

Guze Chetcuti called a 'Rose of Maltese Literature'



Fr Hermann Duncan

Guze Chetcuti was born in Cospicua on 11 August 1914. He studied at St Albert Central school in Valletta. He joined the Department of Education as a teacher between 1936 and 1946. Among the various posts he held, he also worked as a Store Officer in the Medical Health Department in 1938, and as a translator and broadcaster at the Information Office between 1946 and 1954. A few years later he re-joined the Department of Education, between 1956 and 1974 where he taught Maltese at the Lyceum. He spent two years giving Maltese lectures at the Mater Admirabilis Teacher Training College in Tal-Virtu in Rabat, Malta, and at the Upper Secondary School which today is known as Junior College. For a period of time he was a Maltese language examiner for the civil service exams and other public examinations.

Guze Chetcuti was a member of the Maltese writers' union and secretary between 1938 and 1946. He was also a member of the Maltese central council in 1945. He was one of the founders spreading the Maltese language in 1939 and was a member of the Maltese Revival Committee in 1943. In addition he was assistant director of *Il-Malti* (The Maltese) between 1939 and 1942. Chetcuti also assisted in publishing the literary magazine *Lehen il-Malti* (Voice of the Maltese) which was issued by the University of Malta. He formed part of the sub-committee in matters of orthography where he later became, Vice President in 1990, Honorary President in 1998, and finally President.

He passed to eternal life on Tuesday, 18 July 2006 at the venerable age of 91. His funeral was held in the parish church of Stella Maris in Sliema celebrated by Mons. Victor Grech director of Caritas, also from Cospicua. In the homily he called Chetcuti a "Rose of Maltese Literature".

We will now take a short look at some of his writings.

In '*Il-Hajja fl-Isqaq*' (*Life in the Alley*) he talks about the hypocrisy among people in the heart of the village where he experienced childhood joy and sorrow. The author lived in this alley when he was 12 years old, following the death of his father.



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In this story he expresses how much he suffered when he had to leave his home to live in this noisy alley. He describes the powerful character of his mother, who worked courageously in spite of encountering sad events such as when a girl was beaten.

His memories stand out in his beautiful description of when he attended nursery school (kindergarten) run by the sisters and when he used to go to the

market in Cospicua with his father on the eve of the feast of St Martin, as well as painful memories such as when his grandfather died and when the Dock Yard workers went out on strike which led to the tragic events of *Sette Giugno* when protests against the high cost of living took place.

He remembers various streets in his village, one in particular where he met Saint George Preca who kissed his feet which inspired him to write the novel *Fra Martin* (*Br Martin*), and



neighbouring tenants inspired him to write *Il-Kerrejja* 'The Tenants' which was acted at the Manoel Theatre by the Malta Drama League, in Xaghra Gozo and at the Salesian Theatre in Sliema.

Chetcuti's works

Chetcuti's prose is based on reality, while he used his literature to educate. In his novels Chetcuti shows clearly the consequences that lead man to poverty. This can be seen in novels like *It-Tnalja* "The Pliers" and *L-Isqaq* "The Alley", and many other novels which are considered today to be a clear and realistic portrayal of society which left many casualties in the grip of social change.

The writings of Chetcuti can be considered Maltese literary masterpieces. In many of his writings, he showed himself to be a writer inspired by values of Christian charity and social justice. One can say that Guze Chetcuti was a literary-defender of the poor and the weak.

Chetcuti's plays and novels show his testimony of Maltese life which he did with the best poetic realism.

Chetcuti showed the importance of Romantic poetry in our country. He held a great love for farmers as well as simplicity of life. Furthermore he wrote about love and its power. He also wrote about troubles, the joy of life and the Christian faith that he witnessed.

For people to understand literature better, Guze Chetcuti also published books on literary criticism. Chetcuti was also a translator and translated into Maltese many works including

those by V. M Pellegrini and G Curmi.

He would often meet several personalities from the world of literature such as Professor Guze Aquilina, Dun Karm Psaila, Ninu Cremona and 'Il-Gross' who was a man of great wisdom. He was also a friend of Giovanni Curmi an honest friend and good person, Guze Cassar Pullicino a famous folklorist and Anton Buttigieg a poet of great calibre.

Among his many publications we find: *Poeziji* (Poems) (1945), *Gabra ta' Studji Kritici* (Collection of Critical Studies) (1946) and *Poeziji Marjani* (Marian Poems) (1952) *Il-Hajja Nżul u Tlajja* (Lifes - Ups and downs) (1964) and *Novels, Id-Dawl ta' Hajja* (The light of Life) (1958) *Mhabba u Mewt* (Love and Death) (1961) *Nirien ta' Mhabba* (Fires of Love) (1967) and *Plays* (Dramas), including radio-plays on the Redifusion like *Il-Kerrejja* (The Tenants) (1963) and *Mhuf morda* (Sick Brains) (1966). Furthermore he wrote a teleserial called *Marwela*.

We also find translations, from Italian to Maltese, of G. Curmi. *Mewta Waqt Pranzu* (Death During Dinner) (1958), *Fil-Palazz tal-Angwillara* (In the Palace of Angwillara) (1959), *Tkexkix* (Chills) (1959) *Epistolarju Romantiku* (Romantic Epistolary) (1965), *I-Irmied* (The Ashes) (1965) and *Il-Martiri* (The Martyrs) by V.M. Pellegrini (1967).

Chetcuti wrote many other works which cannot all be mentioned here.

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