed.) *Der Streit um Nietzsches Geburt der Tragödie*, Hildesheim, 1969, (quoted as Gründer) pp. 9-14 Berlin 1872.

²⁸ Gründer, pp. 15-26.

philologie (*The Scholarship of the Future*),²⁹ an allusion to Wagner's conception of 'music of the future' (*Zukunftsmusik*). Wilamowitz who belonged to the Berlin school of classical scholars hostile to Ritschl's Leipzig school had been angered by Nietzsche's attack on Ritschl's former Bonn colleague, Otto Jahn (with whom Ritschl had the notorious quarrel when still in Bonn); he was sensitive, too, because the criticism of his beloved scholarship came from someone with whom he had been at school in Pforta. Wilamowitz's wrath was sincere, even if its expression was not entirely felicitous: in later years he regretted publishing the hurriedly written pamphlet.³⁰ But he was right in thinking that scholarship itself was threatened: Nietzsche had done violence to historical facts and scholarly methods. Wilamowitz attacked Nietzsche with the utmost fury because the *Birth of Tragedy*, although it appeared in a scholar's cloak, was not a work of scholarship. He could not forgive Nietzsche this transgression, and he believed he could prove to the world Nietzsche's 'ignorance and lack of regard for truth'.³¹ The *Birth of Tragedy* might be a 'dionysian-appolline work of art',³² but it was not a work of scholarship, and in a purple passage, he adjured Nietzsche to give up his chair and stop corrupting German youth.³³ Nietzsche's approach, so Wilamowitz thought, was determined by his belief in the metaphysics of Wagner and Schopenhauer; he thus found in Greek art and culture what he was looking for, viz. an all-pervading Schopenhauerian pessimism, regardless of the historical facts. In the wake of his theories he also committed a large number of scholarly errors. Homer was, for Nietzsche, a great solitary figure – and not a poet inheriting a great tradition of song. He asserted that music preceded the word, but he ignored that the elegy was not sung: according to him, Euripides spoke with the voice of Socrates, but Socrates was only fourteen years old when Euripides' first play was performed! But these errors of detail are unimportant in comparison with Wilamowitz' main charge, repeated in his second pamphlet, that Nietzsche, in contradistinc-

²⁹ Gründer, pp. 27-55.

³⁰ Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, *Erinnerungen 1848-1914*, Leipzig, n.d. (1928), p. 129.

³¹ Gründer, p. 29.

³² Gründer, p. 55.

³³ Gründer, p. 55.

tion to Winckelmann, had failed to view Greek culture historically and had not sought to understand the beauty and development of Greek art. In short, he sought to superimpose a philosophical conception on Greek reality.

When he heard of the attack Nietzsche was worried, but when he read it he felt that it did not really bear on what he had said. He tried to take it lightly. His letters are full of jokes at Wilamowitz's expense. Still he must have been hurt, perhaps even touched on the raw; for he and Rohde plotted to annihilate Wilamowitz as a scholar. But it was left to Wagner to reply publicly on Nietzsche's behalf, once again in the *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (23 June 1872).³⁴ Not surprisingly, classical scholars did not take any notice of Wagner's open letter in defence of Nietzsche, particularly since he maintained that poets and artists in any case ignored classical scholars and their findings, an argument not likely to cut much ice with Wilamowitz and his fellow classical scholars or to endear Nietzsche to them.

Rohde followed this up by publishing a pamphlet which, on the suggestion of Nietzsche's friend Overbeck, he called *Afterphilologie* (*Bastard Scholarship*).³⁵ Apparently believing the old adage that attack is the best form of defence he launched a powerful onslaught on Wilamowitz, but, unlike Wagner, he took issue with Wilamowitz's scholarship and recommended him to follow Heraclitus' advice: 'it is better to conceal one's own ignorance than to expose it by bragging.'³⁶ He did not however, apart from some general words of praise for Schopenhauer, defend Nietzsche's philosophical position, the presuppositions and consequences of which he ignored, but attacked Wilamowitz for alleged scholarly errors of detail. He succeeded in scoring some points, as Wilamowitz acknowledged in his reply to Rohde's pamphlet, but he also counterattacked by pointing to flaws in Rohde's argument. For Wilamowitz, the cardinal question is not one of being right or wrong in points of detail, but whether Greek studies should be scholarly or not – and Nietzsche's overall metaphysical view of art and culture in general is, in his opinion, decidedly unscholarly, to say the least.

³⁴ Gründer, pp. 57-64.

³⁵ Gründer, pp. 65-111.

³⁶ Gründer, p. 108.

Wilamowitz' reply (in a second instalment appropriately called *Zukunftsphilologie. Zweites Stück* <*The Scholarship of the Future. II.*>)³⁷ does not add anything of importance to his earlier pamphlet, but it is a vigorous, and, on the whole, not unsuccessful defence against Rohde's strictures on his scholarship. He also correctly emphasised that a wide gulf separated Nietzsche from Rohde.

Thus ended the famous quarrel about the *Birth of Tragedy*, famous less because of the vehemence and scope of the polemic than because of the stature of the combatants. What was at stake was the status and methods of scholarship, but that issue was never squarely faced, or even clearly brought into the open.

As far as the classical scholars were concerned, however, the outcome was crystal-clear. They did not accept Nietzsche's main contention and followed Wilamowitz and not Nietzsche.³⁸ Their attitude is summed up in the words of Hermann Usener, Professor of Classics at Bonn, a man whom Nietzsche greatly esteemed:

it is the greatest nonsense, of no use to any one. Whoever writes that kind of stuff is dead as a scholar.³⁹

Nietzsche was for his professorial colleagues, as he put it himself, 'the most objectionable scholar of the day'.⁴⁰ They believed he had committed a crime and 'condemned him to death',⁴¹ so to speak. Only a few friends stood by him; even the students stayed away from his lectures: in the winter term of 1872/73, only two turned up, neither of them studying classics.

But Nietzsche did not despair. He speculated whether classical scholars had the strength to annihilate anyone and consoled himself with the thought of the wide gulf separating his work from pure scholarship, a thought he would not, however, admit to Ritschl. Nevertheless, the book remained for scholars, at its best, a *succès de scandale*. It only won readers when Nietzsche's work as a

³⁷ Gründer, pp. 114-135.

³⁸ For a good account of Nietzsche's classical scholarship cf. Ernst Howald, *Nietzsche und die klassische Philologie*, Gotha, 1920; cf. also the account in the most thorough work on Nietzsche by Charles Andler (*Nietzsche. Sa vie et sa pensée*), 6 vols., Paris, 1920-31.

³⁹ cf. Nietzsche's letter to Rohde, 25 October 1872 (*Briefe*, III, p. 302) in which the sentence is quoted.

⁴⁰ To Malwida von Meysenbug, 7 November 1872; *Briefe*, III, p. 313.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

whole had been discovered and made famous by Georg Brandes, the eminent Danish critic.

Was this hostility on the part of scholars justified? Or was Wilamowitz' attack and the outlawing of Nietzsche by classical scholars only another of the many instances where scholars, arrogant and self-righteous as pharisees, failed to recognize a genius when he appeared? Was their attack yet another of the kind that Reuchlin, one of the greatest German scholars of all times, had had to suffer more than three centuries earlier from contemporary obscurantists and dimwits? Undoubtedly, the classical scholars failed to recognize Nietzsche's genius. But they can hardly be blamed for that. His earlier works of scholarship had been good, indeed, very good, but mainly remarkable on account of his youth; they were not revolutionary. Nor did the *Birth of Tragedy* reveal his gifts as an original thinker which were largely concealed by his style and his subject-matter. His fellow scholars might have penetrated the mist of his style, but the subject was a solidier obstacle. On the one hand, it undeniably belonged to the field of classical scholarship, and was therefore, in principle, capable of being investigated by scholarly methods. On the other hand, Nietzsche's main contention cannot be tested and his method is, accordingly, unscholarly. Indeed, Nietzsche was not even interested in testing his hypothesis. He did not want to produce evidence to support it which could be challenged and sifted. He was only concerned with intuitively apprehending the problem as a whole. But the origins, climax and decline of a literary genre cannot be intuited this way. Something quite different has to be done: to disentangle the interplay of many strands of thoughts and many literary and social factors. This Nietzsche was not prepared to do. Nor was he willing to admit the possibility that chance — for who can safely predict or satisfactorily explain the rise of a great poet or of a period? — may have played its part.

Understandably, scholars did not continue Nietzsche's line of argument, but followed quite different paths.⁴² Nietzsche did not in-

⁴²In a most interesting as yet unpublished lecture on 'Nietzsche and the Ancient World', Hugh Lloyd Jones, Regius Professor of Greek in the University of Oxford, argues that Nietzsche's emphasis on the irrational basis of Greek culture has been decisive and that the *Birth of Tragedy*, on

itiate a new kind of scholarship, nor did he produce a new theory of scholarship that carries conviction. Of course, the questions as to the end of scholarly and scientific activity and of academic and educational institutions which implicitly form the background of the work and on which he explicitly discoursed in other works are still being discussed. But how could that be otherwise? These issues do not allow of a final, let alone of an easy, answer. The debate has, therefore, to rage on.

Nietzsche himself completely turned his back on classical scholarship. He saw it as the source of 'the most shallow enlightenment, always dishonest. Finally, it had become ineffectual.'⁴³ Scholars, so he thought, lacked the feeling for what is really vital in thought. 'When they talk of scholarship they never go to the root [of the matter]. They never pose the question of scholarship as a problem.'⁴⁴

On reflection, the quarrel about the *Birth of Tragedy* is probably nothing but a curious episode in the history of scholarship, but this does not tell us anything about the philosophical value of Nietzsche's book. It is thus for philosophy to take up the enquiry.

III

The Birth of Tragedy fails to satisfy the standards of historical scholarship. Nor does it fare better as a philosophical treatise. It was Nietzsche's tacit intention to vindicate Wagner's music drama philosophically, but he does not make a genuine attempt to do so. Wagner's achievement is praised because his work reveals an affinity with the spirit of Schopenhauer and affords an analogy with Greek tragedy, but the argument is couched in very general terms. Other philosophical issues are, however, raised, but his manner of resolving them is open to severe criticism. However passionate Nietzsche's concern with philosophical truth was, his approach is inconsistent and self-contradictory. On the one hand, art is for him semblance, indeed, the semblance of semblance. Thus, it cannot

this account, constitutes a turning point in Greek scholarship and that, despite all its defects, it has proved to be a seminal work. This view, if correct, would of course make it necessary to modify my argument on one important point.

⁴³ *WGr*, X, p. 276.

⁴⁴ *WGr*, XIV, p. 369.

claim to convey or represent truth. On the other hand, scholarship (or science) which seeks to establish truth is the victim of an illusion; for the intellect is inherently incapable of grasping the world as a whole, and so it is bound to come up against the limits of intellectual enquiry and there suffers shipwreck. On what grounds do we prefer one illusion to another? If fullness of life, or usefulness for living, are the criteria why should art enable a man to fulfil or endure life more effectively than scholarship? To assert this is to stake a metaphysical claim incapable of proof. To say that art is a better guide to life than scholarship because, in contradistinction to scholarship, it springs from an awareness of suffering is clearly not enough, even if the major premise of the argument be true. But is there any reason to believe that it is true? Merely to assert it as true is not enough. Furthermore, is the antithesis between art and scholarship sensible? Are they really enemies, as Nietzsche will have it. Or is he not caught in the trap of his own approach?

Nietzsche's questions may appear bizarre, if not misleading. Nonetheless, it is worth while to look at the reasons that prompted him to ask these questions for he was trying to solve an interesting problem. He asked the question: which is the best way to attain truth, by way of art or of scholarship? Since antiquity claims have been advanced by both artists and scholars. Poets, for instance, have been thought to be the spokesmen of the gods of the makers of myths – and, thus, to be fabricators of lies. On the other hand, scholars (and scientists) have always sought to discover truth and have also been condemned for perpetually and necessarily failing to reach their goal. Or, to put it differently, Nietzsche asks the question which is the best way properly to understand life, its meaning and its various manifestations? Is this best done by way of creative intuition or intellectual cognition? And how does culture arise? Is the artist or the scholar more likely to promote it?

In the years before the actual composition of the *Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche thought that both ways, that of art and that of scholarship, led to truth. In his Bâle inaugural lecture *Homer and Classical Scholarship* he still thinks so:

Life is worth living, art maintains, the most beautiful seductress – life is worth knowing, so scholarship states.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ W, III, p. 159.

By the time he came to write the *Birth of Tragedy* he had changed his position. Knowledge is less important than life. Art is of greater value than scholarship.⁴⁶ He writes:

The will to semblance, to illusion, to deception, to becoming, is deeper, more metaphysical than the ways to truth, to reality, to beauty.⁴⁷

But Nietzsche deceived himself. For did he not write, or rather attempt to write, a scholarly work? There is thus a discrepancy between his statements and his aims. His conviction of the paradigmatic character of both art and the artist does not correspond to his own practice. He is not yet willing to turn what he wanted to say into poetry. He still wishes to speak as a scholar, to appeal to the world of scholarship and give it a new impetus and a new direction.

Nietzsche was fascinated by the paradox of reason looking for truth, but never finding it, since its powers — unrecognised by reason itself — are of their very nature unequal to the task. The world is irrational and reason (and its offspring, scholarship and science) can never see the whole, but only parts of the whole. Sooner or later, and here Nietzsche is indebted to Kant and Schopenhauer, they must become aware of their own limits. Unlike them, art knows no boundaries of the kind. Art does not seek to convey truth through reason. It creates illusions which are analogous to the illusions of life. From the intuition of art it is not truth that suffers but scholarship, especially classical scholarship, which had, Nietzsche was convinced, proved quite inadequate to handle poetry or to tackle the question of aesthetic values. For how can intellectual cognition do justice to art, i.e. to illusion and thus to a lie?

But what is truth? Nietzsche discusses this epistemological question in an early essay *On Truth and Art in a non-moral Sense*. Truth is beyond both art and scholarship. It is a mode of lying. It is indeed the goal of life itself which can possibly be reached only by the genuine philosopher, a man who, like Nietzsche, seeks to combine art and scholarship. But even this hope may yet be a deception: for we may have become so accustomed to a lie that it as-

⁴⁶ Cf. Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche, Einführung in das Verständnis seines Philosophierens*, 3rd ed., Berlin, 1950, for a discussion of this aspect.

⁴⁷ WGr, XIV, p. 369.

sumes for us the appearance of truth:

For what we call truth is an illusion of which we have forgotten that it is one.⁴⁸

When Nietzsche wrote the *Birth of Tragedy* he was not aware of the whole extent of the problem. His attempt to give scholarship a philosophical basis (i.e. for him, to give it the poetic flavour of art) surely implied his belief that the problem of truth could be solved, or at least be depicted by art and scholarship.

The question as to the function of art and whether it can claim to convey truth is only one of the many problems to which the *Birth of Tragedy* gives rise, however important this problem was for Nietzsche himself. But the work raises many other questions: one of them is: how does Nietzsche arrive at the aesthetic criteria by which he judges art? Greek tragedy, so we are told, is exemplary, but why is this so? Does Nietzsche base his judgement on intuitive insight? And if so, of what kind? Nietzsche does not give any answer to any of these questions. It does not suffice to say that Greek Tragedy is great because it united the Apollinian and Dionysian elements. This would be far too vague and also amounts to a circular argument. It is also not clear whether Nietzsche considers the Apollinian and Dionysian to be historical forces, psychological impulses or aesthetic criteria. In the work itself he alludes to all these possibilities.⁴⁹ In the last resort, he postulates their existence, but he does not argue the case sufficiently. Merely to state categorically as he does that great art must be or is like the art of the Greeks and that similar conditions have to prevail if it is to flourish is not enough.⁵⁰

Great art is necessary. Only then can a period be great. Only then has life significance and only then can we speak of culture. So much we may learn from the central sentence of the *Birth of Tragedy*: 'Only as an *aesthetic* phenomenon can existence and the world be for ever *justified*'.⁵¹ But does this cardinal statement

⁴⁸ W, III, p. 321.

⁴⁹ Cf. W, I, p. 33; WGr, XIV, p. 364; W, II, p. 1109.

⁵⁰ Cf. Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton, N.J. 1950, p. 108 who points out that Nietzsche in the *Birth of Tragedy* did not fully develop a theory of aesthetics.

⁵¹ W, I, p. 40.

really say that? If the sentence is examined it appears as anything but clear.⁵² Does a single aesthetic phenomenon suffice for all times? Or must every individual be confronted with an aesthetic phenomenon and then have an aesthetic experience? And if so, how often must he have it? Moreover, is it one or several (or many?) individuals who have to undergo this experience? Furthermore, if it be so how often has this to happen? Does it perhaps mean that a work of art has perennial or even 'eternal' value? Does Nietzsche speak of 'eternal' works of art, or can life, existence, the world itself, become an aesthetic phenomenon? Indeed, how can we know what constitutes an aesthetic phenomenon? Or again, how can the semblance — art — justify life and culture? Or is life, existence or the world itself to be seen as a work of art and hence as an aesthetic phenomenon? Is this judgement to be made from the perspective of the primordial one? But how can we pass judgement on the world of appearance from that point of view since the primordial one cannot be known? Nietzsche's utterance remains enigmatic. Several interpretations are possible, but none carries conviction or has more plausibility than the others. The statement is thus poetic rather than philosophic.

This problem was for him a personal experience; he was oscillating between both modes of experience. He wished to be both an artist and a scholar, but he was an artist with the bad conscience of a scholar,⁵³ and a scholar with the bad conscience of an artist. And later on he blamed himself for not having written a work of imaginative literature; for a work of that kind would have had a much greater impact:

It should have sung this new soul, and not spoken. What a pity that I did not dare to say what I had to say as a poet. I might have been able to do so.⁵⁴

But was Nietzsche really an artist, or was he merely receptive to

⁵² H.A. Reyburn (in collaboration with H.E. Hinderks and S.G. Taylor), *Nietzsche. The Story of a Human Philosopher*, London, 1948, p.132 calls this statement 'more startling than intelligible'. Reyburn then proceeds to interpret it, but even his quite plausible account leaves several questions unanswered, to say the least.

⁵³ Maria Bindschedler, *Nietzsche und die poetische Lüge*, 2nd ed. Bâle, 1962, p.34.

⁵⁴ W, I, p.2.

art? Admittedly, later on he wrote some fine poetry, and *Thus spake Zarathustra* is much more a work of poetry than of philosophy. At the time when he wrote the *Birth of Tragedy*, however, he also wished to be a composer. In the summer of 1872 he sent one of his compositions to Hans von Bülow, the famous conductor and champion of Wagner's operas. But Bülow's response was not what Nietzsche had hoped: he condemned the piece outright without the slightest attempt to spare Nietzsche's *amour propre*. He wrote:

Your Manfred-meditations are the most extreme instance of phantastic extravagance, the least pleasant and anti-musical composition which I have come across. I had to ask myself on several occasions: is the whole piece a joke? Did you wish perhaps to produce a parody of the so-called music of the future? – Are you intentionally poking fun at the rules of sound connection, from higher syntax to orthodox spelling? Apart from the psychological interest – for in your musical fever-product there is an unusual mind at work, still distinguished despite all errors – it has only the value of a crime in the moral world. I have not been able to discover a trace of the apollinine element: as far as the dionysian is concerned I had, quite frankly, to think more of the *lendemain* of a bacchanal than of a bacchanal itself.⁵⁵

For Nietzsche this reply appears to have been a devastating blow. He apologized to Bülow for sending him the piece⁵⁶ and told his friends that he had been cured of a tiresome misapprehension. But it must be doubted whether he really gave up his dream of being acknowledged as a composer of standing. A few months later he was, understandably, delighted when he heard that Liszt had praised his 'Manfred-meditations'.⁵⁷ A later comment by Peter Gast, the editor of Nietzsche's correspondence with Bülow, may also be indicative of his mood: Gast condemned Bülow's attitude and called the work 'an excellent symphonic achievement in every respect'⁵⁸ which Bülow groundlessly attacked. There is some reason to assume, although it cannot be proved, that Gast, who as

⁵⁵ To Nietzsche, 24 July 1872; *Ges. Br.*, III, p. 349 ff.

⁵⁶ Cf. to Hans von Bülow, 29 October 1872; *Briefe*, III, p. 349.

⁵⁷ To Elisabeth Nietzsche, 26 October 1872; *Briefe*, III, p. 305; also of letter to Rohde 27 October 1872; *Briefe*, III, p. 307.

⁵⁸ *Ges. Br.*, III, p. 347.

Nietzsche's disciple and friend was familiar with many of his views, spoke with his master's voice. This presumption is borne out by Nietzsche sending Bülow some fifteen years later another piece of music which he had composed. In the accompanying letter he made it quite clear that this time he was convinced of the high quality of the work.⁵⁹ Bülow did not reply himself, but left it to his wife to thank him courteously and excuse her husband's failure to reply on the grounds of his many commitments,⁶⁰ an unmistakable rejoinder. Indeed, Bülow's silence was most expressive.

Undoubtedly Nietzsche was not without musical talent, but as a composer his work is not significant. He cannot be mentioned in the same breath as the friend of his early days, Wagner – far from it. Nor does his music reveal the Dionysian qualities which he wished it to have in the anti-Wagnerian period.⁶¹ He was, to quote Gustav Mahler, 'a composer manqué'.⁶² But as a poet, albeit a minor one, he had to be taken seriously.

It is, of course, also possible that Nietzsche, as a young man, cherished the hope of rivalling Wagner himself. If he had hoped for success of that kind, he is unlikely to have entertained it consistently. *The Birth of Tragedy* does not say explicitly whether Wagner's operas constitute the rebirth of tragedy, or whether a future musical drama had still to be created in order to realize these aims. It is, thus, not impossible that Nietzsche sometimes expected to achieve future artistic triumphs which would allow him to attain the goal set out in the *Birth of Tragedy*. These hopes are, indeed, voiced in *Ecce Homo*, his intellectual autobiography which, though it contains much exaggeration, also expresses many truths about himself and his conscious and unconscious hopes and beliefs. In this work he not only sees *Zarathustra* and its poet as the artist of the future, but he states explicitly in the chapter dealing with the *Birth of Tragedy* that whatever he said about Wagner in his essay *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* should really be applied to himself:

⁵⁹ To Hans von Bülow, 22 October 1887; *Ges. Br.*, p. 367.

⁶⁰ Marie von Bülow to Nietzsche, 26 October 1887; *Ges. Br.*, III, p. 368.

⁶¹ Cf. Martin Vogel. *Apollinisch und Dionysisch. Die Geschichte eines genialen Irrtums*, (Studien zur Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts, 6). Regensburg, 1966, pp. 219-245 for an analysis of Nietzsche's music.

⁶² Quoted *ibid.*, p. 219.

In all psychologically decisive passages there is talk only of myself. Wherever the name 'Wagner' appears in the text my own name or the word 'Zarathustra' may be substituted without compunction. The whole of image of the dithyrambic artist is the image of the pre-existent poet of Zarathustra, depicted with abysmal depth, not for a single moment touching Wagnerian reality. Wagner himself grasped this fact; he did not recognize himself in this essay.⁶³

And what Nietzsche said about Wagner in *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* closely corresponds to the views about him and his work expressed in the *Birth of Tragedy*. There are therefore some grounds for assuming that the *Birth of Tragedy* is, in some ways, also an attempt to justify his own position and aspirations as an artist. Indeed, in this respect at least, it anticipated his achievement as the poet of *Thus spake Zarathustra* and his lyrics, even if it did not vindicate the musical composition which he was writing, or about to write, at that time.

This poetic approach to history and life corresponds to Nietzsche's later conviction that the *Birth of Tragedy* was a watershed in European intellectual history; for here the path to irrationalism began. The work, so he thought, contained two decisive innovations. Firstly, it presented an understanding of 'the dionysian phenomenon in the life of the Greeks',⁶⁴ a phenomenon of which it gave the first psychological account and in which the roots of Greek art were found. Secondly, it made it possible to understand Socrates and his philosophy as the tools of Greek enlightenment and recognized them for the first time as typical of its decadence. And he spoke of 'rationality against instinct, rationality at any cost as a dangerous force that undermines life.'⁶⁵

Nietzsche's attack on Socrates and Plato as symptoms of decadence, as pseudo-Greek, as anti-Greek, is as extravagant as his praise of Dionysus. His formulation is original, even if it recalls Romantic attacks directed against the enlightenment. But it is no less dangerous. Thomas Mann criticised him not without justice for preferring instinct to the intellect, brute life to reason; for, as

⁶³ W, II, p. 1112.

⁶⁴ W, II, 1109 (*Ecce Homo*).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

he remarked, there seemed to us to be not the least danger that the intellect might dominate human affairs.⁶⁶ Indeed, however brilliant and seductive Nietzsche's formulations may sound, they offer no reason why a scholar should, as Ritschl had immediately recognized, accept so irrationalist an approach. And whoever, in the wake of Nietzsche, wishes to condemn scholarship or science should at least know which idol he is worshipping.

IV

After the failure of the *Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche abandoned all hope of doing philosophical work in conjunction with his classical studies. He realized that there could be no marriage between historical scholarship and his own philosophical outlook. He realized, too, that to combine these two perspectives could mar his writing.

So much for the work itself. Nietzsche changed his own views later on in life; for a time after his quarrel with Wagner, he rated his intellect higher and art lower, but was soon struck by the ambiguity of all experience. The well-known line from *Thus spake Zarathustra* 'Poets lie too much – But Zarathustra, too, is a poet',⁶⁷ expresses his own ambivalence and his own dilemma which he was never able to resolve, whatever way he looked at it.⁶⁸ But his approach to the problem was always conditioned by the strands of thought that came first in the *Birth of Tragedy*.

The work itself had a curious history. Although it is unsatisfactory as a work of scholarship or philosophy, and although its cultural prophecies failed, it gave rise to new myths – to the myths of Apollo and Dionysos, in particular to the Dionysian basis of all art – and thus inaugurated a new age of German writers,⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Cf. Thomas Mann, 'Nietzsche's Philosophie im Lichte unserer Erfahrung', *Schriften und Reden zur Literatur, Kunst und Philosophie* (ed. Hans Bürgin), III, Frankfurt/Main, 1968, p. 37.

⁶⁷ *W*, II, p. 383.

⁶⁸ For an analysis of Nietzsche's later view of art cf. Helge Hultberg, *Die Kunstanschauung Nietzsches* Bergen und Oslo, 1964; cf. also Hans Peter Pütz, *Friedrich Nietzsche*, Stuttgart, 1967 and *Kunst und Künstlertum bei Nietzsche und Thomas Mann*, 1965, pp. 1-45.

⁶⁹ Cf. Vogel, *Apollinisch und Dionysisch*, pp. 197-218 and 247-280; cf. also Paul Böckmann, 'Die Bedeutung Nietzsche für die Situation der

for myths are frequently more important to artists than the conclusions of reason.

The question whether art is able to convey truth since it is a lie and artists are liars has exercised many German writers in the first half of the twentieth century. And the belief in the Dionysian character of Greek drama and culture has had an equal impact on German education. This story cannot be told here, for it would be tantamount to describing a great part of German writing in the years after Nietzsche's rise to fame in the early 1890's, after his discovery by Georg Brandes. But, in conclusion, *one* point must be stressed: The *Birth of Tragedy* had an impact quite different from what Nietzsche had hoped. Its ideas were not taken up by the naive writers who might be in tune with the world of Dionysus, but rather by those reflective, intellectual writers who resembled Euripides and who had eaten from the tree of knowledge. But such is the irony of life: intention and impact frequently do not go together.

modernen Literatur', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, XXVII, 1953, pp.77-101; Anni Carlsson, 'Der Mythos als Maske Friedrich Nietzsches', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, XXXIV, (N.F. VIII), 1968; and Max L. Baeumer, 'Das Dionysische-Entwicklung eines literarischen Klischees', *Colloquia Germanica*, 1967, pp.253-262 for a discussion of this question.

LA POESIA ITALIANA DI DUN KARM PSAILA

di ALFONSO SAMMUT

VORREI cominciare questo discorso dando la parola allo stesso poeta maltese, alla lettura cioè di un sonetto che meglio di altra introduzione critica può rendere l'idea delle ascendenze accademiche di mons. Carmelo Psaila detto poi Dun Karm. Si tratta di un sonetto che basta a qualificare tutto un clima di linguaggio, di esterna sonorità, di ambizioni solenni accompagnate da un largo gesto:

A VINCENZO MONTI

Quando al chiaror di notturno lume
Mentre grato ai mortali il sonno scende
Dispiego, O Monti, il ricco tuo volume
E nei tuo gran pensier l'anima intende.

Io ti vidi spiegar l'agili piume
Alle regioni u' il fulmine s'accende
E teco mi trascini ed il costume
Oblio del mondo e solo il ciel mi splende.

Quindi mi balza il cuor, quindi dal seno
Una voce mi sfugge: O dell'Ausonio
Apollioneo ciel astro sereno,

Te dal Baltico mar fino all'Jonio
Imiti Europa e le castalie Dive,
Rasciutto il pianto, tomeran giulive.

Ho scelto questo sonetto dalla raccolta di poesie italiane di Dun Karm come punto di partenza per queste brevi divagazioni critiche sul suo mondo poetico perchè l'ho ritengo indicativo sotto molteplici aspetti.

In primo luogo, 'il breve ed ampio carne', con il suo tono decisamente encomiastico sottolinea la viva ammirazione del poeta maltese e rivela la sua consapevole adesione ad un poetare stilisticamente affine a quello dello scrittore cantato. In fatti lo stile marcatamente gonfio del brano è una concreta testimonianza che tale

elogio non si esaurisce in un semplice e transitorio plauso occasionale avviato da un stimolo estrinseco, ma ne dimostra un'identità di gusti formali ed espressivi. Da notare che questo stile tramandato dal Monti, ma controllato e frenato nei suoi più vistosi artifici dal Foscolo, dal Leopardi e dal Manzoni, fù ripreso e sviluppato dal Carducci, poeta apprezzato dal Maltese e, in un certo senso, contemporaneo a lui perchè l'ultima fase dell'attività poetica dell'Italiano viene a coincidere con i primi tentativi dello Psaila nel campo della poesia. Perciò quest'aspetto retorico della sua raccolta inserisce il poeta maltese in un contesto più ampio e lo accomuna ad una corrente letteraria che in Italia cessò dopo che D'Annunzio l'aveva ridotta ad un estetismo puramente fonico e musicale. Inoltre questo stile risponde ad una esigenza del clima culturale maltese intonato ad un'atmosfera barocca e neoclassica che rispecchia gusti omogenei nell'architettura e pittura come risulta da uno sguardo panoramico alle chiese esistenti nella isola. Da aggiungere, in fine, che il poeta maltese scrisse una parte notevole delle sue poesie italiane nel suo noviziato poetico quando non aveva ancora raggiunto la sua maturità artistica e perciò è facile costatare che, trascinato irresistibilmente dall'ardore giovanile, cadde in preda a questa sonorità ed artificialità. Questi tre fattori hanno contribuito notevolmente a conferire una fisionomia marcatamente retorica alla sua stagione poetica. Perciò rileviamo subito che nell'analisi di questi frammenti poetici bisogna inquadrarli in questo contesto storico, biografico, ambientale e culturale per poter scoprire qualche felice intuizione poetica che per lo più, fatta qualche rara eccezione, non è legata ai grandiosi temi tradizionali, come la religione, l'amor patrio, la storia o i grandi personaggi di questa, motivi senz'altro presenti nella sua raccolta ma privi di forza espressiva perchè l'accentuato intento didascalico ed il mal controllato entusiasmo soverchiano la poesia e così vien meno l'armonica simbiosi tra forma e contenuto. Occorre, invece, cercare la genuina e spontanea voce poetica quando egli canta in tono sommesso e, diremo pascolianamente, le piccole cose, gli spettacoli della natura, il paesaggio maltese, la semplice ed umile vita dei campi, le scene e gli affetti familiari, perchè in queste circostanze riesce ad instaurare un intimo colloquio in cui si svela come in un libro la sua anima ricca di sentimenti. In questo colloquio che, purtroppo, risulta molto raro, il moralista, il predicatore, il cesellatore cede il posto al poeta. Sotto questo aspetto ci

sembra d'intravedere una certa rassomiglianza con il Carducci perchè è giudizio comune degli studiosi che il poeta italiano diventa grande quando rievoca motivi e sentimenti familiari e cessa d'essere 'il poeta vate'. Dal punto di vista del contenuto, il sonetto sopra citato con lo spunto fornito dalle due coordinate, '... il costume/oblio del mondo e solo il ciel mi splende', abbiamo un'indicazione precisa della tematica preferita del poeta, programmata in una sola direzione, quella religiosa, nonostante le varie sfumature contenute nei titoli dei componimenti. Di fatti la maggior parte delle sue liriche sono ancorate allo argomento religioso e, anche quando il titolo del brano dà l'impressione che il tema sia diverso, il poeta finisce per infondere un'aura religiosa a tale contenuto. Le sue poesie profane sono costellate di riflessioni religiose che sintonizzandosi con quelle di carattere sacro danno un senso unitario alla raccolta e svelano quella che potremmo definire la Weltanschauung transcendente del poeta.

Non si sa con precisione quando Carmelo Psaila cominciò a scrivere poesie in italiano ma da informazioni fornitemi gentilmente dal Prof. Cardona, si può indicare l'anno 1888-89, a diciassette anni, quando in una poesia dedicata a Mons. Pietro Pace parlò delle sue 'primizie'. Poi nel 1895 pubblicò una raccolta, intitolata *Foglie D'Alloro*. Sono poesie di carattere religioso. Nel 1911 ebbe l'intenzione di pubblicare un'altra raccolta dal titolo *Viole*, 'ossia piccola raccolta di poesie quali in anni diversi e in circostanze ora liete ora tristi solitario composi'. Questa raccolta che non fu pubblicata contiene tre sole poesie: *Cristo*, *Corpus Domini* e *Ad un Venticello*. Continuò a scrivere in italiano fino al 1934 quando in un sonetto maltese indirizzato alla musa ne scrisse '... Hawn miet f'idejja/Min lill barrani kien jaħasra ibiegh'. Certamente una delle cause per cui lo Psaila cessò di scrivere in italiano fu la situazione politica di quei tempi. Comunque anche se il nostro poeta scrisse in italiano per molto tempo, il suo ardore per la lingua si spense dopo il 1912 allorchè lo scrittore Ġuse Muscat Azzopardi, l'aveva invitato a poetare in maltese. Nel 1954 Giovanni Curmi curò un'edizione quasi completa della sua poesia italiana e la pubblicò col titolo di *Liriche* a cui ci riferiremo nel nostro discorso.¹

¹ CARMELO PSAILA, *Liriche*, con prefazione di G. Curmi, Aquilina Malta, 1954.

LA POESIA RELIGIOSA

Com'è stato detto una notevolissima parte delle sue liriche attinge a motivi religiosi. Lo Psaila inneggia ai misteri della fede cristiana con un fervore da neofita. La raccolta si apre con cinque frammenti, quattro odi ed un sonetto dedicati alla Vergine. In questi inni sacri il poeta s'ispira ai principali motivi biblici connessi con la biografia della Vergine cercando di riviverli nella sua fantasia. Però nella trasfigurazione lirica dello spunto agiografico il poeta inserisce riflessioni etiche e morali sottolineate marcatamente nel benefico influsso subito da un'umanità rappresentata in uno stato di infelicità e di schiavitù e poi liberata dall'intervento di questa donna privilegiata che irradia la sua luce su tutto l'universo. Vediamo più da vicino la struttura genetica di queste prime poesie perchè lo schema contenutistico ritorna anche in altre odi religiose. L'inno generalmente si svolge con una riflessione introduttiva morale in cui il poeta descrive con foschi colori la situazione primigenia dell'uomo vulnerata dal peccato; poi il discorso verte sul fatto centrale da cui si avvia l'ispirazione ed in fine scioglie un inno di ammirazione e di preghiere al personaggio celebrato. Questo modello lo si può ravvisare nelle odi *A Maria Immacolata*, *Il Naufragio di S. Paolo a Malta*, *La Chiesa e Leone XIII* e *L'Assunzione* che possiamo prendere come esempio concreto di questo procedimento. Nella prima strofa di quest'inno già abbiamo la riflessione morale:

Che scendea dal gaudio etemo
Nell'orror d'angusto ostello
A francar dal cupo inferno
La progenie d'Israello, ...²

(Già in questo inizio lo schema manzoniano degli *Inni Sacri* s'impone, e lascia tracce precise nel linguaggio: 'gaudio etemo', 'cupo inferno', e soprattutto la rima 'ostello-Israello' ci riportano al *Natale* di Manzoni).

Poi viene la rielaborazione del motivo centrale che prende l'avvio dalla sesta strofa:

Perchè immagine perfetta
Del figliuol ognor si renda
Questa madre benedetta

² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Nell'avel convien che scenda:
Ma qual sol, che in Occidente
Cade a sera, poi d'Oriente
L'infocata erta risal,

Della destra onnipotente
Alla scossa vigorosa
Sorgerà questa Dormente ...³

La fase finale traboccante di stupore per la sublime grandezza della Vergine coincide con la quart'ultima strofa:

Benedetta! al Dio d'Amore
Che al suo regno la richiama
Poggia su come il vapore
Della mirra e del timiama;
Bella sí non è l'aurora,
Che di gigli e rose infiora
Il suo rorido cammin.⁴

Oltre a questo gruppo di poesie dedicate alla Vergine, la raccolta contiene numerose altre scritte in occasione della prima messa di molti sacerdoti in cui sottolinea la dignità sacerdotale con uno spirito pigramente convenzionale, per cui la vita secolare ha tutte le insidie, le iniquità, gli allettamenti, le pompe del demonio, mentre al contrario la vita sacerdotale è immancabilmente luminosa e felice come si può constatare dai seguenti versi:

Se d'un maligno secolo
Ai finti blandimenti
Ai vani onor, ai fulgidi
Ma inutili ornamenti.
Con santo sdegno gli omeri
Torcesti e ad una soglia,
Dove virtù germoglia,
Dritto guidasti il piè ...⁵

Nella stessa categoria di poesie religiose ci sono due sonetti dedicati a S. Publio il cui tema è simile a quello d'un'altra poesia, *La Predicazione Evangelica* in cui il poeta esalta l'opera di edu-

³ Ibid., p. 13.

⁴ Ibid., p. 15.

⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

cazione religiosa e civile della chiesa nel mondo e quella di S. Publio a Malta e in Grecia. Non dissimile ma di meno ampio respiro è il pensiero centrale dell'ode, *Il Naufragio di S. Paolo a Malta*, che ha un inizio solenne:

L'etra turbossi: il fulmine
 Si scatenò furente,
 Parve sdegnare i limiti
 Del mar l'irato ambiente;
 Fosco, gelato, orribile,
 Pregno di tuoni un velo
 Coprì l'immenso cielo,
 Tremava ogni mortal ...⁶

La tempesta che porta S. Paolo a Malta provoca scompiglio negli animi e spazza via le liti, il culto degli dei pagani ed all'oscurità della filosofia pagana subentra la luce del verbo rivelato che trasforma i cuori, raddrizza i costumi, illumina i pensieri sublimandoli nell'ascesa verso Dio:

Ira, livor, discordia
 In carità mutärsi
 Tutti fratel chiamärsi
 L'odiato e l'odiator ...⁷

Si noti in questi versi come la forza del verbo cristiano è affermata dall'esterno, non come nella meditazione manzoniana, e il passaggio dal paganesimo al cristianesimo è presentato come un trionfo d'amore non altrimenti giustificato.

Una delle più lunghe poesie religiose è quella intitolata, *Per il Congresso Eucaristico Internazionale di Malta (1913)*, in cui il motivo della natura esultante per tale straordinario avvenimento si armonizza con il sentimento patriottico e religioso del poeta che si spicca di più nell'ardente preghiera finale che oserei avvicinare a quella della *Pentecoste* del Manzoni.

Oltre il celebre inno popolare *T'Adoriam Ostia Divina*, che ha trovato fortuna in altri paesi, forse la poesia più sublime e più riassuntiva di quanto finora detto è quella dedicata *A Cristo*, accolta con molto plauso da chi si è soffermato sulla poesia italiana dello Psaila. Il motivo ispiratore, immediato ed esterno, sembra prendere

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

l'avvio da un monumento eretto a Cristo su una collina. Una volta preso il volo, il poeta spazia nell'alto e sorvola sulla storia millenaria dominata da Cristo che Lo ritrae così:

Solo e sublime stai fra cielo e terra
securò il piede su granito eterno,
uomo e divino, sacerdote e rege,
candido CRISTO.⁸

Il motivo interno si sviluppa dallo spunto di un'umanità fragile ed impotente e si esaurisce nell'immagine di Cristo come unico 'faro', che proietta luce e pace su tutto il mondo, unica voce della vera libertà, unico usbergo contro qualsiasi tentativo di ritorno alle tenebre del paganesimo, come lo fu quello dei razionalisti francesi che vollero spodestarlo ed innalzare un altare alla dea ragione. Depositaria di questo messaggio di civilizzazione è Roma che in antitesi con il ragionamento carducciano contenuto nell'ode *Alle fonti di Clitunno*, di una Roma caduta in rovina e svestita dal suo splendore per l'avvento del cristianesimo; per lo Psaila, invece, la sua provvidenziale scelta come centro della diffusione del verbo rivelato, diventa l'unico motivo della sua grandezza e della sua immortalità. Se l'inizio è solenne altrettanto grandioso è l'epilogo con quel gesto ampio di Cristo benedicente:

... Tu, Dio, sicuro e mansueto
guardi e sorridi
benedicente al popolo che muore,
benedicente al popolo che nasce,
benedicente à piani, à colli, al mare,
Candido CRISTO:⁹

La raccolta contiene altre poesie religiose ma press'a poco riecheggiano gli stessi motivi che abbiamo incontrato: occasioni liturgiche, invocazioni solenni, esortazioni devozionali che qualche volta raggiungono, come in quel simulacro del candido Cristo, una moderata intensità di espressione. Da questo breve sguardo panoramico sul contenuto di alcune sue poesie religiose emerge come elemento essenziale e comune denominatore la secolare antitesi tra luce e tenebre. Questo motivo base è svolto ripetutamente,

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

ma il poeta, come vedremo più avanti, è riuscito benchè non sempre a conferirgli varie sfumature ed a plasmarlo con un linguaggio colorito ed emotivo. L'intento del poeta risulta molto evidente: egli esalta la bellezza e lo splendore della religione cristiana non come fini a se stanti ma per commuovere ed incitare il lettore ad apprezzarla ed amarla. Questo scopo, a volte, è sotterraneo, ma molte volte, si impone vigoroso fino a raggiungere il tono concionatorio e così si sovrappone al genuino moto iniziale della fantasia.

LA POESIA PROFANA

Lo Psaila si è cimentato anche nella lirica profana ma, come accennato in precedenza, le poesie di carattere civile sono relativamente poche ed anche in questo settore l'afflato religioso emerge insistentemente perchè il poeta maltese educato alla luce di una filosofia cristiana interpretata il divenire storico con l'occhio di Agostino e guarda francescanamente alla natura. Nella sua visione della realtà la grandezza umana e la bellezza del creato s'inseriscono in un contesto manzoniano, in quanto diventano rivelazioni di un piano disegnato ed illuminato dalla divina provvidenza ed il riflesso concreto della bontà e dell'amore del creatore. Difatti da uno sguardo d'insieme a questa categoria di poesie si fanno subito vive queste caratteristiche. L'interpretazione religiosa del fatto storico emerge con evidenza tanto nel sonetto come nell'ode che dedicò a Cristoforo Colombo:

Ma di tutti miglior, felice acquisto,
Coll'alta sua virtù, d'un'mondo intero
Fè il grande Genovese e diello a Cristo.¹⁰

E lo stesso concetto si ripete nell'ode:

In quel fulgore etereo
la poderosa mente
Dolce sentia benefico
Il fiato onnipossente,
Che a gran disegni ed opere
L'irto sentier gli aprì.

E per quanto riguarda il suo francescanesimo basta la seguente citazione dalla poesia, *Il Mare*:

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Quasi un ampio volume il mare agli occhi
 Dell'umano intelletto apre e dispiega
 Le pagine superbe ove si legge
 Del Creator la sapienza eterna.¹¹

Queste poesie hanno però altri interessi particolari perchè lummeggiano aspetti e tratti umani della figura del poeta. Ciò che colpisce subito il lettore è il suo legame affettivo verso la madre. Mentre egli dedica un solo sonetto alla memoria del padre stimolato dalla scomparsa di questo, i suoi affettuosi sentimenti filiali verso sua madre sono testimoniati da vari echi come quello in *Ruit Hora* ove nella penultima strofa così ricorda la sua immagine:

Pur nel fuggir de l'attimo presente
 scorgo lontan sorridere un pio volto;
 è il viso bianco ma sereno e bello
 de la mia madre.¹²

A questo ed altri echi si allacciano due fra i suoi migliori frammenti: *Solo* e *Ispirazione Materna* che sublimano questo intenso amore verso la madre che diventa, nella prima poesia, l'unico rifugio del poeta quando è rattristato dalla stanchezza e dalla solitudine e, nella seconda, fonte d'ispirazioni poetiche circonfuse dal suo gioioso sorriso.

Questa intensità di affetti è rivolta ad un'altra persona che sembra fosse molto vicina al cuore del poeta. Naturalmente questo è un tema di non facile trattazione sul piano biografico perchè è passabile di fraintendimenti. Ma è certo che un'ispiratrice, certo sublimata e fantasticamente rivissuta e trasfigurata, ci fù nella vita del poeta. Del resto lo stesso autore accenna a questa cara persona quando nel sottotitolo della poesia *Da Roma a Tivoli*, egli parla esplicitamente della 'compagnia di una persona cara'. Questa misteriosa persona che accompagnò il poeta nel breve tragitto da Roma a Tivoli è quella a cui sono rivolti questi versi nella suddetta poesia:

Te lo ricordi? Aprivasi
 a pura gioia il core,
 gioia serena: ah! quello fu per me
 giorno felice.¹³

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

Certamente fù un giorno doppiamente felice: in primo luogo perchè affascinato dal paesaggio periferico romano e dalle romantiche 'Cascatelle' di Tivoli, ma anche perchè su questo sfondo paesistico campeggia la figura di quella cara persona. Inoltre la poesia *Edera* continua a far luce su questa misteriosa persona:

Nata fra i ruderi
in loco aprico,
cercai bramosa
un fido amico,

Lo trovai rustico
incolto, austero
ma come un Alpe
fermo e sincero.¹⁴

E più avanti dice:

Tal ne la placida
quiete sicura,
senza sospetto,
senza paura,

serena e libera
crebbi costante, ...¹⁵

ed in fine:

Dove ancor tenera
m'appresi forte
resto: fedele
sino a la MORTE.¹⁶

Un'altro accenno significativo si trova nella poesia *Con te!*

Perchè quando sono teco
sempre sfolgora il sole
sovra un mondo giulivo?

Questo attimo di felicità non sembra causato dalle 'onde di vento' che è il motivo centrale della poesia. Dietro quell'onda che porta 'aroma di mare' e 'd'augelli musica' sembra velarsi una persona perchè altrimenti non ci sarebbe motivo di dire:

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

Cosciente
l'anima conta i dolci
attimi che sen volano,
Senza rimorso ...¹⁷

Che il poeta avesse un cuore sensibile al fascino femminile sembra ben chiaro anche da questi due versi contenuti in *Ruit Hora*:

Quante nel lento volgere dei giorni
lotte tra mente ferma e infermo cuore ...¹⁸

Questo elemento affettivo del poeta si colorisce di altre sfumature come emerge nella poesia dal titolo crepuscolare, *L'orfana e Fra Diego*: l'amore per i poveri e la gente sofferente. Il poeta, triste ed accorato per la mala sorte capitata a questa bambina, cerca d'infondere in lei il coraggio e la speranza con pensieri religiosi. Questo motivo evangelico ritorna in altri componimenti come nell'ode *La Chiesa e Leone XIII, Capodanno* in cui vediamo il poeta confortato e sollevato dalla visione del povero, ridente e contento intorno alla mensa.

Dun Karm era particolarmente legato alla sua terra natia e questo legame sentimentale è rivissuto in vari echi nella sua raccolta e vi troviamo pure interi componimenti su cui campeggia questo motivo patriottico. I due sonetti, *VIII Settembre 1565* ed *A Malta* rievocano con grande slancio momenti salienti del glorioso passato su un colorito sfondo paesistico isolano.

La sua ammirazione per l'arte è un'altra caratteristica che allarga orizzontalmente i suoi interessi ed arricchisce la sua personalità. L'arte italiana a Malta è presente in modo massiccio, determinando addirittura gli orientamenti del gusto locale. Una delle forme attive e presenti dell'arte italiana era, ai tempi di don Carmelo, l'opera lirica che aveva il potere di galvanizzare per una intera stagione, al teatro dell'Opera, la classe colta maltese. I melodrammi italiani, conosciuti da tutti, erano ammirati e ripetuti ed anche a questo influsso si deve il linguaggio un pò arcadico ed ammanierato della poesia locale in lingua italiana. Nella poesia dedicata al tenore Leopoldo Dagradi, Dun Karm si fa interprete di questa sensibilità collettiva quando scrive:

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

L'abbiam e grande e vivido
De l'arte il sentimento ...¹⁹

e più avanti ne fa un piccolo accenno alla sua familiarità con alcune opere di Verdi, di Giordano e di Puccini, ed in fine dedica un sonetto a Donizetti ispirato dal detto oraziano, 'non omnis moriar'.

Questa ricca gamma di motivi e di affetti raggiunge il suo culmine nella rielaborazione di temi georgici. Il poeta fù particolarmente attratto dall'affascinante spettacolo della natura e cercò di riviverlo nella sua fantasia con notevole impeto poetico: dalla semplice descrizione paesistica alla rievocazione di una visione idillica pregu di significati etici.

La già ricordata *Da Roma a Tivoli* è una suggestiva reminiscenza campestre in cui 'alberi verdi', 'ameni colli', 'greggi di bianche pecore pascenti', 'ombrese valli', 'nivee colombe', allietati da un'aura sottile' e da un 'cielo azzurro' creano una visione di gioiosa freschezza che si imprime eternamente nella fantasia del poeta:

La vostra cara immagine
sarammi eterna: in mezzo
a voi baciommi col suo bacio ardente
la Poesia.²⁰

Dalla Finestra e *La Lavoratrice di Merletto* sono due graziosi quadretti con particolari aspetti della vita campestre locale e vi si respira una nostalgia della vita semplice e dura ma sana della gente di campagna. Nella prima, su uno sfondo assolato e verde si staglia in un primo piano la figura del 'rubesto colono' con la zappa in mano mentre più lontano emergono l'aratore e la donna che 'gli vien dietro seminando' ed in fine il poeta che accompagna tutti:

... io li accompagno
con lo slancio del cuor.²¹

Nella seconda abbiamo una cartolina che rappresenta un'altra scena gozitana: 'una casina quieta' esposta al sole e profumata dai fiori delle aiuole nel cui cortiletto:

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

... dei pampini al rezzo,
linda, robusta, lieta,
Sta la fanciulla ...²²

la quale mentre lavora il merletto con le sue agili dita canta con la sua 'amorosa voce'.

Ad un ruscelletto ed *Ad un venticello* contengono voli fantastici stimolati dalla natura e svelano anche i forti sentimenti georgici del poeta ma nella fase conclusiva vengono sottratti a questa atmosfera idillica e ricondotti verso il tema religioso.

Oltre i numerosissimi riferimenti al mare, sparsi un pò dappertutto nella raccolta, il poeta gli dedica una lunga poesia, *Al Mare*, ma più che una rielaborazione del motivo marino, al lettore si presentano riflessioni di carattere prevalentemente religioso con alcune evanescenti parentesi attinenti al titolo. Dobbiamo dire che anche in questo settore il poeta non ha saputo lasciarsi cullare dall'onda melodica e silenziosa del ritmo della natura e, spinto dalla sua *forma mentis* sorretta da una concezione etica dell'arte, ha voluto insistere troppo sul significato ivi nascosto senza rendersi conto che tale messaggio sarebbe stato più incisivo se avesse lasciato al lettore di trarre le sue conclusioni e così assaporarle meglio.

LO STILE

Già abbiamo accennato ad alcuni fattori che hanno influito sulla formazione dello stile dello Psaila e che, a loro volta, sono all'origine delle molte imperfezioni stilistiche reperibili un pò ovunque. Le più vistose e che incidono negativamente sulla sensibilità del lettore specialmente moderno, restio alla retorica ed abituato alla silenziosa auscultazione, sono il tono fastidiosamente sonoro, le frequenti esclamazioni di stupore e di meraviglia, gl'insistenti interrogativi retorici, la ricca ma vuota aggettivazione, l'uso un pò smodato di voci reboanti, le ripetizioni di frasi, d'immagini, di atteggiamenti, il gusto per le visioni prevalentemente fosche, il timbro polemico, l'intento scopertamente didascalico, i lunghi brani acromatici, il ragionamento, a volte, freddo e scialbo, l'esagerato accento sull'elemento emotivo ed in fine il tono quasi esclusivamente religioso che conferisce un senso di monotonia alla raccolta.

Segnaliamo qualche illustrazione concreta di questi limiti ma il lettore può trovarne molti altri nel libro. Ad esempio l'immagine del

²² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

padre circondato dai figli si trova nella poesia *A Padre Charles Plater, S.J.*:

. . . e il pane
bianco, fragrante rinnovar a tutti
gli esercitati muscoli, ed al padre,
che sa la gioia d'esser padre, gli occhi
ridon contenti in mezzo a cari visi
rosei, tondeggianti . . .²³

poi in quella *Per Il Congresso Eucaristico*:

L'odore del pane impregnerà la casa
Del contento operaio, e a lui coron
Faran, intorno al desco apparecchiato,
Dei rosei figli i tondeggianti volti . . .,²⁴

ovvero l'altra immagine del sole, presente *Nella morte dell'Alpinista*:²⁵

E il sole grande che del picciol mondo
fruga le valli e le superbe altezze

che sotto una dizione un pò differente ritorna in *Madre*:

Oh del gran mezzogiorno
la vampa assidua invano
arde e fruga d'intorno
la quiete casetta.²⁶

Sarebbe noioso illustrare testualmente tutti i punti in cui il poeta ripete pigramente se stesso. La ripetizione, in genere, cade nei momenti di vuoto fantastico, e si serve sempre non tanto di stilemi altrove prodotti da Dun Karm, bensì di ricalchi da Parini, da Zanel-la, da Betteloni, insomma dai poeti della tradizione scolastica sette-ottocentesca.

Però, a fianco di queste imperfezioni stilistiche, esistono anche i pregi della poesia dello Psaila. In primo luogo si osserva una notevole padronanza della lingua, un'abilità tecnica che a volte sfocia in un virtuosismo da professionista come, ad esempio, nei versi

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

seguenti:

Sgorga sicura, limpida,
 Con arcana dolcezza,
 Ondeggia, sorge, slancia
 A inaspettata altezza
 Ove si libra; spezzasi
 In atomi sonori,
 Fruga, spaventa i cuori
 Strappa arcani sospir
 La voce tua bellissima,
 Gentil Dagradi ...²⁷

ovvero nel suono dantesco di questo verso:

Io vidi il regnator del pianto eterno²⁸

Questa familiarità con la lingua italiana è testimoniata altresì dalla precisa scelta di vocaboli, dall'attenta costruzione sintattica per sottolineare concetti ed accentuare effetti musicali.

Inoltre, in questo esame estetico bisogna anche ricordare il suo linguaggio immaginifico, a volte, ricco di similitudini e di metafore indovinate e scelte con gusto esperto per delineare uno stato d'animo, per rivivere ricordi, per rievocare situazioni, per plasmare concetti dottrinali come possono dimostrare i seguenti esempi:

Come presso all'ovil truce s'aggira
 Lupo affamato meditando il salto,
 E non potendo l'alto
 Muro varcar freme, prorompe all'ira;
 E quando gli vien meno ogni speranza
 Ululando sen fugge in lontananza...,²⁹

ovvero quest'altra:

Come la zolla infiorasi
 E tutto si rinnova,
 Quando succede al torrido
 Anno la fresca piova,
 Tal nel mio cuor al subito

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

raggio d'amor divino
 Crebbe orgoglioso trino
 Della virtude il fior.³⁰

In fine degna di nota è la ricca gamma delle varie combinazioni strutturali, strofiche e ritmiche delle sue poesie che abbracciano dalla grave e solenne saffica al vario sonetto, dal meditativo endecasillabo sciolto all'agile e rapido settenario.

INFLUSSI LETTERARI ITALIANI

Il libro in esame rivela, da uno sguardo superficiale ai nomi menzionati dal poeta e da un'analisi genetica di alcune poesie, una discreta conoscenza della letteratura italiana e dimostra pure un certo influsso subito tanto nella scelta tematica come nella zona espressiva. Oltre al già citato Monti, la sua ammirazione per alcuni dei più grandi rappresentanti della letteratura italiana si concretizza nel sonetto intitolato, *All'Arte* in cui si sente affascinato dalla:

... ondulata musica dei carmi
 di Dante, di Petrarca, di Parini
 e di quei che cantò gli amori e l'armi ...

Dal massimo poeta italiano imparò la struttura strofica della terzina e ne adottò anche concetti e frasi come risulta dalla preghiera che troviamo alla fine dell'inno *All'Immacolata Concezione* che è rielaborato da quella del trentatreesimo canto del Paradiso.³¹ Altri luoghi paralleli sono:

(a) Chi male in te s'affida
 Tenta volar senz'ali

che corrisponde a:

Donna, sè tanto grande e tanto vali
 che qual vuol grazia ed a te non ricorre
 sua disianza vuol volar senz'ali.³²

(b) Sol tu, dolce MARIA, tanto impiettrasti
 Nel tuo dolor che vi riman immota
 Io non piangea, sì dentro impiettrai ...³³

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³¹ *Par.*, I, 1-6.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 11-*Par.* XXXIII, 13-15.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 12-*Inf.* XXXIII, 49.

- (c) Genio mio, picciol barchetta
 Tenti un mar, oh, troppo largo;
 Torci ormai la tua veletta
 E guadagna il noto margo ...

che sembra ispirato da:

O voi che siete in piccioletta barca,
 desiderosi d'ascoltar, ...

Tornate a rivedere i vostri lidi ...³⁴

In entrambi i resi 'picciol barca' significa genio, disposizione intellettuale.

- (d) Come affannato il naufrago,
 Che il piede in terra pose,
 Volge lo sguardo attonito
 Sull'onde perigliose ...

E come quei che con lena affannata
 uscito fuor del pelago a la riva,
 si volge a l'acqua perigliosa e guata ...³⁵

- (e) Nell'ampio mar degli esseri ...
 ... per lo gran mar dell'essere.³⁶

Da Dante dobbiamo fare un lungo salto in avanti fino al Parini con cui ci sono alcune affinità di sentimenti e di idee specialmente l'ammirazione di entrambi per la salubrità fisica e morale della vita campestre lontana da quella sofisticata della città. Questa generica rassomiglianza diventa più esplicita nel sonetto *Alla Poesia* in cui troviamo elaborato il motivo ispiratore della celebre poesia *La caduta* del Parini. Il nostro autore dice:

Invan mi chiama con gli eterni incanti
 di ricchezze, di glorie e di piaceri,
 la vita che mi turbina dinnanzi
 nelle vie, nelle piazze, nei verzieri ...³⁷

Il poeta italiano risponde similmente all'invito attraente del suo

³⁴ p. 16-*Par.* II, 1-4.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 36-*Inf.*, I, 22-24.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 50-*Par.*, I, 113.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 109.

giovane soccorritore. Nel sonetto inoltre abbiamo anche un'eco verbale dalla stessa poesia: 'quando poi d'età carico' che nel testo maltese diventa 'Carico dei danni di cinquanta inverni'.

Poche sono anche le reminiscenze foscoliane e qualche vago richiamo è reperibile nei versi:

E la notte che scende amica e lieve ...³⁸

e nell'altro:

Mentre grato ai mortali il sonno scende,³⁹

che sembrano ispirati dalla frase 'sempre scendi invocata' rivolta alla sera nel sonetto omonimo dell'italiano. Il suo debito più grande verso il Foscolo è l'imitazione dell'endecasillabo sciolto che adopera nella poesia *Il Mare* e *Per il Congresso Eucaristico* ...

Nella citata poesia, *Il Mare*, abbiamo un brano che riecheggia in parte *L'Infinito* del Leopardi:

Quando dal ciglio d'un deserto sasso
Stendo sui campi suoi l'avidò sguardo,
Né traccia scorgo di confin, ma lungi
Nelle piagge del ciel confuso il veggo,
Io rammento il pensier di Quei, che prima
Non conosce nè poi, che senza fine,
Eterno, incomprendibile sussiste.⁴⁰

Il poeta italiano, come tutti sanno, naufraga in quell'ampio sconfinato orizzonte ma il Maltese prende semplicemente lo spunto e poi si approda ai lidi della fede che lo riconduce a Dio, secondo lo schema offertogli dalla scolastica di S. Tommaso.

I riferimenti al Carducci sono vari e molteplici. Difatti alcune delle sue strofe devono la loro paternità a questo autore, come la saffica e l'alcaica della poesia *Per il Monumento di Cresto Redentore*. Però al Carducci bisogna pensare pure nella lettura di certi versi come ad esempio:

Te lo ricordi? Celeri
fuggian gli alberi verdi,
mentre volava fumida stridendo
la vaporiera,

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

e il Carducci:

Ansimando fuggia la vaporiera ...⁴¹

ovvero l'altro:

Ne il sol ti conforta
Ne il sol più ti rallegra⁴²

Altri echi sono ben visibili nelle due poesie *Esequie della Guida E.R.* del Carducci ed in quella *Nella morte dell'Alpinista* del Maltese, ove si notano anche ripetizioni di frasi come 'audace picca', 'su la vetta bianca che domasti' tolta da quella del Carducci 'domator della montagna', 'Riposa amico in Dio', echeggiata da 'Iddio t'abbia mercede' e così via. Però il binomio Carducci-Psaila è rimasto celebre piuttosto per certo atteggiamento antitetico rivelatosi nelle due rispettive odi, *Alle Fonti di Clitunno* e *A Cristo* che è stata ispirata per reazione a quella carducciana.

Abbiamo trascurato l'ordine cronologico lasciando per ultimi i due poeti italiani, Monti e Manzoni che, a nostro avviso, hanno influito di più sulla poetica dello Psaila.

Il Monti gli additò una forma esterna ricca di suggerimenti scenografici, di colori accentuati, di suoni reboanti, di frasi iperboliche e lo fornì con qualche sporadico motivo ispiratore nelle sue frequenti visioni fosche. Nel poema *La Bellezza dell'Universo* il Monti scrive:

Che con muggito orribile e profondo
Là del creato su le rive estreme
S'odon le mure flagellar del mondo;
Simili a un mar che per burrasca freme,
E sdegnando il confine le bollenti
Onde solleva, e il lido assorbe e preme (vv. 34-39).

Lo Psaila ripete a iosa questo concetto, lo priva della sua tensione drammatica riducendolo ad un gioco scenografico:

Sdegni i cardini il mondo, il suolo fugge
Del pavido mortal sotto le piante,
Il mar commosso preme il lido e rugge ...

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56, Carducci, *Davanti S. Guido*, v. 109.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 73, Carducci, *Pianto antico*.

Iddio discende: sotto i piè gli mugge
La trisulica saetta altisonante ...⁴³

dove tuttavia il violento scorcio cosmogonico ha una sua maestà
non priva di fascino;

poi nella poesia *Il Mare*:

Ma quando ai buffi d'aquilon furente
Commosso, spinge intorbidito il flutto
Incontro al lido e lo divora e preme,
E come il rauco rimbombo del tuono
Cupamente ruggisce e bolle e stride ...;⁴⁴

ed in *La Chiesa e Leone XIII*:

Come da venti rapidi
Commosso il mar infido
S'aggira in tetri vortici
preme, flagella il lido ...⁴⁵

Un altro concetto reperibile nel Monti e ripreso varie volte dallo
Psaila è quello del rianimarsi della gleba e l'olezzare dei fiori.
Dice il Monti:

Tumide allor di nutritivi umori
Si fecondâr le glebe, e si fêr manto
Di molli erbette e d'olezzanti fiori
(*Bellezze* ... vv. 58-60).

Nella *Natività di Maria* lo Psaila scrisse:

Tutti or di freschi umori,
Il cespite bagnato
Riacquistano i colori
Nativi e il manto usato;⁴⁶

nell'altra, *Il Natale* abbiamo quasi una ripetizione letterale:

D'umori vivifici
L'erbette son molli ...;⁴⁷

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

e poi ancora in *Prima Comunione*:

Come la zolla infiorasi
E tutta si rinnova ...;⁴⁸

ed infine in *Al Mare*:

... e le già glebe
Senton la vita rifluir nel seno
E i fiori s'ammantano ...⁴⁹

Anche il verso:

Dal piacer opprimeasi
l'alma fidente ...

ci ricorda la frase del Monti nella canzone *Per la Liberazione dell'Italia*:

L'alma oppressa dal piacer.

Ma oltre a queste reminiscenze non sfuggono al lettore, anche sprovvisto di una profonda lettura delle opere del Monti, che certi accorgimenti stilistici s'ispirano a lui come, ad esempio, la seguente gradazione aggettivale: 'fosco, gelato, orribile'⁵⁰ ovvero 'urta, rovescia e stermina',⁵¹ o l'altro 'Che scroscia e fischia e canta fra il sartiame',⁵² che fanno parte dello stile altisonante del suddetto autore. Però, detto questo, bisogna sottolineare pure che tra il Monti e lo Psaila c'è una differenza fondamentale nei riguardi dello stile usato: mentre nel primo la retorica costituisce il punto di partenza e quello d'arrivo e perciò diventa uno strumento consistente, nel secondo, visto esclusivamente nella sua stagione poetica italiana, si restringe ad una fase transizionale nella sua maturazione artistica. Inoltre questa retorica nello Psaila riveste carattere di sincerità nonostante la ampollosità verbale e vuol esprimere convinzioni fermamente credute e sentimenti interamente vissuti, mentre nel Monti è più evidente talora la dissociazione tra le cose in cui crede e le parole che di fatto pronuncia.

Nonostante queste affinità tra Monti e Psaila, il poeta italiano più

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 114.

vicino alla sua *forma mentis* ed alle sue convinzioni filosofiche e religiose è senz'altro il poeta lombardo di cui possiamo considerarlo un'anima gemella. Sulla scia del Manzoni, il nostro autore scrisse un ciclo di poesie religiose dedicate alle feste liturgiche dell'anno. Lo scopo risulta anche identico: encomiastico ed etico. Le odi civili d'entrambi sono dominati dallo stesso pensiero religioso e patriottico e tutta la realtà è inserita in un contesto sublimato dall'idea provvidenziale di Dio come si può costatare dalle poesie *Cristoforo Colombo* e *Il Cinque Maggio*. Inoltre esiste un certo pessimismo storico comune nei due poeti che però viene attenuato e ricondotto ad una visione cristiana in cui il dolore e l'angoscia sono visti come mezzo di purificazione e santificazione. Pochi sono i motivi d'estrazione diretta dal Manzoni come il seguente:

cui fù donato in copia,
doni con volto amico,
con quel tacer pudico,
che accetto il don ti fa ...

che corrisponde a:

Il ricco à lai del povero
Non sogghignò superbo,
Ma gli fè meno acerbo
Il pan del dolor ...,⁵³

ma considerato nell'insieme il libro dello Psaila risulta come una specie di appendice minore dello scrittore lombardo. Questo avvicinamento, benchè non sussidiato da un diritto e fitto confronto testuale, non vuol dire che sia frutto di supposizioni fantastiche perchè la conoscenza del Manzoni ha degli addentellati precisi ed inconfondibili nell'adozione di schemi metrici, tra i quali i più evidenti sono i seguenti: l'ode *A Cristoforo Colombo* e quella a *La Chiesa e Leone XIII* sono modellati entrambi su *Il Cinque Maggio*, e cioè composti di strofe di sei settenari di cui il primo, il terzo e il quinto sono adruccioli e non rimano tra loro, il secondo e il quarto sono piani a rima alternata mentre il sesto è tronco e rima con l'ultimo della strofa seguente. La strofa ha un andamento agile che rispecchia le rapide e gloriose vicende biografiche di Cristoforo e il veloce diffondersi del vangelo in quella di Leone XIII. Anche la struttura strofica e ritmica della poesia, *Il Naufragio* ...

⁵³ MANZONI, *Pentecoste*, 125-8; *Ibid.*, p. 36.

è imitata dalla *Pentecoste*. È composta di otto settenari di cui il primo, il terzo e il quinto sono sdruccioli e non rimano, il secondo e il quarto sono piani a rima alternata, il sesto e il settimo sono piani accoppiati mentre l'ultimo è tronco e rima con l'ultimo della strofa seguente. Altri schemi modellati sul Manzoni sono *Per Novello Sacerdote I*, *Prima Comunione* sullo stesso schema de *La Pentecoste*, *A Leopoldo Dagradi* su *Il Natale* e via discorrendo.

È ovvio che l'imitazione di tali strutture comporta una lettura attenta che, a sua volta, non si è potuta esaurire semplicemente in una tecnica arida ma ha fornito anche dei suggerimenti che sono stati appropriati ed assimilati dal nostro poeta.

LA FORTUNA

Non si può dire che le poesie italiane dello Psaila abbiano avuto grande successo come invece ne hanno ricosso quelle in maltese. Fino ad oggi non è stato fatto nessuno studio organico e profondo e quei pochi che si sono interessate alle sue liriche si sono espressi in un tono favorevole. Oreste Ferdinando Tencajoli scrive a proposito: 'La sua vena ha un pò del settecento veneziano calmo e dorato, la sua melodia dolce e riposante ispirata tuttavia a sentimenti classici, è ricca di facoltà simpatiche ... Natura raccolta e grave, senz'essere un solitario ingegno acuto, nelle sue liriche si sente la forza della tradizione e l'energia spontanea e vigile della stirpe. Questo maestro di lingua e di verseggiatura, dotato di fine gusto estetico, non si è creato, come tanti poeti fanno, un mondo a parte e fantastico; è rimasto nella realtà. In lui equilibrio ed armonia si fondono in una magnifica sinfonia di grazia serena, di luci e di colori dalle smaglianti qualità. Tutti questi pregi conferiscono alle sue poesie un valore eccezionale, sia per la purezza della lingua che per la forma artistica.'⁵⁴ È veramente il caso dire: ognuno vede quel che vuole!

Il giudizio di Giovanni Curmi, è meno esclamativo del precedente ma condizionato da una lettura contenutistica, da un consenso in qualche modo esterno: 'Fra tanta pseudo-poesia contemporanea, scarsa di ritmo e completamente priva d'anima, la poesia di Mons. Psaila emerge bella e potente come un fascio di luce che, fugando il buio intorno, rianima i cuori tormentati e consola gli animi afflitti. Riallacciandosi alla grande poesia del passato, essa non ha

⁵⁴ O. TENCAIOLI, *Poeti Maltesi d'oggi*, Roma, Signorelli 1932, p. 83.

soltanto melodia di ritmo, ma ha pure pensieri profondi e sentimenti altissimi. Essa ci fa più buoni, più sani, più saggi: ci rassegna alle avversità della vita, ci riconcilia con la crudeltà del destino, ci famigliarizza col mistero della morte. E quando la poesia riesce ad operar tutto questo, a farci seriamente pensare e meditare, è vera e genuina poesia che ha espletato la sua nobile missione'.⁵⁵

Più equilibrato e giusto è quello di Prospero Grech: 'On the strength of his Italian poetry alone Dun Karm would have lived as a man of high literary tastes but hardly as a great poet. On the other hand, had he not been trained in the school of Italian verse, Maltese literature would have been in serious danger of losing its greatest representative'.⁵⁶

A nostro modesto parere questo incondizionato plauso entusiastico tributato all'autore, con eccezione di P. Grech, non sembra motivato da una serie e spassionata interpretazione critica delle *Liriche*, perchè o si basa su una frettolosa e superficiale lettura testuale ovvero affonda le sue radici su alcuni criteri valutativi che oggi sono considerati ormai superati. Un'analisi attenta delle sue poesie ci rivela una grande abilità tecnica ma non si può da questa dedurre un'autenticità ed una novità espressiva che allineano Dun Karm tra le voci nuove della poesia italiana. Dun Karm è, a suo modo, una voce vecchia: non c'è in lui una adeguazione, uno scambio di reazioni con le correnti più vive della poesia moderna, dal simbolismo all'ermetismo, dal realismo alla poesia pura. C'è, invece, e questo può essere anche motivo di fascino sottile, l'eco di cose e di sentimenti d'altri tempi, di una provincia romantica che fu veramente *isola* con tutti i limiti dell'isolamento e tutti i pregi del tempo che vi sosta incantato, delle tradizioni che durano più a lungo. Se Malta nel tempo dei cavalieri era stata un vivissimo centro di scambi culturali, quando divenne soltanto una piazza militare si restrinse attorno alle sue memorie, alle sue chiese solenni, al suo costume fastoso. La poesia italiana di Dun Karm ha tutti i crismi della nobiltà è della decadenza o, se vuole, della nobiltà decaduta. È in questo senza dubbio il suo limite, ma anche, in certo senso, l'attrattiva un pò spenta della sua dignitosa compostezza.

⁵⁵ Mons. Carmelo Psaila *Liriche*, con prefazione di G. Curmi, ed A.C. Aquilina, Malta 1954.

⁵⁶ A.J. ARBERRY, *Dun Karm, Poet of Malta, with introduction, notes and glossary by P. Grech*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1961, p. 34.

THE ARAB CONQUEST

by J.B. BARNARD

THE Arab history of Malta is usually treated in general surveys of Maltese history as a Dark Age. Data for this early medieval period are less than fulsome, and there survives no indigenous Chronicle; but Byzantine and Arab sources permit a coherent analysis of the events surrounding Malta's transition to Islam in 870. In fact the real Dark Age is the period of clearcut Arab sovereignty, from 870 to 1901, for which we have very little evidence indeed. Curiously, what are usually termed the Norman and Swabian periods yield more evidence of Muslim Malta than the explicitly Arab period.

Marçais¹ informs us that the North African coasts were heavily fortified in the early 9th. Century: using Ibn al-Athīr, he documents a reciprocal Byzantine energy in defence of Sicily.² There were many Arab raids on Sicily before she was deliberately assaulted in 827, and those which tarried too long came to grief.³ Malta cannot have passed unscathed, but we do not hear of her during the raiding period, so she was probably tolerably well defended against casual pillage at least.

In 827 the Byzantine governor of Sicily, Euphemios,⁵ sought

¹MARÇAIS G. 'Note sur les Ribāts en Bérberie' *Mélanges d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de l'Occident musulman* I pp.23-36, Algiers, 1957.

²From Ibn al-Athīr. See MARÇAIS G. *La Bérberie musulmane et l'Orient au Moyen-Age*, Aubier, Paris, 1946. pp.64-65.

³Closely detailed by TALBĪ M. in pp.386-8 of *L'Emirat aghlabide 184-296AH/800-909*, Adrien Maisonneuve, Paris, 1946. The only modern source which seriously attempts to update Amari.

⁴IBN al-ATHĪR *'Kitāb al-Kāmil fi't Tarīḥ'* trans. FAGNAN E. *'Annales du Maghreb et de l'Espagne'*, Jourdan, Alger, 1898, p.188. [Kamil]

⁵GABOTTO F. *Euphemio - il Movimento separatista nella Italia bizantina* Rassegna siciliana, Palermo, 2 Ser.3-4, 1898, paints Euphemios as the earliest Sicilian nationalist. More soberly, BURY JB. 'The naval Policy of the Roman Empire in Relation to the Western Province from the 7th. to the 9th. Century', p 21 sqq. in *Centenario della Nascita de Michele Ama*

help from Ifriqīya in a revolt against Constantinople. After some hesitation, Ziyādat Allah, Emir of Ifriqīya, despatched a force of 10,000 and 700 cavalry in a fleet of 100 keels to Sicily,⁶ so initiating an eighty year long campaign which led, inter alia, to Arab conquest in Malta.

From 827 onward the Byzantine grasp on Sicily gradually slackened. Amari⁷ records endless reversals of fortune, treacheries, and pestilences; innumerable internecine squabbles between Muslims from Spain, Ifriqīya, and Crete; but until the intervention of Basil II, 'the Bulgar Slayer', in Western affairs in 867-8, the Empire's position in Sicily, and thus in Malta, became progressively more difficult. Basil II's ruthless energy came just in time to save Western Greece, too late for Sicily or Malta.

We have abundant proof that Malta, was both Byzantine and Christian in the early 9th. Century. Papal letters place her firmly within the Province of Sicily from 589⁸ and the itineraries collected by Parthey confirm them.⁹ Malta is presented last, or last but one, of the Sicilian dioceses. We also have the Greek inscription of one Domestikos,¹⁰ recorded by Ciantar and discussed by Cassar. The indiction marks seem to support a dating of 810, but the stone is lost. The appellation is probably a Christian name rather than a rank.

ri II, Virzi, Palermo, 1910 describes the Governor as an opportunist. Although the Arab sources play down Euphemios' role in assuring a safe landing, the complaisance of his fleet was plainly an important factor.

⁶ IBN al-ATHĪR p. 188. NUWAYRĪ 'Nihāya' Appx. to *Kitāb al-Ībar* tr. CASANOVA. I 412 confirms 10,000 men. IBN ADHĀRĪ *Bayān l-Moghrib* tr. FAGNAN I 128 writes of 70 ships and 700 cavalry.

⁷ AMARI M. *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* 2nd. Ed. NALLINO CA. Prampolini, Catania, 1933. [Storia] After more than a century still the masterwork on Muslim Sicily; Amari conscientiously isolated references to Malta, but they are few and plainly secondary. At least once Amari commits the classic howler of confusing Malta with Mljet (Vol I 115)

⁸ Greg. I Epist. I 30: XIII 22.

⁹ PARTHEY G. *Hieroclis Syndecmus et Notitiae Graecae Episcopatum* Berlin, 1866. See BORSARI S. 'L'Amministrazione del Tema di Sicilia' in *Rivista Storica Italiana* 66, 1954.

¹⁰ CIANTAR *Malta Illustrata* Vol. II Not. IV 22, Malta, 1772, and CASSAR P. *Medical History of Malta*, Wellcome NS Vol. VI, 1965. For no obvious reason, Cassar takes Domestikos to be a medical Doctor.

The solitary known seal for Malta is far more eloquent. It is that of Nikita, Drungar and Archon of Malta, and was first published by Schlumberger:¹¹ Mme. Ahweiler¹² dates it to the 9th. century. The precise function of the two ranks within the Byzantine hieratic system is much debated. 'Drungar' in a provincial fleet is described by the Emperor Leo VI in the *Naumachika*;¹³ it betokens the command of fighting ships, and although the size of thematic fleets is still rather conjectural, the likeliest span of command for a Drungar seems, from the *Naumachika*, to be about 3 to 5 ships – probably the galley with a single crew called oussiakon or oussiakon-celandion. It had a crew of just over a hundred, of which the 'rowers of the upper deck' provided the main fighting force, although they were at times supplemented by an embarked marine garrison of 'Mardaites'. Eickhoff¹⁴ offers a good impression of such a galley; it has a sail and is equipped to throw Greek fire through a 'siphon'. The 'de Ceremoniis' of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitos¹⁵ makes it crystal clear that the crew were all free men.

Archon is a more elusive title; it undoubtedly refers to territorial appointments, but Archons range widely in status. Mme. Ahweiler sees them as no more than customs officers, yet the *Naumachika* ascribes to them seagoing command; so does the *Taktikon Uspenskij*;¹⁶ two other Drungar-Archons are known, in Crete and the Crimea. The safest reading is that Nikita was both the Governor and Senior Naval Officer in Malta, with command of a small flo-

¹¹ SCHLUMBERGER G. 'Sceaux byzantins inédits' IV^e Série in *Revue des Etudes Grècques* 13 (1900).... 'ce rarissime petit monument', the author calls it.

¹² AHRWEILER Mme. H. *Etudes sur les Structures administratives et sociales de Byzance* Variorum, London, 1971, II 245 n.

¹³ AHRWEILER Mme. H. *Byzance et la Mer* Presses universitaires, Paris, 1966 p. 68. KULAKOVSKIJ J. 'Drung i Drungarii' in *Vizantiskij Vremnik* IX 1-31 1902, and FERLUGA J. 'Nize vojno-administrativne jedinice tematskog medjenja,' in *Zbornik Radova Vizantoloski Institut* 2, Belgrade 1953, also repay attention.

¹⁴ EICKHOFF E. *Seekrieg und Seepolitik zwischen Islam und Abendland*, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1966, frontis.

¹⁵ ZEPOS *Ius Graecorum* I 222-223. YA'KŪBI *Kitāb al-Buldān* trans. WIET G, *Les Pays*, Cairo, 1937, p. 168, confirms it.

¹⁶ USPENSKIJ p. 123 in Vol III of *Izvestia russkovo Instituta v Konstantinople*.

tilla detached or forcibly separated from the vanishing theme of Sicily.

There is plenty of evidence in Amari and elsewhere of small scale naval encounters in Sicilian waters as the conquest slowly gained ground. Perhaps the most interesting is that of April 858, for it is recorded by a variety of sources:¹⁷ we read of a running battle in which the Arabs, at first victorious, eventually lost 20 keels, and the Byzantines, who seem to have been reinforced during the fight, lost twelve. Amari puts the Byzantine strength at 40 ships, which is very large for a thematic force, particularly because there is no confusion about embarked troops. There was work here, perhaps, for Nikita? He may equally well have acquired his fleet after the disastrous Kondomytēs expedition of 859, when 100 of 300 *chelandia* were lost. No doubt the numbers are exaggerated, but after 859 the naval balance seems to have inclined toward Islām, and it is hard to see how the Sicilian thematic fleet can have survived such a defeat as a discrete force.

It would appear then that the delicate balance of naval power favoured the Arabs from about 860. Before this date there was an engagement which may have tested Malta's defences. According to Ibn al-Athīr, in 835;

'A fleet was sent against the islands; having made a rich haul and having vanquished many towns and fortresses, it returned safe and sound.'

There follows a difficult reference to M. Dnār which Amari associates with Tindari, and the 'islands' with the Lipari, on data, which in Talbī's submission 'ne réposent évidemment sur une démonstration documentaire décisive. Il s'agit de suppositions basées sur des considérations géographiques ou des rapprochements plus ou moins convenients'.¹⁹

The Encyclopaedia of Islam invites us to believe that this raid marked the beginning of Muslim rule in Malta, which is patently absurd, for Ibn al-Athīr plainly speaks of nothing but a raid – the

¹⁷ Bayān I 145, *Storia* I 464-5: *Chronicle of Cambridge* 6366; Vasiliev I 219-220

¹⁸ VASILIEV AA. *Byzance et les Arabes*, Brussels, 1935, I 300.

¹⁹ *Kāmil* 191-193; Amari I 438: Talbi 440.

fleet 'returned safe and sound'.²⁰

Talbī has probed this raid more deeply than Amari and found that Ibn al-Aṭhīr's dates may be shaky; he records the partial destruction of an Arab fleet near Pantelleria in 835, by tempest, having taken a Byzantine Ḥarraqa.

Talbī places the attack in 222/837²¹ and quotes Ibn Adhāri to the effect that the African fleet took 'neuf gros navires, avec tous les hommes à bord, ainsi qu'un chelandium (shalāndas)'. Ibn al-Aṭhīr's fleet was led by al-Fadl b. Ya'qūb, a Sicilian luminary, so it is possible that two fleets were involved. It is equally plain that the Byzantine navies were still active in the West. An attack on Malta is possible – even probable – at this time: but there is nothing to support the notion of conquest.

Curiously, the renowned Maltese forger Vella,²² whose dates, facts, and figures are notoriously unreliable, also writes with a plethora of fanciful detail about two Arab attacks on Malta in 833 and 836. Where Vella's 'facts' tally with an accredited source they are worth investigation. He says that the Arabs took Gozo in 833, were well received, and left after a few weeks, and returned again in 836 to a similar reaction, only to be ejected again by Byzantine arms. There may be something in it.

For the next three decades we hear nothing of Malta, the excellent reason that the focus of attention had shifted to the Straits of Otranto, an area of primordial importance to Byzantium, since the important Venetian trade flowed through it. The Arabs took Bari in ca. 841, and its captor felt strong enough to style himself Sultān, and in that dignity sent ambassadors to Cairo in 861 and 863.²³

²⁰ Art. 'Malta' by Rossi E. in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2nd. Ed., Leiden and London Vol III, 1936.

²¹ Bayan I 106; Talbī 440.

²² VELLA *Codice Arabo-Siculo* I/1 415, 419; I/2 130-133. Ibn al-Aṭhīr, Ibn Khaldūn, and Nuwayrī all owe much to the Zīrīd Secretary of State al-Raqq, whose work seems to have disappeared fairly recently. Perhaps Vella pillaged it? The existence of a Sicilian Chronicle has also been posited, and although we must ascribe to Vella a high talent for forgery, it is very plain that he falsified from a basis of knowledge.

²³ HIRTI PK. *History of the Arabs* Macmillan, p. 605. *Storia* op. cit. I 499n.

More dangerous still, they beseiged Ragusa (Dubrovnik) for 15 months in 867/8, and were only worsted by the most vigorous exertions of Basil II and his Admiral Nicetas 'Ooryphas; Bury assures us that the Byzantine fleet was 400 strong. On the evidence of the Porphyrogenitos,²⁴ the Imperial fleet in the 10th. century numbered 100 keels, to which 77 more warships from the three thematic fleets of the Aegean might be added (Kibbyrrhaeotoi, Samos, and Aegean): the naval service was better found in the 10th. century than the 9th., and even allowing for 100% exaggeration, 'Ooryphas' fleet must have scraped every provincial barrel clean; there was no strength to spare for the west. Yet Byzantium 'in extremis' struggled through – she was to do so for a further six centuries – and in 870, when we next read of Malta, we again hear of a Byzantine fleet. This time it failed. Ibn al-Khaldūn offers a very curt account of Malta's fall:²⁵

'The island of Malta was taken in 257' (870-871).

Ibn al-Khaldūn's date of 257 AH is important, for he is far more scrupulous in this regard than his great co-religionist Ibn al-Athīr.

Nuwayrī is a little more precise.²⁶

'In his time (Muḥammad ibn Hafāḡah, 869-871) the island of Malta was conquered by the hand of Aḥmād ibn 'Umar ibn 'Ubayd Allāh ibn al-Aḡlāb.'

Here the name is of interest; an Aḥmād ibn 'Umar ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ibrahīm al-Aḡlāb 'el Habāshi' can be positively identified in contemporary Ifrīqiya: as we shall see, he is of particular interest to the early medieval history of Malta.

Ibn al Athīr complicates the matter further, yet he complements rather than contradicts his peers:

'In 256 he (Muḥammad ibn al-Aḡlāb) sent an army to Malta, which was beseiged by the Greeks. They raised the seige on learning of the Muslim strength.' Here there are three points of interest:

– The date is one year earlier than Ibn Khaldūn: but Ibn al-Athīr's dates cannot be taken as Gospel.

²⁴ See NEUMANN C. 'Die byzantische Marine' *Historische Zeitung* 45-1 (1898), using de Cerim. 655-665.

²⁵ AMARI *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula* Versione Italiana, 2vv. Turin & Rome, 1880, L p. 178

²⁶ BAS XLVII p. 147

– The conqueror is said to be a Sicilian, not an African Arab: the writer is far more reliable for names than for dates.

– A Byzantine naval force is in attendance – but we learn that it was relatively weak, and dared not suffer loss, which accords well with what we know of the Byzantine strategic situation of the age.

It seems that the first assault was launched from Ifriqīya and failed, and either lost its ships or saw them withdrawn, for we soon find it besegged by another naval force. Yet the inherent fault of the Galley was its unweatherliness, even Piali's vast force in 1565 could not prevent the 'Piccolo Soccorso', so it seems likely that the fleet which decamped in 870 must have wintered in Malta's remarkable harbours – perhaps Nikita of the seal was the

We are thus entitled to infer from the sources that Habāshi was rescued from his plight by a Sicilian fleet. It would follow that the rights of conquest fell to the Sicilian commander, not Habāshi.

The date of definitive capture is recorded in the Chronicle of Cambridge²⁷ as 29 Aug. 870.

The value of the Chronicle is that it is much older than the other Arabic sources, being a 10th. century compilation, and that it appears to have been written by a Christian Sicilian and later translated from Greek into Arabic. Unlike the foregoing Arab sources it owes nothing to the Zīrīd Secretary of State Al-Rāqiq (d. 418 AH/1027-8AD). But it is a curt, dry compilation, little more than a list of dates and events: nonetheless it offers the inestimable boon of a documentary control upon the sources founded upon Al-Rāqiq.

We thus have a siege within a seige if we are to explain why the Greeks were besieging an island which had yet to fall to Islam. The galley had many virtues as a naval weapon in the Mediterranean, but the ability to maintain a blockade in foul weather was not one of them; this lay behind Piali's insistence upon the prior capture of St. Elmo in 1565. Thus if Habashi was contained in 869, it was by a force garrisoned upon Malta, and we have evidence of such a force in the Schlumberger seal. But it is equally clear that no Byzantine commander had a mandate for losing ships whilst the Strait of Otranto remained in danger, as it plainly was until Bari

²⁷ AMARI BAS XXVII: VASILIEV AA Vol. II/2 p. 99;

was retaken. The Byzantine force which decamped in the face of a superior Sicilian fleet in the summer of 870 respected the strategic realities of the period and may well have abandoned the Byzantine garrison in the process as Vella contends. Thus abandoned, it behoved the Maltese to make the best possible composition with the Arab force already disembarked. Indeed it is perfectly plausible that the financial exactions implicit in the maintenance of a Byzantine galley force upon the Archipelago had left the population disaffected. This is Vella's drift and Talbī is also convinced that the Maltese made an 'ahd with their new masters. Two Arab references support this contention.

Ibn al-Khatīb says that

'The island of Malta was conquered and its King taken prisoner in Jumada the First 261' (874-875)

This tardy Grenadine reference²⁸ has been dismissed as a confusion with the date of death of the Sicilian Emir Abu'l Gharaniq, yet it uses the curious term 'king' without mentioning the ubiquitous 'Rūm'. This suggests a Maltese dignitary administering the islands in accordance with an 'ahd four years after conquest. It can be squared with the Kitāb al-Uyūn, which quotes Ibn al-Gazar²⁹ to the effect that the marble columns and certain unspecified 'materieux precieux' in the Qasr Habāshi at Sousse were brought from Malta by Habāshi b. 'Umar, whom we have already met in Nuwayrī. Why should a figure prominent in the politics of Ifriqīya have taken leave to pillage a Sicilian conquest? Talbī offers the highly plausible explanation that the Maltese were punished after capture for having ruptured their 'ahd. In passing, it is of no small interest that 9th. century Malta possessed valuables and heavy marble columns of sufficient value to merit transportation to Sousse. A basis for taxation compatible with the cost of a locally based galley force under Nikita begins to emerge.

Now Muratori³⁰ tells us that when the captured Bishop of Syra-

²⁸ VASILIEV I/1 no. 32.

²⁹ TALBĪ op. cit. pp. 474-6. The writer died in 394 AH/1004 AD, and thus offers another valuable control. The Kitāb al-Uyūn was apparently unknown to Amari and Vasiliev.

³⁰ MURATORI *Rerum Italicorum Scriptores* I/2 p. 264A

cuse was conveyed to Palermo in 878, he found in the prison of that city

'sanctissimus Melitensis episcopus duabus compedibus astrictus'

This reference has attracted frequent commentary, but no credible explanation of why the poor man was so afflicted. Since he was 'sanctissimus', he was presumably properly consecrated. The Encyclopaedia suggests that he must have been incarcerated since conquest in 835 or even before, which places an intolerably high premium upon human survivability in a medieval prison without saying why he had been imprisoned. His appointment offers no real grounds, for the conquests were marked by comprehensiveness to 'People of the Book' so long as they respected the new order, not persecution or forced conversion, which simply served to reduce taxation, Gregory VII conducted a cordial correspondence with the Emir of Bugia in the 11th. century in response to the Emir's request for the consecration of new bishops.³¹ Idrīs³² tells us that the Zīrīd Tamīm was noted for his tolerance to Christianity a century later, writing thus to a mistress;

'And how I love your soft spoken tones, though it cost me my life, as you read the works of the Messiah.... For love of you I savour Christian feasts and the melodious tones of canonical chant'

In fact only the dreaded Vella³³ offers a halfway credible explanation, saying that the Bishop of Malta – surely Ibn al-Khatīb's 'King'? – had been sending grain to beleaguered Syracuse, was caught, and imprisoned. The most likely reason for the Bishop's detention in Sicily is plainly that he was a focus for rebellion in

³¹ COURTOIS C. 'Gregoire VII et l'Afrique du Nord' *Revue Historique*, Apr.-Jun 19 1945. Also LEWICKI on 'Afariq' in *Rocznik Orientalistyczny* XVII Krakow 1953.

³² IDRĪS HR. *La Berbérie orientale sous les Zirides Xe – XIIe Siècles* Adrien-Maisonneuve 1959 2vv. Vol II 733-4.

³³ VELLA *Codice* I/2 374. He claims that the grain was sent from Marsaskala, which adds the idea of subterfuge; but it is difficult to imagine that the Bishop had ships enough for an operation of any size – a reason, perhaps, why he was merely imprisoned rather than executed.

Malta, which in turn tallies with Talbī's concept of an 'ahd broken between 870 and 878. However much credence we may accord to Vella – and it cannot be much – the Bishop's imprisonment must have something to do with the seige of Syracuse.

Nor does Muratori state the name of the unfortunate ecclesiastic, or whether he was set at liberty with his fellow unfortunates in 885.³⁴ Possibly this was the Manas whom Abela writes about³⁵ as one of the participants at the Eighth Oecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 868 – a further nail in the coffin of the Encyclopaedia. Unfortunately Manas is not to be found in Mansi's uncharacteristically poor account of the Council,³⁶ for which he neglects to give his customary list of participants and lists of signatories. Abela says that Manas signed Articles I and IV; his book antecedes Mansi's immense work by eighty years, and is no doubt the source of Vella's extraction of the name, but not of the 'details'.

CONCLUSION

Any attempt at the reconstruction of the medieval history of a poorly documented area is of necessity tentative; by the same token it is unwise to discard early sources, even if they are less than contemporary, for they are too rare. The grave weakness of the Encyclopaedia's account of Malta's capture by Islam is that it adopts a 'position prise' on the strength of a selective reading of the Kāmil linked up with Muratori's bishop. For Amari Malta was merely a passing interest in Sicilian studies, and he took little interest in the Byzantine naval situation in its wider sense. Talbī's account is by far the most widely based in that he has found controlling references for the sources coloured by al-Rāqiq, but *his* prime concern is medieval Tunisia, and he evidently knew nothing of the Nikita seal.

³⁴ AMARI *Storia* I 551.

³⁵ ABELA *GF Descrittione di Malta* Malta 1647 II not.9

³⁶ MANSI *JD Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova* 1728

When we take the matter in the Maltese context, considering all the published evidence, a reasonably coherent picture begins to emerge, in no way founded upon Vella, yet in several interesting respects confirming some of his lines of argument.

Most appreciations of Maltese history make the mistake of assuming that, because the islands have been of military importance in many periods, they have been of high strategic concern in all ages. In the early medieval period it appears that Malta's naval importance was very slight; confined so far as we know to a raid or series of raids in the 830's, the implantation of a small Byzantine naval garrison, itself perhaps a splinter from the defeated Sicilian thematic fleet, and a rather complicated double siege. The later history of Arab Malta suggests that capture may not have been entirely unwelcome, nor Arab rule unbeneficial. Malta seems to have been spared the interminable warfare which ravaged Sicily for almost a century, although as we have seen, she was pillaged at least once.

THE HUMAN QUESTION

By C. DELIA

BIOLOGISTS speak of man's instinct for self-preservation. S. Freud considered the sexual urge as one of man's basic drives. For the philosopher, an equally fundamental human urge is what we may dub 'the inquisitive drive'. Some biologists would reduce all of our drives to the primary instinct for self-preservation. Other secondary drives are, in their view, developed in the service of biological well-being. Some extreme Freudians trace man's inquisitive drive back to the sexual-aggressive instinctual couple. The philosopher, however, views the inquisitive drive as a primary phenomenon, which cannot be reduced to more basic instinctual sources.

It is this inquisitive urge which lies behind and stimulates scientific research, space explorations and such trivial everyday actions as reading a newspaper. For, as Aristotle wrote in his *Metaphysics* (1, 1), 'All men naturally desire to know.' This natural desire or drive to know is an implicit search for an answer to man's constant asking of express or unformulated questions. The human mind's natural drive to ask and to know is the presupposition not only of intellectual pursuits, but of human relations and human life as we know it. If this mental curiosity were extinguished, normal human life as we know it would, as such, atrophy.

The number of non-thematic and explicit questions which originate in the human mind is legion, and their variety is unlimited. Yet, I suppose, they can be schematically represented by one question, which is like the form and substance of them all, namely the query: What *is* it? For, in fact, what are we doing when we ask a question, or seek some information, when we are curious in the broadest sense of the term, when we want to know, is to enquire after *what is*. We want to reach out towards reality, towards things as they are, or in other words, 'being' and truth. This search for truth is accompanied by a natural conviction that we can reach 'being' and truth, and by the hope that we shall eventually attain our aim.

The typical question is of its very nature dia-logic. It arises within the context of a meeting of some kind between two persons.

Questions, which are not inter-personal, are so called by analogy with the typical question, which is a search for the 'logos', for being and truth, undertaken by the conjoined effort of two persons in 'conversation' (dia-logue). This feature of the question springs from and is indicative of the structure of the human mind. Man is not an island. He is essentially a builder of bridges or what we might term 'a being of links', linking himself particularly with other 'I's, who thus become his 'Thou'. This spontaneous human operation fulfils man's nature and personality by meeting one of his basic needs and desires: his natural longing to know truth, both for its own sake and so as to be able to take his bearings in the world. Truth, however, cannot be reached except in a community, by means of conversation and dialogue, by speaking and listening, questioning and answering. Each one of us looks at reality from his own limited standpoint, from his position in space and time. Each one brings to the world of truth the world of his own psyche, culture and upbringing. All this limits the power of our 'sight' and tinges our vision with a certain bias. Our individual limitations restrict the range of our gaze both in extent and in depth, and can even endanger the truthfulness of our vision. These deficiencies are counteracted by dialogue, the very warp and woof of which is the exchange of a question and an answer by the partners. Just as men can only be united together in and by truth, so they can only reach truth by communion: by becoming a responding 'Thou' for each other, while maintaining and fulfilling their 'I' by their questions.

A question is basically a search after truth. As such it constitutes a typical operation of the human mind. Aristotle taught that our minds start out on the itinerary as if they were a *tabula rasa* (cf. *On the Soul*, III, 4, 429b-430a), a *carte blanche*. In other words, our mind is not a possessor of truth, which is its very life-blood, so to say. It is indeed born with a desire for truth, which already implies a dim vision of truth itself and a search for it. But truth is something it has to acquire. Only through acquisition can truth become its possession. The initial lack of, and desire for, truth survives the primordial stage of the life of the mind, and continues to characterize its life and activity. For truth will always remain a prize to be won, and its very acquisition the source of further search. Truth, in all its splendour and many-faceted beauty, re-

veals itself to us in successive stages, without its riches ever being exhausted. Somewhat like Heidegger's 'Sein', it remains veiled at the very moment in which it unveils itself, for its dimensions are infinite. As truth, which in its life-source is infinite, so the human mind, in spite of its limitations, has an infinite capacity for truth. That is why it will, and can, never rest on the laurels of its acquired truth, but will ever continue to delve deeper, to search and to ask.

The extent of our questioning is unlimited. Not only do we ask innumerable questions of all kinds about all sorts of objects; we could potentially ask about anything and everything whatsoever. The horizon of our questioning is not limited to one set of existents, but is co-extensive with existents themselves. Our mind, then, is not only open and oriented to one field of knowledge, but to the 'questionable', that is to whatever might possibly be questioned, and consequently to whatever is know-able, or to knowledge wherever it can be had, or in other words to all reality. For it is only 'nothing', that is the absence of reality, which I cannot enquire about, and which consequently cannot be known and contains no truth. The questioning activity of the human mind is characterized by universality. This universality rests on man's ontological relationship with all beings. Because he can communicate with every existent, man 'real-izes' each and every one of them by 'humanizing' them, that is by making them meaningful for himself and thus part of *his* world. That is his privilege. On the other hand, it depends ultimately on man alone which beings actually do inhabit the human world, insofar as they have meaning and relevance for man. And that is man's responsibility!

Every question that we ask presupposes knowledge and ignorance, an ignorance that is aware of itself, or in Cusanus' language, a 'learned ignorance'. It would be useless for me to ask a question if I already knew the answer. A question is, on this count, always an inquiry into the unknown. This 'un-known' is not, however, in the realm of total obscurity. For I could never possibly ask a question about something unless I had at least some awareness of the object of my query. Otherwise my question would be pointless. Furthermore, unless I knew about the 'un-known' as such, I would never be induced to ask about it, which is as much as saying that every question is the last analysis motivated by 'knowing an un-known'.

In this sense each question is a sure sign of the limits of man's knowledge, and of man's power to surpass the limit and be always already beyond it.

A question is accompanied by the conviction and by the knowledge that there is a relevant answer, which corresponds to 'the thing itself'. In other words, when I ask a question, I know that there is a reply, which is absolutely valid because it tallies perfectly with the truth of 'the thing itself'. Through the expectation of the 'correct' reply to my question, I am therefore aware of absolute validity, as concomitant with the truth and with the correctness of the 'right' answer. What does absolute validity imply? A relationship to the totality of all existents. For, if something is true, it is true 'absolutely'; that is, it is valid, 'it holds' for every being whatsoever. If this were not the case, if truth connoted only relative validity, if a statement or a 'truth' held for only a limited sector of existents excluding even a slight margin of beings, it would always be possible for it to be proved false or contradicted by just those regions of reality which would not be, so to say, bound by it. In which case the statement, the answer or the 'truth' concerned would only improperly be called 'true'. Inasmuch, then, as I am enquiring after *truth* when I ask a question, I have a certain fore-knowledge, however dim, of all existents *as a totality*,¹ which guarantees the absoluteness of the truthful answer I expect to receive. This fore-knowledge accompanies our questioning as a *conditio sine qua non*. I can ask questions in so far as I am somehow related to the totality of beings.

One of the most distinguishing features of the human mind is its inquisitive disposition, that is its search after being and truth. This search is stimulated and sustained by the hope that the aim will be reached. Can this hope be a fundamentally vain expectation? In other words, is our hope of reaching truth merely a will-of-the-wisp? Is truth a too distant objective for the human mind? Just as our questioning activity pertains to the make-up of our mind and of our human nature, so too the hope of attaining truth, which is

¹ This totality is to be understood *formally* as that which makes accessible to my unlimited possibility to know *all* that is to be known. It is the 'horizon of Being', within which, so to say, I ask my question or posit my affirmation.

logically inherent in our questioning, is a natural dynamism. If this natural stimulus were doomed to perpetual frustration, the object of man's hope in our case, that is the *attainment* of truth, would be illusory; the object of man's hope would be something which it is humanly impossible to realize.

This would be tantamount to saying that the human objects of human hope, in this connection, non-existent.

A fundamental natural dynamism which is essentially directed towards the attainment of an objective cannot conceivably be thought to subsist if its goal is non-existent, because its objective is impossible to attain. If such a fundamental natural dynamism as the hope under consideration were therefore *per impossibile* fundamentally deprived of the possibility of attaining its aims – i.e. truth – it would logically have to destroy itself.

THE VOLCANO

by JOHN MICALLEF

A Parable about man as an existent-towards-death

THE sun was hot; the soil cracked and the grass parched. Flora and her husband were sitting under a chestnut tree; a bottle of wine was on the grass beside the skeleton of a roast chicken. They were relaxed, like they were back on their honeymoon picnic; but Victor was fat now in his late fifties, and had a double chin, and Flora with her features hard set as in rock looked older than her age. Victor reached out for the wine; he frowned as he twitched his back.

'Don't strain yourself!' She poured the wine.

He drank slowly as he gnawed at the leg of the roast chicken. 'What a blow-out!' he murmured. 'It reminds me of the past when I could eat a chicken all by myself'.

'We should be going.'

'What's the big hurry for, Flora? Let's watch the volcano spew fire.'

'I hate that monster up there; yet somehow it fascinates me,' she remarked.

'I'd be thrilled to see an eruption,' he said.

'You'd be scared to death,' Flora replied. 'But I – I would be thrilled. I've always been the stronger one, Vic.'

'That's why you *married* me?'

'That's why you married *me*. You needed a stronger woman to lean on.'

'You wanted to boss over me,' Victor said. 'You never loved me?'

'What a question after thirty years of marriage!'

'I was always scared to ask you.'

'What makes you bold now?'

'I'm still scared, but more curious than ever. I'm getting on, one of these days you'll bury me.'

'You speak like an idiot.'

'Perhaps! I don't care to live much longer. Life has beat me. The way we live – our bureaucratic organization, our charge-accounts, our computer systems – all very neat but dull,' he remarked. 'They take over our life – our hands become their tentacles. What a world we've made to live in!'

'Do you hate me? Flora asked.

'I put up with you.'

'Why?'

'You're the only thing I can relate to,' he said. 'We thrive on hate, you might say. It's our way of existing. If we cease to hate, we cease to live.'

A tramp came their way; he wore a beard several days old, his step was not so steady, his clothes were dirty, his trousers baggy and stained with grease, his coat pockets torn and his shoes had no laces.

'Good evening!' he remarked.

'What do you want?' Flora asked.

'Who? Me? Nothing. Unless, perhaps, you have something to drink.'

'There's plenty of water around,' Flora replied.

'Water's bad for the liver, ma'am.' He moved away. Then he saw the bottle, stopped and turned back. 'You couldn't spare a drop.'

Victor took a glass and filled it up. He was about to hand it over to the drunk, but Flora took away the glass from his hand. 'We don't lend out glasses,' she said.

'Sorry, no glass, no wine,' Victor remarked, as he drunk the wine himself.

'You're half-drunk, anyway,' she added.

'By nightfall, I'd be dead drunk, ma'am, if we survive, that is.'

'Why shouldn't we? It isn't the end of the world!'

'More or less – as far as we're concerned,' the tramp replied.

'You must be more drunk than I thought.'

'I wish I were, m'm, so I wouldn't bother about the blasted volcano.'

'What's wrong with the volcano?' Victor asked.

'I can't talk, man. My throat's dry.'

'Here drink.' He filled a glass of wine, spilt a little on his trousers, and handed it to him.

'This is good booze, man.'

'What's the matter with the volcano?' Victor insisted.

'Don't you feel the heat, man?' The tramp took off his jacket and threw it on the grass, then unbuttoned his shirt all the way and pulled it out of his trousers.

'It's sure hot,' Victor remarked, as he loosened his tie. Flora frowned at him, but he shrugged his shoulders; then he took off his tie just to spite her.

'Can I have another drop?' the tramp asked.

'On with your story first.' Flora wanted her wine's worth.

'I was on my way to the barber's,' the tramp said. 'I used to be a respectable person.' He burped. 'Hell! What does it matter now? If it's the end, why waste my money on a hair cut.'

'You look terrible!' Flora remarked.

'At this stage, appearances don't count, m'm. I spent all my money on booze. Another drop, please.'

Victor filled the glass, and handed it to him. 'Keep talking,' he said, as he took off his jacket, and threw it on the grass. Flora unbuttoned her blouse too.

'It should be cooler now that the sun is down. Why is it so clammy?' Flora remarked.

'It's like an oven now.'

'Look at the crater!' Victor exclaimed. How it glows in the dusk!

A man came up carrying a suitcase. He opened it, took out several instruments, took some measurements, scribbled a few notes, but he never said a word.

'What are you doing?' Victor asked.

'I'm running some tests to study the stages of the eruption.'

'What eruption?'

'What are you doing here?' the scientist said. 'Everybody's leaving town. The volcano might explode any minute.'

'Then why don't you go too?' Flora asked.

'I have a job to do.'

'Look!' Victor shouted. 'The flame is curling up.'

'That's the pit of hell,' said the tramp.

'It's behaved well all these years,' Flora commented.

'It's sure misbehaving now, m'm,' the tramp said. 'God! I'm thirsty. Can you spare another drop?'

Victor gave him the bottle. He stuck it in his mouth and drank it dry.

'Man, I tell you, before the night is out, it will be spitting fire and brimstone,' the tramp said, as he took off his shirt. 'I hope the lady doesn't mind,' he added.

'You've been drinking too much,' Flora remarked.

'What do you expect me to do? Beat my chest and confess my sins? I enjoyed my sins and I couldn't care less what happens to me or to the rest of the world once I'm dead.'

The scientist went on with his tests; Flora and Victor stretched out on the grass.

'Don't you believe in God?' Flora asked the tramp.

'Is he going to hold back the explosion?'

'You never can tell,' Victor murmured.

The scientist turned. 'What has to happen will happen.' Then he went back to his instruments.

'We'll find out before the night's over,' Flora added.

'Let's go and have a ball. You don't want to waste your last night doing nothing,' the tramp went on. 'Leave your sleeping bag, if she wants to stay and we'll go and get two broads.'

'Look man, take another bottle and leave us in peace.' She handed him the bottle. 'Now beat it,' she added as he grabbed it and left. 'That man was getting on my nerves.'

'What's happened to you, Flo? You gave him our last bottle.'

'Vic, if it's the end, we don't need it.'

'You're a strange woman.'

'I was thinking,' Flora said; then she stopped.

'You don't have to think, Flora. 'We're in a mess, anyway.'

'I was thinking.' Flora ignored his interruption, 'I gave you a hell of a time.'

'It's too late for all that jazz, Flo.'

'I wanted to tell you before — but,' she broke off.

'You're human, Flora! You really feel —'

'What a pity it's too late!' Flora murmured.

'You've become sentimental?'

'I've wasted my life.'

'Are you scared, Flo?'

'If only I could start all over.'

'Quit your silly talk, Flo. Let's go home.'

'Home? What's the use?'

'Let's run away, then,' Victor said.

'Where would we go?'

'Away from the volcano.'

'There are volcanoes all over the world.'

'So there's nothing we can do?' Victor asked.

'You'd like to go and have some fun for a change.'

'I've put up with you long enough, Flo. I can stick it out another night.'

The scientist was climbing higher up the volcano to take more measurements.

'If only it rained!' Flo remarked.

'Let's cut off all the ifs and face facts.' He took off his jacket and his shirt slowly, as though he was peeling them off.

'If I were at home, I'd shed off all my clothes.'

'Why don't you?' Vic asked, as he took off his trousers.

'What if the tramp comes back?'

'Who cares!'

She took off her blouse, and her skirt. She looked grotesque with her huge rear; but Victor was as shapeless with his bulge on his tummy, and his flat chest.

'We sure look funny!' Flora remarked.

'Does it matter how we look? For the first time, we are looking at each other and we are waiting to die.'

The smoke was thicker now, and it was creeping down from all sides. They wiped off the sweat with their wet clothes and they brushed the ashes off their bodies. Small stones began to roll down the mountain.

The tramp came back, wearing his sandals and his trunks. 'How do you like my outfit? I'm melting. Have you any more booze? I know you did your good deed for today; but do another one for tomorrow. Because there ain't going to be any tomorrow.'

'We ran out of juice too,' Vic murmured. 'Here's some money, perhaps you can find some to buy.' He emptied his purse in the tramp's hands.

'Thanks, old man, you sure have a big heart. Why do people have to wait for a crisis to be kind? I have to run now before the bars close down or burn up.' He ran away.

'I'm going to die, but I don't care,' Victor remarked.

'The heat's gone to your head, Vic.'

'No, Flo. I've never been happy. I just want to die. I never had enough guts to kick the bucket; tonight I'm kind of glad it's going to be over.'

'Did I make your life that miserable?'

'We never understood each other, Flo.'

'I'm scared, Vic. I wish I could live my life all over.'

'You have a few hours left. Live them up to make up for a lifetime wasted,' Victor said.

'What can I do?' She took his hand; then she leaned over his shoulder.

He caressed her hair. 'We've not made love since, since —' and he stopped.

'We've never made love, Vic, not really. Perhaps I've never been capable of loving or even feeling.' She put her arms round his body. 'I want to love you, Vic.'

'Since when?' Vic's voice was scornful.

'Since now.'

'Am I supposed to believe you?'

'I know it sounds phony, but I do feel. I'm beginning to love you.'

'We're going to die,' Victor said.

'I don't want to die; but what can I do?'

'You can do nothing,' Victor replied.

'Can I love you enough to make up for thirty years of misery?' She brushed away the ashes from his shoulders and wiped the sweat on his face.

'You really care?' Vic murmured. He sniffed; then he began to cough.

'You've got that cough again,' she whispered.

'It's the sulphur from the mouth of that beast.'

She hugged him and kissed him — the first kiss since their honeymoon. 'It's so funny I'd like to scream.'

'We're finally learning to live and we've got to learn to die,' she said.

The volcano rumbled like thunder on a sudden storm. The leaves on the tree were all shrivelled up.

'If only we could start all over!' Flora murmured.

'We found each other's love, Flo. It's too late, I know, but I rather die than go back to our hate.'

'We don't have to go back to our hate. We can start clean this time.'

'We are what we've made ourselves, Flo. Love is easy now; because we're leaving — both of us. If we had to live together we'd be at each other's throat once again,' he remarked.

'I'm scared of death.'

'I'm scared of life, Flo. We tortured each other and — let's face it — we enjoyed our sadism.'

'We've exploited each other's weakness, Vic. Now our fear brought us together. Somehow, we've learned to share our fear and we found our love.'

'Come closer,' he whispered. She pushed her body against his, and kissed him. 'I'm ready to die now,' he said. 'Imagine going back to my stamp-collecting to kill time, and our sandwich dinners, while we watched those silly programmes on the telly, and my loneliness when I tried to make love to you and I couldn't even function like a man because you were so damn frigid.'

'We don't have to go back to that.'

'But we will, darling. We'd start torturing ourselves once again.'

'Do you love me a little, Vic?'

'I loved you a lot once, a long time ago; then my love died inside me.'

'I killed your love,' she said.

'Somehow you left the seed in my heart. It's sprouting again now, I'm drawn to you; I don't hate you any longer.'

'I used to hate myself for hating you, Vic; now I'm beginning to respect you.'

'I didn't think you were capable of love; now as I embrace you, I feel less scared. Perhaps because I am no longer lonely, since I found your love,' he said.

'I never respected you, because you were so damn inefficient. You let everybody treat you like dirt, because you were honest.'

'I was lucky I could hold my job,' he said. 'I barely saved my self-respect. Now it will be over in an hour or two. If we had to start all over —' He broke off.

'You've never forgotten nor forgiven me,' she said, 'but now it doesn't matter.'

The tramp was back, retching and singing. 'I beg your pardon,' he said as he saw them locked in an embrace.

They ignored him, so he reeled out. 'I'd like to go now while the going's good,' Victor murmured.

'We've got a reason to live now.'

'So we've got a reason to die,' he explained. 'We've always lived under a threat: we didn't realize it, and life became a matter of routine. Now all of a sudden we see the volcano and smell the sulphur; so the ground breaks open under our feet and we begin to live.'

'When we face death?' she asked.

'When we accept death.'

The tramp was back. 'It's hundred and twenty in the moonlight,' he uttered.

'You ran out of booze again?'

'I'm bored. This business of waiting for death gets on my nerves. Hell, I couldn't find a broad. The demand exceeds the supply, I guess.'

'You're dead drunk.'

'Not yet; but I'm working on that too.'

The scientist came down; he stopped and wiped the sweat off his forehead with his sleeve. 'Any minute now,' he said. 'That crater might go like a huge hydrogen bomb.'

'That's only your opinion,' Victor commented.

'A scientist has no opinions. I deal in facts as far as I can.'

'I'm going fishing,' the tramp said.

'The sea is boiling.'

'That's good. I catch the fish with instant cooking. See you - if you're still around.' He walked away.

'How do you manage to keep your cool?' Flora asked the scientist.

'I concentrate on my work and forget the rest of the world.'

'What if we all die? You've been wasting your time,' Victor said.

'It's worth it while it lasts,' the scientist replied.

'Are you ready to die?' Flora asked.

'I ignore that question.'

'You're scared to answer?' Victor said.

'No. The question doesn't compute in my brain,' he replied.

'What sort of brain do you have?' Victor asked.

'I live day by day. I do my job, and go to bed; then next day, I take up where I left off.'

'Don't you ever get messed up inside you?' Flora asked.

'I've organized my life on a rational basis.'

'You amaze me, — you're either loony or phoney,' Victor said.

'Why don't you sit down and relax?' Flora asked. 'Take off your clothes and have a smoke.'

'I have all the smoke I can take. I just wait, but I hate to waste my time. Maybe it's a false alarm,' he added.

'When will we know?' Victor asked.

'Never. There's always a threat of an explosion or an eruption somewhere sometime. You just sit tight and go about your business.'

'You've ceased to be human,' Flora remarked.

'I've learned to live with death; when it comes, it will be like closing my lab to go to bed.'

'Except that you won't wake up the next day,' Victor said.

'Someone else will go on with my work.'

'Your life doesn't make sense,' Victor said.

'I put all the sense I want into it. Excuse me, I must go on with my tests.'

'What are you made of, man?' Victor asked. But the scientist had already walked away.

'I can't take it much longer, Vic.' She huddled close to him. 'Now that I care, the anxiety kills me.'

'When we begin to care, we begin to live; but when we begin to live, we also begin to die.'

'I begin to understand,' Flora whispered. 'Every day is a burden; but every moment carries the burden of all our days. And we wait, day after day until we don't have to wait any longer. Now that the end is near, I wish it were still far away. I don't want to die, but I'd be afraid to live either. I'm scared I'd mess it up all over.'

'I know, my love; we yearn to live and yet we lie and wait for death.'

'Perhaps now we are less scared of death than of life,' Flora remarked.

'I can't take it any longer!' The tramp grumbled as he returned. 'I'm drunk, yet I can't stand waiting for death, like I was waiting for my turn to be put to trial.'

'Why don't you lie down and try to sleep.'

'I don't want to die.'

'Grab a satellite then, and go to the moon.' Victor was sarcastic.

'That's not funny — man. Don't you see — this is the end. The

end of everything that ever meant anything to me, or to you.'

'We still have ourselves,' Flora remarked.

'Have you nobody who cares for you?'

'I thought I did. I had lots of girls, I thought. I wasted time and money on them. I ask you — Is life worth living?'

'You can ask that question for ever,' Flora replied, 'but you'll never find the right answer.'

'Your question is your answer; you wouldn't ask the question if the answer wasn't obvious,' Victor remarked.

'I can't live like this — with death chasing me all the way,' the tramp said.

'Suppose you had a bad ticker — you could drop dead any minute.'

'What do you expect me to do — lie down and wait for the end?' he asked.

'You can go about your business like the scientist; till the end reaches the end; or you can accept to love and care and share your anxiety,' Victor explained.

'Or go and get screwed,' the tramp said.

'Whatever you do, you'd have to wait,' Victor added.

'I shan't wait. This waiting kills me. It's like taking a lifetime to die.'

'That's exactly the way it is,' Vic insisted.

'I can't stand a slow death. I don't mind a big bang. I've been under fire before; but I can't stand waiting to melt in this damn heat. I have to do something about it. Life's a big swindle.' He went away again.

All over the valley people were running away from the volcano; but wherever they went, they found another volcano ready to erupt. Still, they kept running hoping to find some deserted spot, where no volcano had ever raised its peak of flame and smoke.

The scientist was still checking his measurements, while Flora and Victor were still making love. The tramp was back, reeling and shaking his bottle, his back pouring with sweat.

'Won't you two have a drink with me — kind of farewell toast? Mind you, it's not the best booze, but tonight anything goes.'

'Why don't you dry up?' Victor asked.

'I'm all dry inside; so I wet my whistle from time to time.'

'How's the mass evacuation going on?'

'They've stopped it. It's of no use,' he explained. 'Whatever you

are, some monster is going to eat you up. It's a waste of good gas. Save it for the journey to the other world — that's what I say. Why don't you laugh? Don't you like my jokes? They're supposed to be good. I tried them at a variety show a moment ago. They roared.'

'How can people sit on a variety show on a night like this?' Flora asked.

'What do you expect? Some are in church beating their chest flat with remorse to make God change his mind about the explosion. But God doesn't give a damn,' the tramp said. 'What's the use of prayer?'

'What are you trying to prove?' Victor asked.

'I'm not trying to prove anything. I'm talking, man, so I don't have to think. I can't face myself and know I'm going to end up in bits. I just can't take the suspense any longer,' the tramp complained. 'If only I could relax and watch the blow-up on the telly — I'd see myself going to pieces, and I wouldn't bat an eyelid. Pity! The cameras are dripping with sweat. I bet the fireworks will beat any Thanksgiving celebration. Hardly worth thanking for — don't you think?'

'Why don't you shut up, man?' Victor asked.

'Because I can't stand this waiting to die. Why do we have to have volcanoes, anyway? They sure are an expendable luxury, and the world's a mess with all these volcanoes ready to blow up any minute. You must excuse me. I need more booze.' Then he vanished with a leap.

Deep down the earth was bubbling and gurgling; the soil quivered and the leaves of the chestnut tree were dried up. The smoke on the crater was curling up like a mushroom, as the scientist came back.

'You're wasting your time,' Victor said. 'It wouldn't matter if somebody could take over where you left off; but we are all going to die. It doesn't make sense.'

'Maybe you're right, but I won't quit.' The scientist walked away into the smoke up the folds of the volcano.

Then the tramp was back with a huge long pipe which he held in his mouth. 'Say, you care for a draught of beer? I found a huge barrel of beer in a deserted bar. Too heavy to move; so I hit upon this device to have a drink handy any time.'

'How long does it take you to get drunk?'

'I'm getting drunk for all the teetotallers in the world.'

'What's the latest on the eruption?' Victor asked.

'Everything is following on schedule. The world is going to pieces bit by bit – a little here, a little there; a chip gets broken in the south, a spark goes off in the north.'

'What's everything doing?' Flora asked.

'They like to blab out what they feel like waiting for the big bang, or they just complain. Why should their life be cut short because of these bloody volcanoes? They have no one to blame, so they blame the good God. We shouldn't have been born in the first place, if we had to end up this way – that's what they say. Or they just don't care, because they don't realize it's inevitable. Man is a big mistake or a joke. That's what I say.'

'What are you going to do?' Flora asked.

'I don't give a damn, either way. I didn't care to be born. I don't mind dying; but I can't stand the waiting. Hell, you make me think and I don't want to think. I get scared of my thinking.'

'What are the odds that our volcano blows up first? Victor asked.

'Fifty-fifty.'

'It might never blow up,' Victor suggested.

'It will blow up; but nobody can tell when. If you don't mind, I'm going to lie down and drink myself to sleep.'

'It's your funeral, mister,' Flora said.

'It's your funeral too. You'd better get ready.'

'All our life is one long dress rehearsal for our funeral,' Victor replied.

The tramp lay down and began to snore. Flora and Victor embraced and made love as they had never before; the people down in the valley went on talking and laughing, so they wouldn't have to think, while the volcano rumbled and thundered.

Next morning the sun rose again, and everybody went about his business, but Flora and Victor still heard the volcano rumble; so even in their old age, they still made love as best as they could, for they were not sure whether that day would be their last.

LA BEAUTE

La Beauté — notre beauté — c'est une vie secrète,
c'est une chose spéciale,
c'est un autre moment,
une autre personne,
cent autres personnes;
mille petites choses
pour chacun de nous —
pour tout le monde —
ou quelquefois toute autre chose
mêlée aux sentiments...
mais rarement
la même personne,
le même amour,
quelquefois heureux —
mais pas toujours,
quelquefois sentimental
avec une douleur indéfinie
ou une petite mélodie —
Chopin, Bartok ou Debussy —
Quelques mots, quelques vers
de Verlaine ou de Baudelaire...
petit jeu de rythme,
musique de mots
triste — mais si belle;
un rêve, un ange de Picasso,
un arbre ou un oiseau...
Goya, van Gogh...
Epoques différentes...
Ou une fleur jaune
de notre printemps,
un papillon de jour ou de nuit,
notre enfant — quelquefois du bruit,
une seconde tranquille —
très loin de la ville —

de notre vie,
très loin d'ici...
une impression,
une seconde, un rayon
d'or du soleil entre les arbres,
dans tes cheveux –
cent nostalgies,
un amour passé,
un petit cadeau...
richesse unique
sans argent,
sans rien, sans or...
un petit secret
dans notre coeur
sans l'acheter –
C'est la Beauté –
un mot, un rythme,
un monde passé –
un monde retrouvé –
c'est la Beauté.

E. SZIRMAI

CHUCHOTER....

... avec les enfants,
avec l'amour....
Avec les femmes
et les oiseaux;
avec la mort;
devant une tombe,
en téléphonant,
en confiant un secret,
pour demander de l'aide;
auprès de celui qui dort,
auprès du blessé,
en cas d'accident –
Quand on se confesse,
quand on baisse la tête,
quand on prie,

quand on demande,
quand on prononce
des mots d'une grande beauté –
et plus encore
quand arrive notre dernière heure –
quand notre mort approche –
et plus encore –
quand elle ou il sont morts
quand on est mort.

E. SZIRMAI.

SPURLOSES VERSCHWINDEN

(Erinnerung an Kipling's weise Kobra)

Nur eine Stunde lebte die ganze verschwundene Welt,
und sie war in eine Stunde zusammengedrängt.
Wer hört die Menschen aus ihren Türmen der Traurigkeit
irzendeinmal? Wie oft haben sie die Riesensteine der Qual
hineingeworfen in die verschwundenen Meere,
wo die uralten Muschel-Uhren alles zusammengemischt haben,
die Stille und die aussereinanderfallenden menschlichen
Worte der Hilferufe?
Ja, wirklich nur eine Stunde
lebte die ganze verschwundene Welt,
und ich habe meine weise Kobra – mein Schicksal –
tausendmal verdammt;
aber trotz allem bewache ich in der Tiefe des eingemauerten
Kellers die königliche Krone
und schätze alles Wertvolle,
so wie wenn da oben noch die einmaligen königlichen Paläste
und Völker beten würden an die uralten Götter
und wie wenn der Urwald noch wachsen würde – oben –
über einstige Städte, über mich,
der schon lange weint –
seit wann – wie lange – seit wann?

K. SZIRMAI

TO BE A MAN

Who is so brave to be a man,
to stay a man,
one cannot be paid
to become a man.
Too high the price
who is such fool?
may be I am?
Perhaps you are?
But no one else would,
nobody will
pay this high price
to be a man,
to stay a man,
to day a man,
May be I can
May be you can.
Who else would done
to be a man
to stay a man
today a man?
Nobody will
pay the highest price,
to be proud,
to be a man,
to stay a man.

E. SZIRMAI

BANG, BANG

One more funny mortal, suddenly kicked out of this planet,
Hurled with a high ha-ha into the dark unknown –
Bang, bang, then flash of a crumpling comet;
Body and Mind torn apart – Self, scared alone.

QAMAR FUQ RUMA

Lil Illustri Prof. S. Satta

Illum fuq Ruma tela' qamar mimli,
 abjad, sabih.
 F'dil-Belt fejn qisu l-ewwel darba
 l'ghannewh sabih,
 in-nies ghaddiet bla ħarset
 medhija b'mitt elf ħsieb,
 min vojt, min ta' kulljum, min ħholi.

U fis inħeba
 wara nitfa ta' ħajbura
 li qisha ddenst minn bieb ewlieni tal-qdumijiet.
 Li kellu mohħ, kont tghid,
 "stahba mibluġh, qabel jaqbduh!"

LUNA SU ROMA*

Al ill. e Chiar.mo Prof. S. Satta

Oggi su Roma si è ascisa la luna piena,
 bianca, bella.
 In questa città ove ormai per la prima volta
 l'inneggiavan armoniosamente,
 la gente passa senza guardar,
 alienata dai suoi folli pensieri,
 vuoti, pratici, nobili.

E presto si è nascosta
 dietro un velo di nuvola
 che sembra sfuggita d'una porta principale delle rovine.
 Se avesse mente, direi
 "s'è nascosta attonita, prima d'esser rapita!"

DIARY NOTES

as soon as I enter the front room
of my studio I stop work:
that is the norm
that is necessity
that is a foregone conclusion
a life-style, manner
a livelihood

not to appear ridiculous
I go through the door
through the motions
then at half-past five
I leave for home
and paint the inconceivable
(leaving nothing to certainty)
in the back room
of my head

PHILIP WARD

LABOUR PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL SECURITY IN THE MALTESE ISLANDS, 1967*

by ROBIN G. MILNE

ABSTRACT

Information from the 1967 population census is analysed to test the influence of a variety of factors on the decision to join the labour market and on unemployment. The characteristics of the unemployed are also examined.

Among the more important conclusions, we found that labour participation was significantly lower in the Islands than in other countries.

We also conclude that low earnings were not an important cause of family poverty as defined by the income guaranteed by social security in 1967. Its corollary is that the benefits paid were very low in relation to earnings. Introducing a retirement condition for men, raising National Insurance contributions, and providing more finance from general taxation led to an unprecedented increase in the level of benefits for all contingencies.

Finally we found that economic factors dominated the decision to join the labour force and unemployment, but those not gainfully employed usually had some alternative means of support. Typically the unemployed were young and unmarried, and they relied on their family for support since few are eligible for social security.

1. INTRODUCTION

The reports of the 1967 population census provide a rich source of economic data on the Maltese Islands. These are analysed to identify the factors affecting labour force participation and unemployment, and to describe the characteristics of the unemployed. These facts are then related to the provision of social security in 1967 in order to indicate how far the latter has succeeded in its objectives to maintain income levels and alleviate poverty. We

*I am very grateful to Professor L.C.Hunter and Mr. L.D.Smith for detailed comments on earlier drafts and to Mrs. B.Craig for computational assistance.

begin by briefly describing the provision in 1967. The next two sections are given over to an analysis of labour force participation and unemployment. The last section is devoted to a discussion of some of the policy implications of our analysis. The reader is referred back to the original reports for further economic data.

2. SOCIAL PROVISION

In this section we briefly outline the provision for the unemployed and aged in 1967.¹ The provision had and still has much the same structure as in Britain, with two schemes running in parallel: the contributory non-means tested National Insurance Act (1956) provision, and the non-contributory means tested National Assistance Act (1956) and Old Age Pensions Act (1948) provisions.

All those working, except those casually employed or earning £104 or less annually, must participate in the contributory scheme; voluntary membership is available to others including the non-employed. Benefits are paid on an individual basis with supplementation for married men, and information on the scales at the time of the 1967 census is given in Table 1.

At the time of the 1967 census *all* contributors who had reached the age of 60 years in the case of women and 63 years in the case of men, were eligible for an old age pension. It had been planned to reduce the age limit by stages to sixty years for men, but this development was frustrated by a change of Government which imposed a retirement condition for men between the ages of 61, when they are now first eligible, and 65. In 1967 one-third of men aged sixty and over benefited from one. This proportion will increase considerably as more of the aged are in a position to have contributed. The position of the permanently disabled is also favourable, although the non-employed contributors are not covered. A pension is paid until a person is old enough to be eligible for an old age pension or until he takes up work, and its scale is at the same level as the old age pension.

On the other hand, the contributory scheme is far less satisfactory for the unemployed. Only employees over nineteen years of age are covered, and their benefits are exhausted after six months. The provision for the sick is exactly the same as for the unemployed except that the self-employed are also eligible.

¹A fuller description of present provision and its history may be found in (Milne, 1973, Chapter 7).

status)³ at first rising and then falling with age. A significant proportion of those aged sixty and over worked, but the proportion for married women was particularly low. No systematic variation by age was evident for women, except for single women, whose variation was the same as for men.

There was also a systematic variation by marital status for men and women. It was more common for married men than single men to work, and least common for widowers. Hardly any married women worked, and the proportion of widows was small. In contrast, a large proportion of single women worked, even those aged sixty and over. The variation by marital status for men and women undoubtedly reflects the dependent status of women in the Islands, a conclusion supported by the reasons given for not being available for work (Table 4).

Young men and women not available for work tended to be in full-time education. Women who were not gainfully employed or in full-time education usually helped at home. In contrast, men generally retired because they had sufficient financial provision apart from earnings. However, some men were not available for work because of permanent disability, a problem whose magnitude is not considerably smaller than that of unemployment (Table 2). Social security provision is available for them, but as we note later (Section 5) the scale of benefits is low compared with income from employment.

As in many other countries, low or zero incomes are not only due to unemployment or disability. A small proportion of those working were not paid at all (Tables 2 and 5), although they generally helped their family and benefited indirectly (*Malta 1, p. lxxviii*). We delay till Section 5 an assessment of the incidence of family poverty due to low earnings. For this assessment we use the data on the distribution for all employees (Table 6) and on average earnings of men and women of specified age groups (Table 7). We note in passing that average weekly earnings of men and women were £9 and £5, respectively, and that an analysis of the hours worked shows that most employees, particularly men, worked a full week (Table 8), and low earnings were primarily a reflection of low

³In interpreting the tables standardization of the other variables will be assumed in the rest of the text unless the contradiction is explicitly stated.

The main purpose of the other scheme, the non-contributory means tested provisions, is to guarantee income levels according to the size of the household. Data on the levels guaranteed at the time of the 1967 census are also given in Table 1. Provision is available whether or not the beneficiary works, and makes good many of the serious deficiencies of the contributory scheme just described. For example, income supplementation is common, and coverage is available for those not eligible for the contributory scheme: although not all those eligible for supplementation apply.² Those aged sixty and over are treated on an individual basis, but others are treated on a household basis. The definition of 'household' used in administering provision is 'persons living together as a family'.

3. LABOUR PARTICIPATION

All persons in the 1967 census aged 14 and over were classified in one of three groups: not available for work, at work, and unemployed. Information on their distribution and on other basic labour statistics is given in Table 2.

The usual definition of the labour force, those at work plus the unemployed, is adopted in this paper. In the census those 'at work' were defined to 'include(s) all persons including family workers, who worked during the week ending 28th October 1967, or who had a job in which they already worked but from which they were temporarily absent because of illness or injury, industrial dispute, absence with or without leave or temporary disorganization of work due to such causes as bad weather or mechanical breakdown' (*Malta 1*, p. 446). The proportions of men and women aged 14 and over who said they were in the labour force are 76 per cent and 18 per cent. This proportion is very low compared with many other countries, even when we consider the problem of making international comparisons (*Turnham*, 1971, p. 24).

Information on the labour force participation rates for men and women by age and marital status is presented in Table 3. There is a systematic variation for men by age (standardized for marital

²Evidence of the 'take-up' problem is available for 1948 and 1957 (*Milne 1973*, p. 233), but it was not possible to estimate its magnitude in the latest census year, 1967.

wages and not of a short working week.⁴

In this section we have shown that the decision to be a member of the labour market in 1967 varied with the age, sex and marital status of the person. Those who did not work tended to have a dependent status. Men earned much more than women, and the variation in earning, particularly by age, but also by sex, was determined by the wage rate offered rather than by the length of the working week.

4. UNEMPLOYMENT

The unemployed were defined in the census as those available for work who had been out of work for at least one week ending 28th October 1967. Included among the unemployed are those not seeking work. The proportions of men and women in the labour force unemployed at this time were 8.1 per cent and 6.4 per cent.

Information on the proportion of the labour force unemployed by age, sex and marital status is given in Table 9. Unemployment was higher for men than women and fell with age for both sexes. This variation has been found in other developing countries (*Turnham, 1971 pp. 47-50*). On the other hand, there was no systematic variation by marital status.

Information is also available on male and female unemployment by educational attainment (Table 10). Unemployment was relatively low among those with no education and among those with a great deal. This variation has also been found in other developing countries (*Turnham, 1971, pp. 50-52*). No information is available to test the influence of other factors on unemployment in 1967.

Elsewhere we have analysed unemployment trends between 1956 and 1971, a period when considerable economic development had taken place (*Milne, 1974*). We found that male and female unemployment largely varied because of changes in demand deficiency, i.e. by how far the overall level of the demand for output exceeded the capacity of the economy to produce that output. Another factor found to be important was the opportunity cost of working: that

⁴Using cross-sectional data on 32 industry headings gives an elasticity of average hours worked with respect to the average hourly wage of -0.1 . A value of -1.0 would mean that the hours worked were adjusted so that all earned the same weekly income. The low absolute magnitude of the elasticity implies that weekly earnings depended mainly on the hourly wage rate.

male and female unemployment fell when wages rose in relation to unemployment benefit, even though only a few of the unemployed at any one time are eligible for the benefit. Finally, we found that unemployment for men had increased over time, but had decreased for women. Thus not only are more women coming on the labour market, but their doing so has been partly due to the desire by employers to substitute them for men.

The characteristics of the unemployed by age, sex and marital status are given in Table 11. Typically the unemployed were young and single, although an appreciable proportion of the unemployed men were married.

The proportions of unemployed men and women who were not seeking work were 18 per cent and 9 per cent respectively. Information on their distribution by age and marital status is given in Table 12. Those not seeking work tended to be younger than the unemployed as a whole, and in the case of men were more likely to be single (cf. Tables 11 and 12). They were thus typically more able to depend on their family for support, in a society where men are bread-winners. Undoubtedly it is the possibility of finding this support that contributed to the decision to stop looking for work: certainly this conforms to casual observation.

Those not looking for work were asked why. In this paper we present the answers given by single men, distributed by the main reason and age (Table 13). Seasonal unemployment and the lack of suitable jobs were rarely given as the main reason. On the other hand, many had given up hope of finding a job in Malta, and some were in the process of emigrating. This common response is hardly surprising since as we see shortly those not seeking work at the time of the census had been out of work longest.

The proportions of unemployed men and women who were looking for their first job were 29 per cent and 53 per cent respectively. Most were single and under nineteen years of age; and hardly any were over the age of thirty.

The proportions of unemployed men and women in the residual group, looking for their second or subsequent job, were 53 per cent and 38 per cent respectively. Information on their distribution by age and marital status is given in Table 14. We find a much more even distribution by age and marital status among the unemployed seeking their second or subsequent job than among the unemployed as a whole (cf. Tables 12 and 14). Their distribution relates much

more closely to the characteristics of the labour force, indicating that the variation in the probability of being unemployed by age after one had secured a job is less marked than indicated in Table 9.

Information is also available from the 1957 census to permit an analysis of time out of work. We first describe the variation by sex and marital status, shown in Table 15. Except for those whose spouse has died, we find women were out of work longer than men, even after account is taken of non-specification. Among men we find married persons were out of work for a shorter period than single persons; and widowers were out of work longest of all. Married women were out of work longer than single women. It is not possible to rank widows due to their small number.

Information on time out of work is also available by age and sex, and is presented in Table 16. Those aged sixty and over are excluded because of their small number. The time out of work tended to increase with age for men and women, although the age gradient cannot be estimated given the systematic variation of non-specification with age. We also find confirmation that, except for those in their fifties, women were out of work longer than men.

We were not able to standardize for age and marital status simultaneously, and it is possible that one or other rather than both influenced the probability of being unemployed. For example, it may be because men are married and not widowers, rather than because they are young, that explains their shorter period of unemployment. And again, it may be because women are single and not married, rather than that they were younger, that explains their shorter period of unemployment.

The influence of educational attainment can also be tested, but to avoid the direct influence of age, or its association with marital status, we restrict our population to men and women in their twenties (Table 17). This population embraces the largest single age group of whom practically all had completed their education. Once again when comparison is possible (i.e. for primary and secondary school graduates) women tended to be out of work longer than men. Among men, the time out of work tended to fall with educational attainment, but it is not possible to estimate the educational attainment gradient because non-specification varied systematically with attainment. No clear cut influence is discernible for women because all but five left school at the primary or secondary level.

However, although no obvious difference in the distribution by time out of work is discernible between primary and secondary school leavers, we cannot infer that education did not have the influence for women that we identify for men.

Finally, we can test whether the decision to seek work was influenced by the time out of work, and whether those seeking work who have never had a job were unemployed for a longer or shorter period than those who had been employed. The relevant data are given in Table 18. In order to take account of the influence of marital status (direct, or implicit because of its association with age), the comparisons are limited to single men and women.

About half of those unemployed and not seeking work did not say how long they had been unemployed. However, non-specification was low for those seeking work and their distributions are very different from that for those not seeking work. We therefore conclude that those not seeking work were out of work longer than those who said that they were still seeking work. This result is hardly surprising; not only does long term unemployment discourage the unemployed from seeking work, but those who do not look for work are more likely to remain unemployed. Among those looking for work, those who had had a job were out of work longer than those who had never been employed. This result is not obvious. In all three categories defined, women were out of work longer than men.

The conclusions reached in this section are as follows. Unemployment was systematically influenced by age, sex, educational attainment but not by marital status. The unemployed were typically young single persons and had been out of work at least six months. A small but significant proportion no longer looked for a job and it was they who had been out of work longest. The time out of work varied systematically by sex, education, age and/or marital status.

5. DISCUSSION

In this last section we draw together some conclusions about the nature of the labour market in the Islands and how it relates to, and is related in turn to, social security provision there.

(a) *The Labour Market*

Our analysis has shown that individuals respond to economic forces when making decisions in the labour market, and that these

forces can dominate their decision. We found very large differences in earnings by age and sex (Table 7), and the response by members and potential members of the labour force was as we would expect if the price mechanism was operational: low participation rates among young adults and women, and high unemployment among young adults. These two groups also tend to be dependants, so that not only is the opportunity cost of working relatively high, but their income requirements are lower than older persons with dependants of their own. Both effects are conducive to their non-participation in gainful employment.

The conclusions of a temporal analysis made elsewhere gave additional support to the hypothesis that the price mechanism was effective in the labour market. The substitution of women for men, the growth in the employment of women and their relative decline in unemployment were all accompanied by a faster rise in earnings. Further evidence of the power of the price mechanism was the sensitivity of men and women to the opportunity cost of working (Section 4). These observations suggest the effectiveness of the price mechanism over time and space.

Nor must we forget that the incidence of unemployment in the economy largely varied because of changes in demand deficiency. This implies that monetary and fiscal measures can be employed by the government to reduce unemployment, assuming that the cost of doing so, in terms of balance of payments deficit, etc., is not prohibitive.

Ideally, in a discussion linking the labour market to social security provision which is based on the family unit, information on earnings should be available on a family as well as on an individual basis. In this way we can assess how far family poverty is due to low earnings. Unfortunately, none exists. We know, however, that few married women worked, and, therefore, that family poverty depended on how the earnings of the main bread-winner varied with family size and composition, and how often and by how much these earnings were supplemented by other members of the family.

Despite its various shortcomings, the income guaranteed by social security is often regarded as a measure of family poverty. Information on how the income guaranteed varied with family size at the time of the 1967 census is given in Table 1. Judged on this

basis, families of, say, four or more persons, whose sole breadwinner earned less than £3 weekly, could be defined as poor. A small proportion of male employees, but nearly one-third of female employees, earned less than £3 (Table 6). However, an analysis of earnings by age (Table 7) showed that the overwhelming majority of those with low earnings were almost certainly under nineteen years.⁵ They were therefore unlikely to be the main breadwinner, and if their earnings are regarded on a personal basis then they compared favourably with the income guaranteed by social security. Average earnings of men and women aged nineteen and over were also well above the social security minimum even had they several dependants. In conclusion, low earnings were not an important cause of family poverty for employees, judged on the basis of the income guaranteed by social security.

(b) *Social Security*

The above observations on the operation of the price mechanism in the labour market suggest that some individuals have a choice between work and leisure. We would therefore expect social security provision to have an impact on the decision to be gainfully employed, particularly as part of the provision is directed to the unemployed and those aged sixty and over. The most obvious evidence of the predicted impact is the temporal analysis of unemployment (Section 4) where we found that the relative cost of unemployment was a significant factor.

There is plenty of evidence elsewhere, particularly for America (Schiller, 1973), to confirm the hypothesis that social security has a disincentive effect on the decision to work. But we know of no comparable studies for low income countries to test the generality of the hypothesis. We believe this study goes some way towards establishing this generality. To begin with, our conclusions cover the period from the mid-1950's when the Islands state of development was far less advanced than now: their atypicality may be more apparent than real. And then, where comparisons are possible, the Island's experience is similar to the urban sectors of rich and poor countries.

⁵ The number of men who were earning less than £3 weekly was 1,819 and the number of employees under 19 years was 5,396. The corresponding data for women are 4,736 and 3,574.

We complete this section by examining how far social security provision was able to maintain income levels and so alleviate and/or prevent destitution.

Our analysis of the labour market suggested that individuals were able to exercise some choice between work and leisure, and that those who do not work tended to be dependants or have sufficient alternative sources of income. However, we also found that a small but important part of the population were not working although they would have done so had conditions in the labour market been more favourable, or had they not suffered from permanent disability.

Finally, we found from our analysis that families with a breadwinner who was an employee rarely suffered from a poverty as defined by the income guaranteed by social security. The corollary to this is that those who had to rely on social security as their sole source of income were much poorer than other persons. Thus one general shortcoming of social security provision was the low level of benefits.

The National Insurance Fund was already facing financial difficulties in 1967 with expenditure exceeding revenue, and within a few years the annual deficit was to become so large that the Fund used up all its assets. If the scale of benefits were to be raised, then fewer contributors could be eligible for the contingencies covered, or recourse was necessary to additional funds for financing the Fund and providing higher social assistance benefits.

Both measures were adopted, and both seem eminently sensible in view of the choices open. In 1971 retirement (or virtually this situation since earnings were not permitted to exceed £10 in any given month) was made an additional condition for men to be eligible for an old age pension. The wisdom of this follows from the facts (given in Section 3) that a large proportion of men aged sixty and over work and are paid nearly as much as those younger:

Additional finance for the Fund was found, as a temporary measure, by recourse to the Consolidated Fund, and more permanently by raising the level of contributions. In future the Fund is to operate on a pay-as-you-go basis, i.e. income and expenditure shall be approximately equal in any given year. Higher social assistance benefits, as previously, are financed from the Consolidated Fund. The virtue of these sources of finance is that they are

directed at those working, and prior to 1971 they enjoyed a standard of living incomparably higher than those relying on social security as their main source of income.

Finally, the other main deficiency was, and still is, the lack of provision for the majority of the unemployed. About half, and possibly more, had exhausted any National Insurance benefit to which they might have been entitled, at the time of the 1967 census. Only if they had been head of their household would they and their households have been given further support from National Assistance. The majority of the unemployed in 1967 were single and too young to have qualified as head of the household and they depended on their family for support. However, it is arguable that the unemployed not eligible for benefit are one group in the population which is best able to do without government financial support.

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Table 1

SOCIAL SECURITY PROVISION, 1967 AND 1971 (£M)

<i>National Assistance Act (1956): Benefits</i>	1967	1971
Unemployment and sickness		
Single man	1.80	3.00
Single woman	1.35	3.00
Married man	2.70	5.00
Old age and invalidity pension		
Single person	2.00	3.00
Married man	3.00	5.00
<i>National Assistance Act (1956): Income guaranteed</i>		
Household of 1 person	1.37	2.75
5 persons	3.27	5.55
12 or more persons	4.77	7.75
<i>Old Age Pensions (1948): Income guaranteed</i>		
Pensioner	1.37	2.75

Sources: National Insurance Act, 1956 (Act No. VI of 1956),
as amended up to 31st December 1966, pp. 43 and 45.
National Assistance Act, 1956 (Act No. VIII of 1956),
as amended up to 31st December 1966, p. 14.

Act No. XXIV of 1971, pp. A198-9

Act No. XXVI of 1971, p. A223

Table 2

BASIC LABOUR STATISTICS

	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
<i>Civilian population, all ages</i>	150,598	163,618	314,216
<i>Aged 14 and over</i>	106,118	120,999	222,117
<i>Not available for work</i>	25,864	99,000	124,864
Disabled	1,974	1,390	3,364
<i>Employed</i>	73,779	20,588	94,367
Unpaid workers	1,994	788	2,782
Employees earning less than £M3 weekly	1,819	4,736	6,555
<i>Unemployed</i>	6,475	1,411	7,886
Not searching for work	1,147	126	1,273
Seeking first job	1,885	749	2,634
Seeking second or subsequent job	3,443	536	3,979

Source: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities Volume I, pp. ii, iii, vi, xxv and lxxiii.

Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities Volume II, p. 396.

Table 3LABOUR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATE FOR GROUPS
DEFINED BY AGE, SEX AND MARITAL STATUS (%)

AGE	MEN				WOMEN			
	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWED	TOTAL	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWED	TOTAL
14-19	59	87	—	59	30	3	—	29
20-29	92	99	82	94	56	2	16	31
30-49	89	98	87	96	47	3	9	14
50-59	78	91	73	88	32	4	12	11
60 and over	28	29	15	26	13	2	3	5
14 and over	70	83	26	76	24	3	6	18

Sources: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities, Volume II, p. 394

Malta Census 1967, Report on Population pp. 72-4 (forthcoming)

Note: — denotes no persons in population group.

Table 4

PROPORTION OF MEN AND WOMEN IN SPECIFIED AGE GROUPS
NOT AVAILABLE FOR WORK BY MAIN REASON (%)

AGE	HOUSEWORKERS OR HOUSEWIVES	STUDENTS	PENSIONERS AND RETIRED PERSONS	INCAPABLE OR PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED	OTHER	ALL REASONS
	<i>Men</i>					
14-19	2	35	*	1	2	41
20-29	1	3	*	1	1	6
30-49	1	*	1	2	1	4
50-59	1	*	8	3	1	12
60 and over	1	*	69	3	1	74
14 and over	1	7	13	2	1	24
	<i>Women</i>					
14-19	44	25	*	*	*	71
20-29	68	1	*	*	*	69
30-49	85	*	*	1	*	86
50-59	84	*	2	2	*	89
60 and over	66	*	25	3	1	95
14 and over	71	5	5	1	*	82

Source: Malta Census 1967 Report on Economic Activities Volume II p. 396.

Malta Census 1967, Report on Population p. 2 (forthcoming)

Note: Other includes persons of independent means, those awaiting to follow a religious vocation, or a course of training, as well as non-Maltese nationals who have been resident for more than 12 months and do not belong to one of the four specified reasons.

* denotes less than 0.5%

Table 5

DISTRIBUTION OF MEN AND WOMEN
WORKING BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS (%)

	MEN	WOMEN
Employers	2	*
Self-employed	20	22
Employees	75	74
Unpaid helpers	3	4
All Statuses	100	100

*Source: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic
Activities Volume I p.XXV*

*Note: * denotes less than 0.5%*

Table 6

DISTRIBUTION OF MALE AND FEMALE EMPLOYEES
BY WEEKLY EARNINGS (%)

	MEN	WOMEN
Under £3	3	31
£3 to under £4	3	16
£4 to under £10	69	44
£10 to under £15	17	8
£15 and over	8	1
Not specified	*	*
All Employees	100	100

*Source: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities,
Volume I p.lx.*

*Note: * denotes less than 0.5%*

Table 7AVERAGE WEEKLY EARNINGS OF MALE
AND FEMALE EMPLOYEES BY AGE

AGE	MEN	WOMEN
14-18	£3.93	£2.72
19-59	£9.29	£5.55
60 and over	£8.67	£4.38
14 and over	£8.76	£4.97

Source: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities, Volume I p. lxviii.

Note: No information on earnings was reported by 0.3% of employees.

Table 8DISTRIBUTION OF MALE AND FEMALE
EMPLOYEES BY HOURS WORKED (%)

HOURS WORKED	MEN	WOMEN
Under 35	4	21
35-44	44	34
45-48	33	28
49 and over	19	17
Not specified	*	*
All hours	100	100

Source: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities, Volume I p. lvii.

Note: * denotes less than 0.5%

Table 9

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FOR MEN AND WOMEN OF
SPECIFIED AGE AND MARITAL STATUS GROUPS (%)

AGE	MEN				WOMEN			
	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWERED	TOTAL	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWERED	TOTAL
14-19	24.3	15.6	—	24.2	12.8	0	—	12.8
20-29	12.9	4.4	22.2	9.9	6.1	4.3	14.3	6.1
30-49	7.2	2.7	7.0	3.6	2.7	2.0	2.4	2.6
50-59	3.4	2.6	3.2	2.8	0.9	1.3	0.9	1.0
60 and over	0.7	1.3	1.5	1.1	*	0	0	*
14 and over	15.0	2.9	3.3	8.1	6.9	1.9	1.1	6.4

Sources: Malta Census 1967, *Report on Economic Activities* Volume II pp.394 and 433

Malta Census 1967, *Report on Population* pp. 72-4 (forthcoming)

Notes: — denotes no widowed persons in the labour market

* denotes less than 0.5%

Table 10

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE FOR MEN AND WOMEN BY
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (%)

<i>Educational attainment:</i>	MEN	WOMEN
Never attended school	5.0	2.7
Primary	10.1	7.2
Secondary	5.6	6.5
Post-Secondary	0.6	0.1
All levels	8.1	6.4

Source: Malta Census 1967, *Report on Economic Activities*, Volume II pp. 56-7 and 444-5.

Notes: The educational attainment of 0.2% and 0.1% unemployed men and women, respectively, was not stated.

Table 11DISTRIBUTION OF UNEMPLOYED MEN AND WOMEN BY
AGE AND MARITAL STATUS (%)

AGE	MEN				WOMEN			
	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWED	TOTAL	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWED	TOTAL
14-19	46	*	0	46	55	0	0	55
20-29	26	5	*	31	34	1	*	34
30-49	7	11	*	18	8	1	*	10
50-59	1	4	*	5	1	*	*	1
60 and over	*	1	*	1	0	0	0	*
14 and over	80	20	1	100	97	2	1	100

Source: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities, Volume II p.433

Note: * denotes less than 0.5%

Table 12DISTRIBUTION OF THE UNEMPLOYED MEN AND WOMEN
NOT SEEKING WORK BY AGE AND MARITAL STATUS (%)

AGE	MEN				WOMEN			
	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWED	TOTAL	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWED	TOTAL
14-19	64	0	0	64	64	0	0	64
20-29	19	2	*	22	25	2	0	27
30-49	7	6	0	12	6	1	0	7
50-59	1	2	*	3	1	1	0	2
60 and over	0	*	0	*	1	0	0	1
14 and over	90	10	*	100	96	4	0	100

Source: Malta, Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities, Volume II, p.433

Note: * denotes less than 0.5%

Table 13

DISTRIBUTION OF SINGLE UNEMPLOYED MEN BY AGE
AND MAIN REASON FOR NOT SEEKING WORK (%)

AGE	JOBS NOT SUITABLE	GAVE UP HOPE	SEASONAL UNEMPLOYMENT	WAITING TO EMIGRATE	OTHER REASONS	ALL REASONS
14-19	3	25	1	9	32	71
20-29	1	7	*	6	6	21
30-49	*	3	*	1	2	7
50-59	0	*	*	0	*	1
60 and over	0	0	0	0	0	0
14 and over	4	37	2	16	40	100

Source: Malta, *Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities*, Volume II, p. 450

Note: * denotes less than 0.5%

Table 14

DISTRIBUTION OF UNEMPLOYED MEN AND WOMEN SEEKING A
SECOND OR SUBSEQUENT JOB BY AGE AND MARITAL STATUS (%)

AGE	MEN				WOMEN			
	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWED	TOTAL	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWED	TOTAL
14-19	19	*	0	19	35	0	0	35
20-29	34	8	*	42	41	1	0	41
30-49	10	18	*	29	18	3	1	21
50-59	2	7	*	9	2	1	*	3
60 and over	*	1	*	2	0	0	0	0
14 and over	65	34	1	100	95	4	1	100

Source: Malta *Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities*, Volume II, p. 433

Note: * denotes less than 0.5%

Table 15

DISTRIBUTION OF UNEMPLOYED MEN AND WOMEN OF
SPECIFIED MARITAL STATUS BY TIME OUT OF WORK (%)

DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT	MEN				WOMEN			
	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWERED	TOTAL	SINGLE	MARRIED	WIDOWERED	TOTAL
1-4 weeks	10	15	6	11	9	7	14	9
5-8 weeks	7	8	9	7	5	10	14	5
9-13 weeks	7	7	15	7	6	4	14	6
14-26 weeks	10	12	6	10	10	7	14	10
27-52 weeks	7	9	6	7	6	4	0	6
1-2 years	13	10	9	13	12	7	0	12
over 2 years	28	33	47	29	37	45	14	37
Not specified	19	6	3	16	14	17	29	15
All durations	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities, Volume II, p. 443

Table 16

DISTRIBUTION OF UNEMPLOYED MEN AND WOMEN OF
SPECIFIED AGES BY TIME OUT OF WORK (%)

DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT	MEN				WOMEN			
	14-19	20-29	30-49	50-59	14-19	20-29	30-49	50-59
1-4 weeks	9	13	14	10	11	8	3	13
5-8 weeks	6	8	7	7	6	5	8	6
9-13 weeks	7	7	6	4	7	4	5	6
14-26 weeks	10	11	10	9	12	8	8	6
27-52 weeks	7	7	9	7	6	6	8	13
1-2 years	15	10	10	11	13	10	10	0
over 2 years	22	32	38	46	29	45	50	50
Not specified	25	12	7	6	16	14	10	7
All durations	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities, Volume II p. 444.

Table 17

DISTRIBUTION OF MEN AND WOMEN AGED 20-29 YEARS OF
SPECIFIED EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BY TIME OUT OF WORK (%)

DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT	NEVER ATTENDED	PRIMARY	SECONDARY	POST-SECONDARY
<i>Men</i>				
1-4 weeks	17	14	11	0
5-8 weeks	4	8	8	29
9-13 weeks	5	8	7	14
14-26 weeks	9	10	12	0
27-52 weeks	14	7	7	14
1-2 years	10	9	13	14
Over 2 years	36	32	30	14
Not specified	5	12	13	29
All durations	100	100	100	100
<i>Women</i>				
1-4 weeks	25	8	8	0
5-8 weeks	0	5	5	0
9-13 weeks	0	4	7	0
14-26 weeks	0	9	6	0
27-52 weeks	0	7	3	0
1-2 years	25	10	12	0
Over 2 years	25	45	43	100
Not stated	25	12	18	0
All durations	100	100	100	100

Source: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities Volume II pp. 444-5.

Note: One man who had been unemployed 5-8 weeks and one woman who had been unemployed for more than two years failed to state their educational attainment.

Table 18

DISTRIBUTION OF SINGLE MEN AND WOMEN OF
SPECIFIED SITUATIONS BY TIME OUT OF WORK (%)

DURATION OF UNEMPLOYMENT	NOT SEEKING WORK		SEEKING FIRST JOB		SEEKING SECOND OR SUBSEQUENT JOB	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
1-4 weeks	4	2	16	15	7	7
5-8 weeks	4	2	10	8	4	4
9-13 weeks	4	3	9	8	5	5
14-26 weeks	5	3	11	13	10	10
27-52 weeks	6	5	8	6	6	6
1-2 years	9	5	13	11	17	14
Over 2 years	20	31	26	31	35	42
Not specified	50	49	8	7	15	14
All durations	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Malta Census 1967, Report on Economic Activities, Volume II p. 443.

THE ISLE OF CALYPSO – GOZO?

By JOSEPH BUSUTTIL

ODYSSEUS, the king of Ithaka, was destined to spend some time on the 'tree-clad' island of Ogygia on which he had been washed in one of his many wanderings after the sack of Troy. The island was inhabited by the nymph Calypso, the daughter of Atlas, who kept Odysseus in her beautiful cave and allured him with her charms. At the instigation of the goddess Athene, Zeus, the father of the Gods, sent his messenger Hermes to the little island to urge Calypso to release Odysseus. The nymph obeyed but with the greatest reluctance. Odysseus was released and left the island for good.

A fragment of the poet Callimachus preserves the unfinished sentence 'the little islet of Calypso – Gaudos'.¹ Furthermore, Strabo asserts in two different passages² that Apollodorus took Callimachus to task for maintaining that Gaudos (Gozo) was the island of Calypso and Corcyra Schemaria. The legend or tradition that Gozo is the island of Calypso goes back to at least Callimachus's days (310-325 B.C.).

Eratosthenes (born c. 284 B.C.), the geographer and astronomer, who was the pupil of Callimachus, had attacked those scholars who held the view that Odysseus's wanderings had been in the neighbourhood of Sicily.³ He seems to have been in favour of the opinion that they had taken place in the outer Ocean.⁴ This opinion was also shared by the disciples of Eratosthenes.⁵ On the other hand Callimachus and other writers like Polybius were of the view that the wanderings took place in or around Sicily.

Apollodorus (C. 180 B.C.), the grammarian, made a distinction between the journeys of Odysseus and the account given of them by Homer. Apollodorus maintains that Odysseus really wandered around Sicily; but, he states, Homer gives a fictitious account and transposes the real places visited by

¹ Cf. Appendix 1.

² Cf. Appendix 2 and 3.

³ Strabo 1, 21; H. Berger, *Die geographischen Fragmente des Eratosthenes*, Amsterdam 1964, p. 25 f.

⁴ Strabo, 1, 44.

⁵ Ibid.

Odysseus to the outer ocean. For this reason Apollodorus censures Callimachus for failing to see through Homer's plan. On the other hand he does not say where the wanderings had taken place.

Strabo, the geographer, criticises Apollodorus because the latter had not stated where exactly Odysseus went to and because the regions round Sicily commanded greater credibility.

In ancient times the island of Ogygia was identified with at least twelve different islands.⁶ Recently L.G. Pocock has tried to prove that Odysseus journeyed around Sicily;⁷ but following Bérard he identifies Ogygia with Perejel, an island near Tangier.⁸ It is interesting to note that the Greek word Calypso is connected with⁹ καλύπτω (I hide) and that *Ogygia* is 'the mysterious island'.

APPENDIX

I

Callimachus, Fragment 524:

ὀλίγην νησίδα Καλυψοῦς – Γαῦδον.
The little islet of Calypso, Gaudos.¹⁰

II

Strabo, 1, 44.

Ἀπολλόδωρος δὲ ἐπιτιμᾷ Καλλιμάχῳ συνηγορῶν τοῖς περὶ τὸν Ἑρατοσθένη, διότι, καίπερ γραμματικῶς ὦν παρὰ τὴν Ὀμηρικὴν ὑπόθεσιν καὶ τὸν ἑξαιεανισμόν τῶν τόπων, περὶ οὓς τὴν πλάνην φράζει, Γαῦδον καὶ Κόρκυραν ὀνομάζει. ἄλλ' εἰ μὲν μηδαμοῦ γέγονεν ἡ πλάνη, ἄλλ' ὅλον πλάσμα ἐστὶν Ὀμήρου τοῦτο, ὅρθη ἡ ἐπιτίμησις. ἢ, εἰ γέγονε μὲν, περὶ ἄλλους δὲ τόπους, δεῖ λέγειν εὐθὺς καὶ περὶ τίνας, ἐπανορθούμενον ἅμα τὴν ἀγνοΐαν. μῆτε δὲ ὅλου πλάσματος εἶναι πιθανῶς λεγόμενου, καθότι περὶ ἐπεδείκνυμεν, μῆτ' ἄλλων τόπων κατὰ πίστιν μεῖζω δεικνυμένων, ἀπολύουσιν ἂν τῆς αἰτίας ὁ Καλλιμάχος.

Apollodorus, however, siding with Eratosthenes and his school, cri-

⁶ Cf. W.W. Hyde, *Ancient Greek Mariners*, O.U.P. 1947, p. 86.

⁷ Cf. *The Sicilian Origin of the Odyssey*, Wellington, 1957.

⁸ Id. pp. 62, 72.

⁹ Cf. E. Boisacq, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Heidelberg 1950.

¹⁰ Cf. P. Pfeifer, *Callimachus*, Oxford, 1949.

ticises Callimachus; because, though a *grammaticus*, Callimachus names Gaudos and Corcyra (as the regions) round which he says the wanderings of Odysseus had taken place – contrary to Homer's plan and the *exocceanism* of the (Homeric) places. But if the wanderings did not take place anywhere, and the story has been completely invented by Homer, then the criticism is fair; or if they had taken place, but around different regions, then Apollodorus should also tell us straightaway where (they took place), thus correcting at the same time Callimachus's mistake. But since Homer's story cannot convincingly be said to be wholly fictitious, as we have shown above, and since no other regions are shown to command greater credibility, Callimachus might be absolved from censure.¹¹

III

Strabo VII, 299.

Ἐπιτιμᾷ δε (Ἀπολλόδορος) καὶ τοῖς περὶ Σικελίαν τὴν πλάνην λέγουσι καθ' Ὅμηρον τὴν Ὀδυσσέως. εἰ γὰρ, αὖ χρῆναι τὴν μὲν πλάνην ἐκεῖ γεγονεναὶ φάσκειν, τὸν, δὲ ποιητὴν ἐξωκεανικένας μυθολογίας χάριν. καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις συγγνώμην εἶναι, Καλλιμάχῳ δὲ μὴ πάνυ, μεταποιοιούμενῳ γε γραμματικῆς, ὅς τὴν μὲν Γαῦδον Καλυποῦς νῆσόν ψησι, τὴν δὲ Κόρκυραν Σχερίαν.

(Apollodorus) criticises also those who maintain that the wanderings of Odysseus in Homer's account took place around Sicily; for in that case, (he says) they should say that the wanderings did take place there, but that the poet (Homer) placed them in the ocean for the sake of mythology; the others can be excused, but certainly not Callimachus: he pretends to be a *grammaticus* and says that Gaudos is the island of Calypso and Corcyra Scheria.¹²

¹¹H. Berger, op. cit., p. 26.

¹²Ibid.

HECATAEUS AND GOZO

By JOSEPH BUSUTTIL

THE first reference to the island of Gozo occurs in a fragment of Hecataeus (560-480 B.C.) preserved in the epitome of the work of Stephanus of Byzantium.¹

Hecataeus, called a λογοποῖτος by Herodotus,² was an active figure in his native city Miletus. He was a historian and improved the first map of the then known world drawn up by Anixamander with detailed information collected on his own travels. Among other things he wrote a work entitled περίοδος Γῆς or a description of the world. He divided the inhabited world into two parts: Europe and Asia, the latter including Libya.³ The *Periodos*, which was written before 500 B.C., is in reality a 'periplus' or a description of the coasts of the Mediterranean and adjoining seas.⁴ The fragment of the *Periodos* which mentions Gozo is the following:

Γαῦλος νῆσος πρὸς τῇ καρχηδονί· ἑκαταῖος περιηγήσει ὁ νησιώτης Γαυλίτης.

Gozo: an island close to Carthage. (mentioned by) Hecataeus in the *periegesis*. Gaulites is (the name of) the inhabitant of the island.

Hecataeus, therefore, mentions Gozo and presumably Malta in the *Periodos*. The fact that he places the island in the proximity of Carthage indicates that he included it in the περιηγήσεις τῆς Λιβύης that is, that part of his work which deals with Libya and Carthage.

¹Cf Stephan of Byzantium, *Ethnika*, Graz, 1958; also J. Nenci, *Hecataei Milesii Fragmenta*, Florence, 1954, p. 98, No 358.

²Cf Herod. 11, 143; V, 36, 125; also W.W. Hyde, *Ancient Greek Mariners*, O.U.P., 1947, p. 9.

³Cf R.E. Vol. 14, 1912, p. 2703; also J.O. Thompson, *History of Ancient Geography*, 1948, p. 47.

⁴Cf R.E. op. cit. p. 2670; and E.H. Bunbury, *A History of Ancient Geography*, New York, 1959, Vol. 1, p. 134-135.

⁵Cf R.E. op. cit. p. 2728: So gehören an die Küste im Herrschaftsbericht der Karthager die περί καρχήδονα oder πρὸς καρχηδόνι legenden Städte, καυθήλια (fr 308), ὑβέλῃ (fr 310) und die Inseln Εὐδεῖπνη (fr 313), Γαῦλος (fr 314) φοινικοῦσσαί (fr 315).

Why should Hecataeus put it near Carthage? The answer is that the prepositions *πρὸς* (near) and *περὶ* (around) used with towns and islands are not employed by Hecataeus to denote strict topographical proximity but are used to indicate political possession or political control.⁵ In other words Hecataeus places Gozo near Carthage because that island was in the Carthaginian sphere of influence, as he does with many other islands and towns. This is of great historical interest. Gozo (and presumably Malta) was already in the Carthaginian sphere of influence in the sixth century B.C. Likewise Ps. Skylax, writing some two centuries after Hecataeus, groups Malta and Gozo in that section of the *Periplus* dealing with Libya and Carthage.⁶

Hecataeus calls the island *Gaulos*. The letters *GWL* are found in the Phoenician inscriptions which refer to Gozo.⁷ Whether Hecataeus is here reproducing the grecised form of the Phoenician name of Gozo is not clear. The Phoenician inscriptions are of a much later date.⁸ The Romans adopted the Greek name of Gozo without bothering, with some few exceptions, to change the final -os into -us.⁹ On the other hand there was another Greek form of the word already employed by Callimachus in the third century B.C. — *Gaudos* — which has ultimately given rise to the words *Għaudex* and *Gozo*, the two present names of the island. An inhabitant of Gozo was called *Γαυλίτης* by the Greeks since the sixth century before our era. Gozitan coins of the Roman period bear the Greek legend *τῶν Γαυλίτων* (*Gaulitwn*, of the Gozitans).

To sum up: Gozo was already known to the Greeks of the sixth Century by the name *Gaulos*, and a Gozitan by the name *Gaulites*. The fragment also shows that in the sixth century B.C. Gozo was in the Carthaginian sphere of influence.

⁶ Cf C. Muller, *Geographi Graeci Minores*, Hildesheim, 1965, Skylax III.

⁷ Cf M.G.G. Amadasi, *Le Iscrizioni Fenicie e Puniche*, Roma 1968, *passim*.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 25.

⁹ Cf Pliny, N.H., 111, 92; Silius Italicus, *Pun.*, XIV, 259.

LYCOPHRON AND MALTA

By JOSEPH BUSUTTIL

THE poet Lycophron, born about 330-325 B.C., was a native of Chalcis in Euboea and spent most of his life at Alexandria in Egypt. He was the natural son of Socles and the adopted son of the historian Lycus of Rhegium. In the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-247 B.C.) he was commissioned to arrange the Comic Poets in the Royal Library in Alexandria. He wrote a number of tragedies and was given the name πλειας by the later Alexandrine scholars.¹

Only a few fragments of Lycophron's tragedies have come down to us; the *Alexandra*, however, a work in 1474 lines of iambic poetry, has been preserved in its entirety. It deals with the prophecies uttered by Alexandra or Cassandra and it relates in a prophetic vein the later fortunes of the Greek and Trojan heroes. It was written purposely in an enigmatical style and for this reason Suidas calls it τὸ σκοτεινὸν ποιήμα (The Obscure Poem). It was certainly written after 309 B.C. and most probably after 295 B.C.² The poet tries to show that what Troy lost in the East was balanced by the success of Troy's descendants, the Romans, in the West.³ From a historical point of view it reflects the great impression which the Roman military victories had made upon the contemporary Hellenistic world.⁴

Cassandra, opening her 'inspired Bacchic lips'⁵ enumerates the various islands and places which will be inhabited by the Greeks and Trojans. In verses 1027-1029 she says:

Ἄλλοι δὲ Μελίτην νῆσ-ν. Ὀθρωνοῦ πέλας
πλάγκτοι, κατοικησουσιν, ἣν πέριξ κλύδων
ἔμπλην παχυνου Σικανὸς προσμασσεταί.

¹ Cf Lycophron, *Alexandra*, translated by A.W. Mair, Loeb Edition, p. 311; Suidas *Lexicon*, Halis 1853, sub voce *Lycophron*.

² Cf Lycophron, op.cit., p. 307; Enciclopedia Italiana, Edizione 1949, Vol. XXI, p. 95.

³ Cf vv 1226 f.

⁴ Cf Enciclopedia Italiana, op.cit. p. 94.

⁵ Cf v 30.

Others, wandering in the neighbourhood of Othronus,
will inhabit the island of Melite, round which the
Sicanian surf laps near Pachynus.⁶

Cassandra says that others will inhabit the island of Melite. Which Melite does Lycophron have in mind? Cassandra adds three small details: (a) Melite is washed by the Sicanian Sea; (b) it lies near Pachynus; (c) it is in the neighbourhood of Othronus, modern Fano.⁷ The Sicanian or Sicilian Sea washes Malta and not the Adriatic island of Melite, modern Meleda.⁸ Cape Pachynus, which is far from Fano, is that point in Sicily that is nearest to Malta. On the other hand Othronus is an island near Meleda in the Adriatic. The Scholiast of Lycophron does not help us much to solve the problem. 'Othronos', says the Scholiast, '(is) an island between Epirus and Italy; the island of Melite lies close to it. Othronus is an island to the South of Sicily and it lies before the promontory of Pachynus in Sicily. Othronos lies close to the mouth of the Adriatic'.⁹ The Scholiast contradicts himself. If Melite lies between Epirus and Italy it cannot lie in the south of Sicily. Stephanus of Byzantium says: 'Othronos: a city: according to some an island to the south of Sicily; according to others, the island of Malta'.¹⁰

It would seem, therefore, that in ancient times Lycophron's passage was interpreted differently by different commentators: some thought that by Melite he meant Meleda, others maintained that he was referring to Malta. Those who held that Lycophron was alluding to Malta postulated the existence of an Othronos near Sicily. In actual fact no island bearing that name ever existed to the south of Sicily. The only explanation appears to be that Lycophron (and his Scholiast) mixed up the two

⁶Cf Lycophronis Alexandra, edidit Lorenzo Mascialino, Teubner, MCMLXIV, p. 46, vv 1027-1029.

⁷Cf R.E. Vol. 36, 1942, pp. 1870-1871.

⁸F. Abela, *Descrittione di Malta*, Malta 1647 calls Malta l'isola del mar siculo.

⁹Cf. Schol. Lycophron 1027: 'Οθρωνός νῆσος μεταξὺ Ἑπείρου καὶ Ἰταλίας. ταύτῃ δὲ νῆσος παρκαεῖται Μελίτη. Ὀθρωνός νῆσος πρὸς νότον Σικελίας, ἣτις προβεβλήται τοῦ παχυνου ὠρωπηρίου Σικελίας, ἣ δὲ Ὀθρωνός πρὸς τῷ στοματι τοῦ Ἀδρίου.

¹⁰Cf. Stephan von Byzanz, *Ethnika*, Graz, 1958: Ὀθρωνός. πόλις, οἱδὲ νῆσον πρὸς νότον Σικελίας. ἄλλοι δὲ Μελίτην νῆσον.

¹¹Cf Stephan von Byzanz, *Ethnika*, Graz, 1958: Σικελίας, ἥδὲ Ὀθρωνός πρὸς τῷ στοματι τοῦ Ἀδρίου.

Melite. Lycophron's geography is hazy elsewhere. In lines 1030-1033 the poet expatiates on the legends connected with Pachynus. He mentions the western point which was called after Ulysses (1.030), the river Helorus (1.1033) and the shrine of Athena (1.1032). Hence there can be no doubt that, although he places Melite near Othronos, the poet had in mind the island of Malta. At that time interest in the history of Sicily had revived. Timaeus wrote the *Σικελικά* at the end of the fourth century B.C. and influenced the poet Callimachus, who wrote much about Sicily, Lycus, who wrote a history of Sicily, and Lycophron himself.

Cassandra does not say who the 'others' are. Doubtlessly they are Trojan or Greek heroes and they are few in number. Thucydides in the sixth book of the Peloponnesian Wars says that Sicily and the neighbouring islands had been inhabited by Trojans.¹¹ Of course, the presence of Trojans in Sicily and Malta belongs to the realm of mythology. However, from a historical standpoint one can say that in the eyes of the Alexandrine poet Malta was inhabited by people of Trojan stock. Moreover the author connects the inhabitants of Malta with those of Sicily, Southern Italy and of Rome itself.

¹¹v1,2.

MARIUS SCALESI

Société Littéraire du Maine, 19 novembre 1972.

Introduction by FRANÇOIS CUNEN

PART I

PUIS-JE en cette note remercier l'exquise et inlassable Présidente de la *Société Littéraire du Maine*, des paroles aimables qu'elle eut à mon égard. C'est mon admiration pour le *Poète Maudit* de souche maltaise, Marius Scalési, et le *Poète Béni* de Malte, Laurent Ropa, c'est aussi le vif et respectueux intérêt que je porte à l'admirable zèle de la *Société Littéraire du Maine* qui m'ont incité à demander l'hospitalité de ses pages à notre *Journal* universitaire, qui avait déjà rendu hommage à Laurent Ropa par la voix, si pleinement autorisée, de cette Société et notamment celle de Félix Gaucher.

J'aimerais, en un prochain numéro, m'attarder avec le lecteur devant certaines des multiples splendeurs de cette oeuvre admirable de Jeanne Blin-Lefèbvre, dont notre Université vient d'acquérir certains joyaux, et scruter les merveilles que dévoile la lecture du *Roi des Soirs*, de *Gaves et Frontons*, du *Coeur Exagéré*, de *Brindilles* et du *Dieu de Cristal*.

On trouvera dans cet Hommage à Marius Scalési une première étape, en notre étude de ce poète éminemment moderne, mort pourtant dans l'oubli et sous le signe infamant, aux yeux de certains, de la folie, il y a plus de cinquante ans. Les vers prestigieux de ce Baudelaire nord-africain ne manqueront pas d'éveiller l'intérêt de la génération des 'jeunes en colère' en quête de coryphées et de martyrs. J'ai consacré à cet *Héphaïstos* un poème que l'on trouvera en un des numéros antérieurs de ce Journal, et une strophe 'à la mère de Marius Scalési', en mon poème *Aux Mères de trois Méditerranéens*.

Je tiens également à rendre hommage ici à l'admirable traduction anglaise qu'un de mes amis, homme de lettres et poète distingué, le Lt. Colonel Roger E.R. Robinson, de Mosta, a bien voulu donner des poèmes lus lors de la Conférence de la Société. Son enthousiasme pour la cause de la poésie contribuera sans aucun doute à

faire connaître plus aisément à Malte un poète, siculo-maltaïse, qui ne s'est exprimé qu'en français.

Tous les poèmes lus au Mans ont été imprimés ici, selon l'édition Saliba, de Tunis, 1935. Le Lieutenant Colonel Robinson nous a gratifiés par surcroît de la traduction de poèmes dont la lecture n'avait pas été faite au Mans. Nous terminerons cette 'Anthologie' par la reproduction de ces poèmes, en leur version originale et leur traduction anglaise. Ce sont: *Chanson*, *Tentation*, *Ballade de la Mort*, *Aux Morts Ignorés* et *Lever de Soleil*.

Ce n'est pas une conférence que je ferai qui serait riche de documentation, d'éloges, d'analyses critiques sur l'oeuvre de Mario Scalési, poète italo-maltaïse mort à trente ans. Il n'a eu le temps que de souffrir et de chanter sa misère. Le programme ne me permet pas de m'étendre sur ses poèmes assez peu nombreux, hélas, (83), mais combien denses et harmonieux.

Ce ne sera qu'une brève communion avec une âme douloureuse, sensible, profonde, traduite en des vers de noble facture, ce sera un élan fraternel et spontané de poète à poète.

Comment ai-je pu connaître ce Tunisien né de père sicilien et de mère maltaïse? C'est un touchant exemple de solidarité poétique qui a rattaché l'île de Malte à la Société Littéraire du Maine. Le premier intermédiaire est bien sûr notre auteur franco-maltaïse, Laurent Ropa, dont l'île natale se montre fière, et qui fut un fils adoptif de la Cénomanie. Même après sa mort, il reste trait d'union entre les intellectuels que sépare la mer latine. C'est bien à cause de lui et de sa veuve fidèle que ce jumelage de sympathies a pu s'opérer. Grâce aussi soient rendues au Professeur de l'Université Royale Maltaïse, François Cunen, érudit, ami de la poésie et du beau langage français. Il sait s'enthousiasmer pour les oeuvres qui le méritent, il en goûte les nuances et les finesses, en ressent les impressions les plus fugaces et pénètre vraiment l'inspiration même d'un texte. Je sais, par expérience, que la sagacité de son analyse passe toutes les espérances d'un auteur.

Revenons à Mario Scalési. Né en 1892, il pourrait être encore parmi les vivants; mais l'eût-il souhaité? Pauvre, chétif, infirme

et contrefait, 'l'ombre de son corps dérisoire se projetait devant lui comme une croix ignominieuse'. Son enfance ne connut que le sourire triste d'une mère accablée par les difficultés de l'existence. (Ecoutez le poème qu'il lui adressait en évoquant les meilleurs souvenirs du passé.)

A MA MERE

Ton coeur s'est-il usé, ma mère?
Je n'ose, devant tes yeux froids,
T'adresser l'ardente prière
De m'embrasser comme autrefois.

Je n'ose, te sachant aigrie
Par les ans et la pauvreté,
Te raconter la rêverie
De l'enfant que je suis resté.

Je voudrais pour quelques minutes
Poser mon front sur tes genoux
Et m'y reposer de mes luttes
En un ressouvenir très doux.

Je me croirais encore à l'âge
Des papillons blancs et des fleurs.
Je croirais qu'ayant été sage,
Je m'endors en tes bras berceurs.

J'ai tant besoin d'une caresse,
D'un mot qui me console un peu!
Si je perds aussi ta tendresse
Que ferai-je sous le ciel bleu?

C'est pour toi, c'est pour mon vieux père,
Qu'alors que m'appelait le glas,
J'ai poursuivi ma voie amère.
Tu sais à quel point je suis las.

Je comprenais jadis l'ivresse
Du soleil, des prés reflouris:
Ce qui me restait de jeunesse,
Votre misère me l'a pris.

Rends-moi l'illusion propice,
Egrène-moi tes vieux récits.
Je crois aux contes de nourrice
Lorsque c'est toi qui me les dis.

Elève à Tunis d'une école primaire française, Scalési continua à cultiver son esprit durant le cours de sa vie si brève, et ses vers savent chanter dans notre langue la plus classique, avec charme et justesse. —

'Ame contre son corps, sanglotant l'anathème', il marqua son verbe de tristesse et de révolte, mêlées à des sursauts de jeunesse qui voudrait exulter, aimer; sa Muse est pathétique mais, dans sa désespérance, des accents de résignation affleurent quelquefois. Tout devait finir dans le drame: fou devenu, il expira dans un asile de Palerme!

Nous aimerons ce poète maudit, lequel, avec sa souffrance même, créa de la beauté.

S'exprimant dans notre langage avec art, il se placera non loin des Rimbaud, des Corbière, des Verlaine. Il est plus réellement qu'eux, issu du petit peuple; plus qu'eux il connut, dès l'enfance, dans sa chair malade, toute la misère aggravée par l'indigence. Je ne puis malheureusement vous faire entendre tous ses poèmes, mais nous allons en dire suffisamment pour que vous lui accordiez comme ses frères maltais, amour, pitié, admiration.

JEANNE BLIN-LEFEVRE

On lit ensuite les poèmes suivants:

CHASTETE

O chasteté froide, ô chasteté sainte,
Qui contestera ta divinité?
L'amour est la vie, et c'est une plainte,
La paix a béni ta stérilité.

L'amour perpétue avec son étreinte
L'homme malheureux et débilité:
O chasteté froide, ô chasteté sainte,
Qui contestera ta divinité?

Tu mets sur la mort ton auguste empreinte,
Voluptueux lis de mysticité,
C'est toi le parfum de l'éternité,
Tu mets sur la mort ton auguste empreinte,
O chasteté froide, ô chasteté sainte!

VERS L'ABATTOIR

Dans le soir, terne et sale ainsi que l'âme humaine,
Sous des rayons pareils à nos désirs sanglants,
Un troupeau de moutons dociles et bêlants
Flaire au loin l'Abattoir où son pasteur le mène.

Les bêtes ont senti les effluves du sang.
Leur clameur a troublé les campagnes muettes,
Au tintinnabulis familier des clochettes,
Elles marchent toujours, d'un train obéissant.

Poudreux, un régiment débouche sur la route.
On entend résonner le rythme des tambours,
Et — dans la paix rustique et sainte des labours —
Défilent les soldats, sous le sac qui les voûte.

Au devant des moutons et des hommes, le soir
Est rouge. Les bouchers attendent. L'ombre monte.
Je regarde, écoeuré de dégoût et de honte,
Passer tout ce bétail allant à l'abattoir.

CHASTITY

O chastity cold, o chastity blest,
Who will contest your divinity?
Love is just life; a plaint expressed,
Glad peace has praised your sterility.

Love's kiss makes life for ever impressed
On man with his woes, his debility;
O chastity cold, o chastity blest,
Who will contest your divinity?

On death you imprint your ineffable crest,
Voluptuous lily of mysticity,
You are the scent of eternity,
On death you imprint your ineffable crest,
O chastity cold, o chastity blest!

TOWARDS THE SLAUGHTER-HOUSE

In dusk, dingy and dirty like the human soul,
Midst florid rays resembling our blood-red desires,
A docile, bleating flock of sheep, as it respires
Detects the distant shambles – now its shepherd's goal.

The beasts have recognized the clinging smell of blood.
Their clamour has disturbed the silent fields and dells,
And to the well-known tinkling of their tiny bells
Forward they go in passive and obedient flood.

From out of a cloud of dust a regiment appears.
I hear the drum-beats echo to their rhythmic vow,
And – in the rural peace made holy by the plough –
The soldiers march with kitbags arched behind their ears.

Tonight, before the sheep, before the men, how red
The light. The butchers wait. The shadows mount the sky.
Shocked with disgust and self-reproach I dumbly spy
How all these cattle to the slaughter-house are led.

SYMBOLISME

De grands cierges brûlaient au fond de ma mémoire;
Les fleurs de mon passé, dont mouraient les parfums
S'effeuillaient sur leur tige et tombaient dans l'eau noire,
Emportant les désirs et les espoirs défunts.

Et l'ombre despotique établie en mon âme
Proscrivait sans pitié les pensers de soleil;
Triste galérien incliné sur la rame,
Je souhaitais aux soirs un sanglot moins vermeil.

C'est alors, un matin de printemps, à l'orée
Des bocages divins où meurt le souvenir,
Que je vis frissonner à ta lèvre sacrée
Le rire corallin et doux de l'avenir ...

ETRENNES

Afin de gâcher tes traits de sirène
Et lier ainsi ton sort à mon sort,
Je veux t'acheter, en guise d'étrenne,
Un beau flacon d'or.

Ce flacon pisan dont un vieil orfèvre
De fleurs de rubis enchâssa le col,
J'y mettrai l'amour qui flambe à ma lèvre,
Et du vitriol.

Mais la cruauté du soleil s'efface
Et je sens pleurer mon coeur vespéral.
Oh! Si je pouvais te brûler la face
Sans te faire mal!

LA ROBE BLANCHE

L'âme porte en naissant une robe filée
Par les Vierges des cieux aux doigts magiciens
Robe impalpable et pure en fils aériens
Qui dépasse en blancheur la plus blanche gelée.

SYMBOLISM

At my memory's roots great candles were alight;
The flowers of my past whose perfume has expired
Shed leaves from stalks which fell into black water's night,
Bearing away with them dead hopes of things desired.

And the despotic shadows which now haunt my mind
Have pitilessly banished my sunny-coloured dreams;
Sad galley-slave bent down upon the oar, I find
That I crave sobs at night with less ruddy-coloured gleams.

In the pure spring morning's air, and at the edge
Of the divine bocage where the memory dies,
I saw upon your sacred lip the trembling pledge –
That sweet laugh of coralline which floats in future's skies.

NEW YEAR'S GIFT

So that I counter your siren's sharp dart
And bind to my fate your fate with firm hold,
I want to buy you, to mark the year's start
A flask of bright gold.

Into this flask from old Pisa, encased
With a goldsmith's ruby flowers on its bole,
My love which singes my lip I'll have placed
With some vitriol.

But the sun will eclipse its cruel face,
My vesperal heart I feel weeping too.
Oh! Were I but able to burn your face
Without harming you!

THE WHITE ROBE

Our souls at birth bear robes which Virgins sew
Amidst the skies, whose magic fingers thread
Robes pure, impalpable of yarns which shed
A whiteness whiter than the whitest snow.

Mais à nos premiers pas dans cette âpre vallée
 Où l'air est alourdi de péchés anciens,
 Comme un beau lis tombé dans la niche des chiens
 Commence à se noircir sa trame immaculée.

Sacrilèges passants atteints de cécité
 Nous profanons partout notre habit de beauté
 Si bien que nous partons vêtus de boue et d'ombre,
 Et c'est là ce qui cause, au moment des remords
 Où l'éternité s'offre ainsi qu'un miroir sombre
 Cette horrible stupeur qu'on lit aux yeux des morts.

PARFUMS

Elle allait, balançant coquettement ses hanches,
 Sur le sable strié de détritits marins,
 Ses lèvres m'attiraient ainsi que des écrins,
 Et mes mains effleuraient ses mains fines et blanches.

A peine un gazouillis tremblait-il sous les branches.
 Des voiles mouchetaient le vert des flots sereins.
 O la tête charmante aux pensers vipérins
 Qui rêvait près de moi, dans la paix des dimanches!

Des joyeuses villas qui longeaient le chemin,
 Les parfums de l'oeillet, du lilas, du jasmin,
 S'exhalaient, se mêlant à la brise saline.

Mais rien ne m'était doux que ses yeux pervers
 Et ses cheveux de vierge où j'aspirais, divine,
 L'odeur des orangers fleuris au Paradis.

ORGUEIL

Je puis rêver de toi sans craindre qu'en mon rêve,
 Ce fleuve cristallin, ce limpide miroir,
 J'aie en me souvenant l'amertume de voir
 S'ennuager l'azur où mon amour t'élève.

But when at first we thread this vale of woe
Where former sins weigh down the air with dread,
Like lilies falling into a dog's shed
These spotless wefts besmirch their pristine glow.

Impious passers-by struck blind, we in our throe
Befoul our lovely garb where 'ere we go
So that we're clothed at last in muddy gloom,

And at the moment of remorse, that's why
When darkened mirrors represent our doom
We read dire stupor in a dead man's eye.

PERFUMES

She went swinging her hips like a roguish coquette,
On the sand scored with refuse thrown up by the sea,
Her lips held a lure as might chests of jewelry,
Her hands, thin and white, flowered mine when they met.

In the boughs a faint warbling trilled feebly as yet.
On placid green waves sails made pale filigree.
O sweet head full of viperous thoughts, which near me
Dreamt on Sundays in calmness and peacefulness set.

Happy houses which border the roads in the lea,
Scents of pinks, of sweet jasmin and the lilac tree
Floated up and then mingled with winds from the brine.

But nothing's so precious as her corrupt eyes
And her virginal locks where I breathed the divine
And sweet perfumes of orange trees from Paradise.

PRIDE

I dream of you without fearing that I may recall
Within my dream — that liquid mirror; crystal stream —
The grief of seeing the blue sky's romantic gleam,
To which I raised you, wreath itself in cloudy pall.

A cet amour qui fut ma félicité brève,
 Je puis trouver encore une odeur d'encensoir,
 Et le délicieux renoncement du soir,
 Et l'orgueil blanc des lis fleuris sous les pieds d'Eve.

Comme la remembrance, à des yeux aveuglés,
 Des roses, des bijoux, du soleil et des blés,
 Ta mémoire est divine à ma mélancolie.

Car malgré ton beau corps luxurieux et cher
 Et tes yeux de charbon où brûlait l'Italie,
 J'ai toujours ignoré que tu fusses de chair.

LAPIDATION

Ce livre, insoucieux de gloire,
 N'est pas né d'un jeu cérébral:
 Il n'a rien de la Muse Noire,
 De l'Abîme ou des Fleurs du Mal.

S'il contient tant de vers funèbres,
 Ces vers sont le cri révolté
 D'une existence de ténèbres
 Et non d'un spleen prémédité.

Infirme, j'ai dit ma jeunesse,
 Celle des parias en pleurs,
 Dont on exploite la faiblesse
 Et dont on raille les douleurs.

Car, des plus anciens axiomes,
 Lecteur, voici le plus certain:
 Les malédictions des hommes
 Secondent celles du Destin.

Dans l'abandon, dans la famine,
 Honni comme un pestiféré,
 J'ai fleuri ma vie en ruine
 D'un idéal désespéré.

Et, ramassant ces pierres tristes
 Au fond d'un enfer inédit,
 Je vous jette mes améthystes,
 O frères qui m'avez maudit!

In this love; my bliss, so sweet but so ephemeral,
I still can find the censer's fragrance and supreme
Delicious surrender to the nocturnal theme,
And the white pride of lilies beneath Eve's footfall.

Like memories a blind man's brain will often spawn,
Of roses, of jewelry, of sunrise and of corn,
Your image adds divine spark to my melancholy.

For, despite your cherished body, lewd and prone to sin
And your coal-black eyes smouldering of Italy,
I still am unaware that you are made of skin.

THE STONE-THROWER

My song eschews proud glory's kiss
Nor does it spring from facile wit:
Not Sable Muse nor Black Abyss
Nor 'Fleurs du Mal' occasion it.

And if its lines strike dismal notes
They signify life's outraged span
Amongst the fading sunlight's motes:
Not spleen on pre-determined plan.

A cripple, I proclaimed my prime,
My youth which weeps without the gates
Whose weakness helps the rest to climb,
Whose grief the mocking world berates.

For, reader, here's an ancient law
Whose truth stands up to scrutiny:
Men howling curses at your door
Promote the schemes of Destiny.

Hungry and torn by mental strife,
Shamed; with a plague-bedevilled air,
I've grown within my ruined life
A dream-flower coloured with despair.

Sad stones from Hell's unfathomed mists
I garner now to hurl at thee.
Beware my sober amethysts
O brothers who have hated me!

LES MAINS

Mon Dieu, j'ai blasphémé, prenant pour de la haine
Mon désenchantement qu'irritait ton azur,
Et je ne voyais pas dans mon esprit obscur
Couler sur tes pieds nus les pleurs de Madeleine.

Quand le limpide écho réverbère le chant
Des angelus, quand les avés parfument l'ombre,
O Christ, tu dois errer sur notre terre sombre,
Mêlant tes cheveux roux aux rousseurs du couchant.

A tous les carrefours j'ai guetté ton passage,
Scrutant les horizons et ne découvrant rien.
Mon attente était vaine, ô Rédempteur! si bien
Que je ne savais plus t'implorer qu'avec rage.

Tu viendras me guérir, pourtant un soir heureux,
Un soir riche d'encens et verdoyant de palmes,
Et tu m'imposeras sur le front tes mains calmes,
Comme aux aveugles, comme aux sourds, comme aux lépreux.

BALLADE

Pour expliquer pourquoi l'Auteur écrit des vers

'J'étouffe' fut mon premier cri
Au premier jour de mon enfance,
Jamais ne pointe en mon esprit
La moindre lueur d'espérance.
Morne, insultant par ma souffrance
A la gaîté de l'Univers,
Je puis tourner à la démente:
Voilà pourquoi j'écris des vers.

Je n'ai trouvé pour tout abri,
Contre le fouet de l'ignorance
Qui m'a si longuement meurtri
Muse, que ta tendresse immense.

THE HANDS

My God, I have through hatred and in ways profane
Expressed my disillusion: vexing your blue sky,
And in my gloomy spirit I could not descry
What dripped on your bare feet: the tears of Madeleine.

When limpid echoes chant and render the behest
Of the sweet Angelus; when aves scent the shades,
O Christ, you should explore our earth when sunshine fades,
Mingling your sandy locks with redness in the West.

At each cross-road I've lain in wait till you came forth,
And scanned horizons where there's nothing to be seen.
My hope, O blest Redeemer! was so very lean
That I besought you not, except in futile wrath.

But you will come to heal me on some joyous night,
A night effusing incense: verdant with the palm.
Upon my forehead you will lay your hands so calm,
As on the deaf, on lepers and on those bereft of sight.

BALLADE

To explain why the author writes verse

'I suffocate' was my first cry
On the day that I first saw light,
No glimmer of hope could I spy
To stab my poor mind with delight.
Sad, rebuffed, I suffered a slight
At the thought of the gay Universe,
I can turn to sheer madness all right:
Which is why I'm a writer of verse.

For sound shelter to help me defy
The lash of pure ignorant spite
Which has long bruised me, I find that I
Much prefer, Muse, your tender insight.

O mon unique jouissance
 Parmi mes multiples revers,
Tu seras aussi ma vengeance:
 Voilà pourquoi j'écris des vers.

Avec mes rimes de proscrit
 J'adoucirai la virulence
 Du vieux mal qui m'endolorit
 Le coeur ainsi qu'un fer de lance.
 Ma pensée âpre au loin s'élance
 Comme un vaisseau sur les flots verts.
 Mes pleurs ont fleuri le silence:
 Voilà pourquoi j'écris des vers.

Envoi

Prince, aujourd'hui, Prose et Finance
 Sont les filons des plus experts.
 Chanter, c'est une erreur. J'y pense:
 Voilà pourquoi j'écris des vers.

SONNET

à Jean RICHEPIN ...

Vous qui chantiez les gueux des champs et de la ville
 Sur la lyre qu'on fit pour les preux et les rois,
 Vous, l'ami des tortus et des porteurs de croix,
 Qui fîtes de la pourpre avec la loque vile,
 O bon sculpteur du Verbe, en ces jours pleins d'effrois,
 Où le tocsin languit parmi ceux qu'on mutile,
 Taillez dans l'airain pur de la strophe et du style
 Des vers qui sonneront au plus haut des beffrois.
 Car il faut couronner des fleurs des belles rimes
 La plèbe qui se bat en légions sublimes
 Comme au temps de Marceau les va-nu-pieds fougueux.
 Le peuple, ce lion écrasé par ses chaînes,
 Sera le seul vainqueur des victoires prochaines:
 Le laurier ne fleurit que dans le sang des gueux.

O my singular, joyful respite
 Amongst many a painful reverse,
 You will also revenge my sad plight:
 Which is why I'm a writer of verse.

With the outlawish rhymes which I ply
 I shall soften the virulent blight
 Of the old ill which makes my heart sigh
 And ache as from sword-point's sharp smite.
 My harsh thoughts sally forth in far flight
 Like ships on green waves sailing traverse.
 My tears flowered silence's night:
 Which is why I'm a writer of verse.

Envoy

Prince, today Prose and Cash are quite
 The most expert sources to nurse.
 Singing's wrong. This set my thoughts alight:
 Which is why I'm a writer of verse.

SONNET

to Jean RICHEPIN ...

You who care to laud the beggars of field and town
 On the lyre whereon warriors and kings are hymned,
 You, friend of cross-bearers and of the twisted-limbed,
 Who out of filthy rags produced the purple gown,

O sculptor of the Word, in these days with terror brimmed,
 When the tocsin pines amongst the maimed whom we struck
 down,

Cut in pure brass strophe and style of great renown –
 Verse which will sound from highest steeples unbedimmed.

For we must honour with the flowers of sweetest rhyme
 Commoners fighting in the legions' ranks sublime
 Like the bootless in Marceau's day, with 'passioned flood.

The people, this lion overburdened by his chains,
 Will be the sole victor of our future gains:
 The laurel only flowers in the beggars' blood.

PAROLES D'UN SOLDAT MOURANT

Le feu des Allemands m'a broyé les genoux
Et troué les poumons. Que de fleurs dans la plaine!
Mon âme, prête à fuir, de souvenirs est pleine.
C'est alors qu'on le perd que le jour semble doux.

Demain, mes compagnons viendront creuser des trous
Pour y coucher les morts, sans un pleur, sans un thrène.
Là nous consommerons une union sereine
Avec la terre chaude où germent les blés roux.

Soit. Le premier amour veut bien que l'on expire
Pour l'extase et l'orgueil qui forment son empire;
Tu fus ma passion première, ô sol natal.

France, Guerrière blonde, amante à forte sève,
Dans ton grand sein fécond étreins-moi, chair et rêve:
Je te donne en mourant le baiser nuptial.

CHANSON

Petit enfant, dors dans tes langes,
N'ouvre pas tes yeux étonnés,
Tes yeux habitués aux anges,
Sur notre monde de damnés.

Fi de l'humanité morose
Qu'enivre et que tourmente l'or;
Bercé par ta vision rose,
Petit enfant, sommeille encor.

Mais nous souffrons; en nous expire
La gaîté du printemps vermeil:
Petit enfant, que ton sourire
Nous rappelle un peu le soleil!

WORDS OF A DYING SOLDIER

The fire from German guns today has crushed my knees
And pierced my lungs. O flowers in the vale, so dear!
To my soul, ready to fly, memories appear.
Not till it's lost can the day's sweetness truly please.

Tomorrow will my friends dig hollows, and in these
Will lay the dead without a pang, without a tear.
There we shall hallow a reunion serene, sincere
With the warm earth where ruddy corn sprouts at its ease.

So be it. The first love decrees that I expire
For the ecstasy and pride which fashions his empire;
O native soil, you were my first love, premier bliss.

France, fair Amazon, lover of strength supreme,
Clasp me in your fecund bosom, flesh and dream:
In dying I bestow on you the nuptial kiss.

A SONG

Baby sleep in swaddling band,
Shut your wond'ring eyes, my child,
Eyes which angels' gaze withstand,
Peep not at our world's defiled.

Glum humanity, what shame,
Tortured sots bewitched by gold;
Baby, let your rose-dream's flame
Soothingly your brain enfold.

But we suffer; in us ends
Scarlet Spring's most joyful tint:
Baby, how your smile transcends:
Conjures up a sunbeam's glint.

TENTATION

Mère, tu m'as sauvé.

Voici comment.

Hier,

Je regardais s'enfuir les rails d'ombre et de fer,
 Les longs rails meurtriers du chemin électrique,
 Dans la brume, le long du lac mélancolique;
 Et, le site assoupi m'incitant au repos,
 Aux lumières du hall, sur de grands écritaux,
 Je déchiffrais, gagné d'une sourde espérance,
 Ces mots mystérieux et solennels: 'Défense
 'De traverser jamais les rails. Danger de mort.'
 Et je me trouvais seul, pensant avec effort:
 'Les gens craignent la mort comme on craint une peine,
 'La belle Fiancée aux prunelles d'ébène.
 'O les fous, redouter son baiser amoureux!'
 Je m'étais approché, tranquille, de la voie,
 Et j'étendais la main vers le rail qui foudroie,
 Mais je perçus alors en un sanglot soudain,
 Ta pauvre vieille voix qui demande du pain!

A MA MERE

Ton coeur s'est-il usé, ma mère?
 Je n'ose, devant tes yeux froids,
 T'adresser l'ardente prière
 De m'embrasser comme autrefois.

Je n'ose, te sachant aigrie
 Par les ans et la pauvreté,
 Te raconter la rêverie
 De l'enfant que je suis resté.

Je voudrais pour quelques minutes
 Poser mon front sur tes genoux
 Et m'y reposer de mes luttes
 En un ressouvenir très doux.

TEMPTATION

You've saved me, Mother,
I'll explain how.

Yesterday,
I gazed upon the gloomy iron way,
The lengthy, lethal rail's electric wake
Glimmered in mist beside the lonely lake;
The sleepy place bespoke of the delights
Of resting here, and by the station's lights,
Urged by an idle interest, I read,
On giant boards this notice, dark and dread:
'Beware! Danger of death. Therefore no one
May cross this line'. I thought, whilst quite alone:
'These folk fear death as one would fear a pain,
The black-eyed beauty: she to whom I'm swain.
What fools they are to fear her loving kiss.'
I walked up to the platform's edge, all calm
And t'ords the thund'rous rail I stretched my arm,
Then, all at once, I heard your poor thin voice
Cry out for bread. I sobbed. I had no choice.

TO MY MOTHER

Is your heart quite worn out, Mother dear?
I am scared by the chill of your gaze
From importuning you with a tear
To embrace me as in the old days.

I dare not, so embittered you seem
By your poverty and the years' strain,
Tell you now of the beautiful dream
Of your baby; which I shall remain.

Let me steal a short respite from life;
Let me rest my poor brow on your knees
And hand over my portion of strife
Whilst recapturing past reveries.

Je me croirais encore à l'âge
Des papillons blancs et des fleurs.
Je croirais qu'ayant été sage,
Je m'endors en tes bras berceurs.

J'ai tant besoin d'une caresse.
D'un mot qui me console un peu!
Si je perds aussi ta tendresse
Que ferai-je sous le ciel bleu?

C'est pour toi, c'est pour mon vieux père,
Qu'alors que m'appelait le glas,
J'ai poursuivi ma voie amère.
Tu sais à quel point je suis las.

Je comprenais jadis l'ivresse
Du soleil, des prés refleuris:
Ce qui me restait de jeunesse,
Votre misère me l'a pris.

Rends-moi l'illusion propice,
Egrène-moi tes vieux récits.
Je crois aux contes de nourrice
Lorsque c'est toi qui me les dis.

BALLADE DE LA MORT

Berceuse au froid timbre cassé,
J'endors au milieu des ruines
Le moribond et le blessé;
Et j'apparais dans les bruines
Après l'explosion des mines,
Aux naufragés songeant au port.
A moi les glaives, les famines:
Je suis Sa Majesté la Mort.

Blanche déesse, on m'a dressé,
Dans le flamboiement des chaumines,
Un autel noir du sang versé.
Trois empereurs sont mes flamines,

I felt young as the bud of a flower:
 As a butterfly's white wedding dress.
 Can such wisdom earn me a brief hour
 Of repose rocked in your arms' caress?

Oh I need to be fondled by you,
 To hear some of your comforting words!
 If your sweetness fails, so will the blue
 Of the sky and the chant of the birds.

So that you and dear Dad have their day,
 When the toll of the bell summoned me
 I held fast to my wearisome way:
 And you know what true tiredness can be.

Once the sun or fresh blooms in the fields
 Made me reel in deep drunkenness:
 But what's left of my youth perforce yields
 To the nightmare of your wretchedness.

Run over your tales of old times,
 Give me back the lost hope of my dreams.
 I'll believe still in nursery rhymes:
 But only if you sing the themes.

BALLAD OF DEATH

In the midst of the ruins I stand,
 I, crooner at their cradle, lulling with my cold,
 the dying and the wounded; [cracked voice
 in the mist I appear
 (after the explosion of the mines)
 to the castaways hungering for harbour.
 Famine and the sword are mine:
 I am His Majesty Death.

They've set me up: a white goddess.
 In the inferno of the blazing huts,
 a black altar bespattered with blood.
 As priests — three emperors,

Et j'aspire à pleines narines
 – Encens dont le désir me mord –
 La poudre, aux senteurs si divines:
 Je suis Sa Majesté la Mort.

J'effleure avec mon doigt glacé,
 Celles qui, douces et chagrines,
 Rêvent du fils, du fiancé:
 Leur coeur sanglote en leurs poitrines;
 J'y plante, en passant, des épines.
 Chastes bonheurs, lys couleur d'or,
 Ma faux va trancher vos racines:
 Je suis Sa Majesté la Mort.

ENVOI

*à Sa Majesté Guillaume II
 Empereur d'Allemagne*

Kaiser, je t'aime, et tes hermines
 Sont mon soleil de Messidor.
 Apôtre ardent de mes doctrines,
 Je suis Sa Majesté la Mort.

AUX MORTS IGNORES

Vous êtes morts afin que l'avenir fleurisse;
 Votre chair formera nos grappes et nos blés,
 Et nous profiterons de votre sacrifice
 Sans jamais rien savoir de vos coeurs immolés.

Car tout ce qui fut vous, ô victimes sans nombre,
 Achève de mourir en d'ignorés sanglots,
 Et vous avez passé par une route d'ombre
 De la nuit du néant à la nuit des tombeaux.

Vous avez, humbles Christs, rédempteurs anonymes,
 Gravi le sentier âpre et saigné sur la croix,
 Mais le rayonnement des Calvaires sublimes
 N'a point auréolé vos fronts blêmes et froids.

and I inhale gratefully, totally
— incense sending me —
divinely scented powder:
I am His Majesty Death.

I, with my icy fingers lightly brush
those sweetly gloomy folk who
dream of son or lover:
I plant thorns in their chests,
chests heaving with sobs, as I pass by.
Chaste happiness, golden lilies,
my scythe will cut your roots:
I am His Majesty Death.

ENVOY

*to His Majesty William II
Emperor of Germany*

Kaiser, I love you; and your ermine
is my sun of Messidore.
Ardent apostle of my doctrines,
I am His Majesty Death.

TO THE UNKNOWN DEAD

You died that future worlds might boldly bloom;
We garner from your flesh our fruit and grain,
And we shall gain because you faced your doom
Though never sensing how your souls were slain.

For your true selves, O victims without sum,
Embrace your deaths with sobs whose sound we miss,
And down a shadow-haunted way you've come
From nothing's night to night of tomb's abyss.

You, humble Christs, redeemers quite unsung,
Have climbed the rugged path; bled on the cross,
But your bright Calvaries whereon you hung
Left your pale brows without a halo's gloss.

Sur vos restes pourris, non point de gerbes roses,
Point de marbres sculptés intimidant les pleurs ...
Mais c'est surtout pour vous qu'en nos coeurs sont écloses
Des floraisons d'amour et de saintes douleurs.

Vous êtes trop nombreux et trop grands pour la gloire.
Martyrs au sort obscur, aux actes de clarté,
Votre oeuvre ne veut pas de clinquant dérisoire
Vous êtes au-dessus de l'immortalité.

Par sa grandeur tragique et par sa vastitude,
L'Inconnu seul pouvait draper votre sommeil.
Vous n'avez point de noms. Mais c'est la multitude
Des rayons innommés qui forme le soleil.

LEVEL DE SOLEIL

Jailli de la lagune sombre,
Un globe rouge et sans rayons
Lentement s'élève dans l'ombre
Investissant l'onde et les monts;
Et des reflets roses, des moires,
Troublant le sommeil des oiseaux,
Tranchent sur les eaux encor noires
Et se glissent dans les roseaux.
— Bienheureux celui-là dont l'âme,
En un calme ravissement
Laisse ta lumière et ta flamme,
Aurore, éclore en son tourment;
Heureux qui peut cueillir du rêve,
Soleil, en tes floraisons d'or,
Et croire qu'avec toi se lève
Nu, l'Amour riant de la Mort!

On your remains no wreaths of roses rot,
No marble blocks compel our tears to flow ...
Yet you alone within our hearts begot
A flowering of love and saintly woe.

Too noble and too numerous for fame,
Martyrs, your deeds from chance obscurity
Shine forth, but have no bombast as their aim:
You are above all immortality.

His tragic grandeur and his magnitude
Enable 'L'Inconnu' to clothe your dreams.
You have no names. But it's the multitude
Of nameless rays which gives the sun its beams.

SUNRISE

From lagoon's deep gloom emerges
Rayless and vermilion globe
Which from darkness upwards surges
Drapes o'er hill and sea its robe;
And with rose and moiré glitter
Makes aware the bird which sleeps
Piercing lakes still darkly bitter,
And midst reedy shallows creeps.
— Happy he whose heart, translated
From its anguished grief, O dawn,
With exquisite calmness sated,
Of your fiery lightness born.
Happy he whose dream devises
All your gilded flowers, O sun,
And believes that with you rises
Naked Love, who mocks death's fun!