

Book Reviews:

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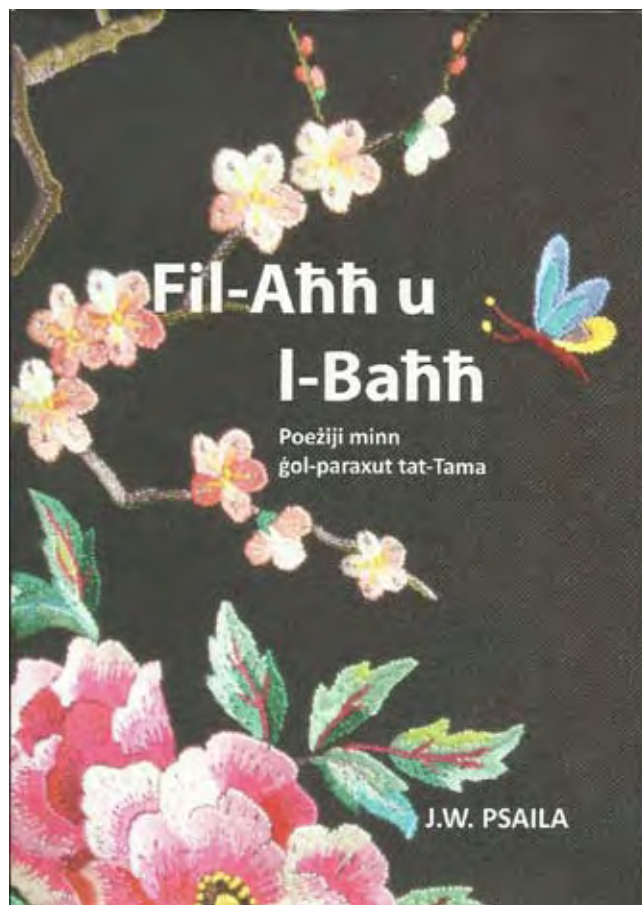
Fil-Aħħ u l-Baħħ. Poeżiji minn ġol-Paraxut tat-Tama

Joe W. Psaila,
Gozo, Gozo Press, 2013, pp. 150.

One of Gozo's less-known poets who has slowly established himself as one of the island's leading poets is undoubtedly Joe W. Psaila, a middle-aged poet from Victoria who spent his life in the education sector mainly as a P. E. Teacher.

Fil-Aħħ u l-Baħħ is the fourth anthology that Psaila has given us. The first anthology was called *Graffiti f'Gerduf* evoking one of Gozo's earliest Christian sites and published in 1993. It was followed by *Xewqat* a decade later in 2003 and the very inspiring *Tabilhaqqiet Varji u Taparsijiet Veri* in 2006. His latest anthology is mainly inspired by the unpredictable death of his dear wife Mary-Jane a couple of years ago, a difficult moment in the poet's life that must have devastated him to the point of creating a barrage of poems inspired by the sad event.

Poetry is the language of the heart. It has been said that every human being is born a poet. However not every human being is given the gift of poetic expression. The poet who writes poetry has therefore a representative role in the sense that he represents the entire community in his expression of the deepest emotions. Psaila's *Fil-Aħħ u l-Baħħ* is the voice of a soul in grief crying out for the presence of its lost partner, the other half that nobody can replace. It is quite common for a married poet to sing his suffering and grief in his melancholically verses. Anton Buttigieg, the 'poet of nature' from Qala and a lawyer by profession, wrote a poem dedicated to his wife who passed away; it is known as *Il-Mewt tas-Sieħba*. Ruzar Briffa, dubbed 'the poet of childhood and beauty' was also influenced by the death of his wife whom he survived and the theme of suffering surfaces quite often in his poetry. Psaila continues on this



tradition airing his sentiments of grief through profound thoughts fossilised in words.

The book's foreword is rich in meaning. It is in itself a spiritual treatise and it uncovers in the most manifest of manners the religious profundity and the rock-hard faith of Psaila the poet who even in his 'dark night' – to use St John of the Cross' classical phrase – remained true to his faith and in the company of God who walks with him. Grief can either lead to the loss of faith or to the enrichment of it. In Psaila's case, death, which he nicknames the great 'leveller' is not to be abhorred but rather embraced and like Jacopone

da Todi, the Italian poet to whom the legendary *Stabar Mater* is attributed, he chooses to make peace with it and live through. The poet's one and only tool that helps him and protects him from falling into the abyss of the existential 'angst' is the 'parachute of hope'. As he opens a dialogue with the creator in the poem *Ordnajt Ħarifa*, Psaila acknowledges the fact that although he has ordered an 'autumn' from the restaurant of life, he has been given 'spring' instead. As Trevor Zahra's *Stella, Jien u Hu* came to mind, I read Psaila's poem *Int, Hu u Jien* in which he comes to terms with the summoning of his wife by God to eternal

life – 'ġbartha għalik bla kliem u bla sliem' (you called her to you unpredictably) – and then he is invited by the Almighty to stand on his feet and continue his earthly journey.

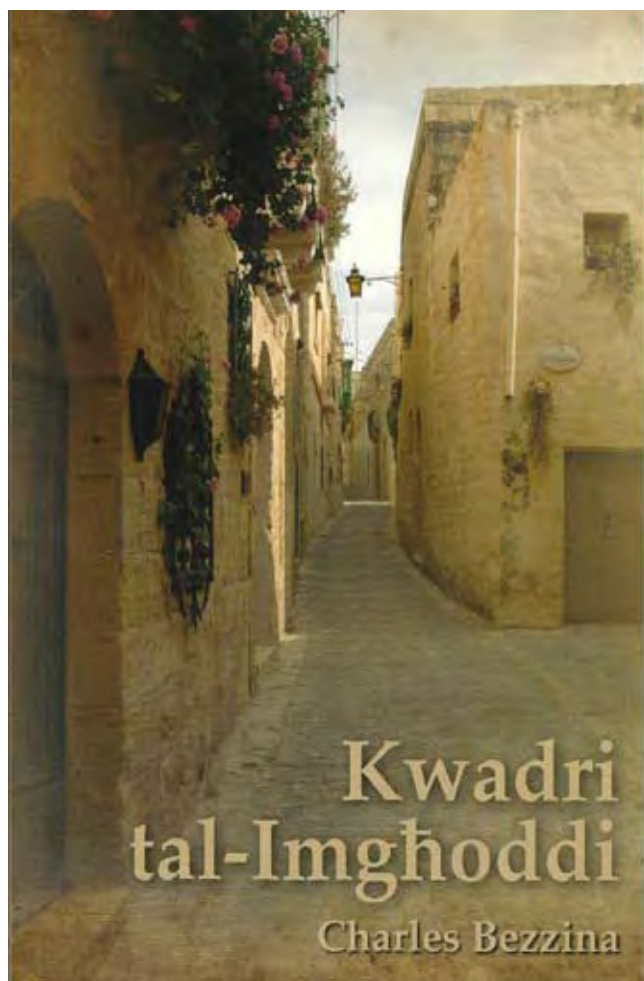
Joe W. Psaila's latest collection of poetry is a hymn in honour of a loving wife who has impoverished the life of her husband with her going away to a better life; one has no choice but to accept Arthur Schopenhauer's famous dictum 'Without death neither philosophy nor poetry would have existed'. Psaila has proved him right all the way.

Kwadri tal-Imghoddi

**Charles Bezzina,
Gozo, Self published, 2012, pp. 123.**

Kwadri tal-Imghoddi is the name of the latest publication by Gozitan poet and writer Charles Bezzina of Victoria. The Bezzina family has produced a significant number of writers specialising mainly in the field of research. I have in mind Charles' own father the late Frank Bezzina (1925-1996) who wrote various historical accounts of the war in the Gozo as well as his brother John (1932-1998) who contributed to the history of Gozo by a great number of articles most of them published in the now no longer published newspaper *Il-Berqa*. Then, Charles' cousin Rev. Dr. Joseph Bezzina (1950-) is the author of the renowned series *Gaulitana* through which he slowly established himself as 'Gozo's leading historian'.

Kwadri tal-Imghoddi falls under the category of autobiographical literature. This branch of literature is quite interesting because it is a cross-breed between a proper autobiography and a historical novel. As I was half way through the book, what came to my mind was Biagio Galea's *L-Imdina ta' Tfuliti* published way back in 1989. I remember it was one of those books which squared



well with my field of interest. Bezzina's book is different from Galea's because it is not a flowing narration of the writer's experiences divided under different headings according to different aspects. On the other hand Bezzina focuses on many characters which endowed daily life in the sixties in the town of Victoria, where the author himself was born and raised and still lives. Charles Bezzina writes from his own experience. As I read through his rich character sketches in my imagination I could almost see the author throwing his imaginary bucket of life-experiences down into the deep well of his past memories and bringing up beautiful nostalgic experiences of his which he then presents to the reader as life-size portraits. I have to say that although I have not known any of the twenty-one persons (with the exception of one) about whom he writes his sketches, Bezzina has succeeded in instilling the breath of life once again into these otherwise dead Gozitan characters. As the reader reads on, he or she begins to see the very person he is reading about; it is as if the characters are called back to life from beyond the grave. This makes for interesting reading.

Kwadri tal-Imghoddi is written mainly in prose, however, the character sketches have been rightly referred to as 'portraits' (*kwadri*) and it is the poetry that flows throughout the narrative that gives the book that personal touch which makes it both unique and captivating. Each and every sketch is preceded by a poem of a biographical

nature and the reader should not even for a split second underestimate the fact that the writer is also an accomplished poet.

The book has an introduction by Professor Oliver Friggieri and contains photographs of some of the characters discussed within its pages. I would have preferred the book to carry the title *Kwadri Rabtin tal-Imghoddi* since the author writes from his perspective and background as a *Rabti*, a citizen of Gozo's town and the majority of the characters come from Victoria. Although it is not mainly a scientific book of research I believe it is a valuable contribution to *Gaulitana* – the term now used for the history of Gozo – and specifically to the history of Rabat, Gozo's medieval city whose roots go beyond the Middle Ages. It is a book that will also instil among middle-aged and elderly readers such nostalgic feelings that no branch of art – noble and articulate as it may be – can ever aptly express. I recommend *Kwadri tal-Imghoddi* to one and all.

Fr. Geoffrey Attard's bionote appears on page 27.