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## A NEW FEATURE ON POETRY

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In this issue we are introducing a new feature. This is a lengthy article on Maltese poetry by the Rev. Peter Serracino Inglott, who has been recently appointed Head of the Department of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts. We wish the new Professor and his Department good luck which, academically, means success in the pursuit of intellectual development guided by the light of truly logical reasoning and when too many philosophies disagree and cancel one another, by Common Sense. This is a good opportunity both for congratulating the new professor and for introducing a new feature written by him, a scholar's study in our home language. Now that Maltese is the official language of the University together with the English Language we would be failing in our duty if we refused to publish a scholarly article in Maltese on the assumption that our language, like so many other small peoples' languages, has a limited circulation. Our first obligation is towards our own people; for the benefit of our non-Maltese readers, we have provided an abstract in English. There is a great deal of poetry writing in Malta at the moment and also a sort of battle of wits by some of the enthusiastic younger generation (a few iconoclasts too!) who have built a very conspicuous niche in the local press for their type of poetry which is untraditional because it is structurally different from Dun Karm's, to mention one example, and, like so much poetry in other languages, too comfortably, and sometimes uncomfortably, free from the restraint of technical discipline which created great poetry in the past. A remarkable feature of this new type of Verse is the unscrewing and loosening of the grammatical, syntactical and cognitive nexuses which marks the parting of the ways between the old and the new. Today's ancients were yesterday's moderns, and today's young, incidentally, if their literary movement will meet with better luck than Dadaism or Surrealism, will be tomorrow's established ancients facing the battle of

another generation of other moderns according to the time-established pattern in the succession of one generation after another as we age along, guitar in hand, singing what we may consider our masterpiece.

We do hope that Prof. P. Serracino Inglott's essay originally delivered at the British Council on 25th May, 1971, will be considered not only pleasant reading but also an exercise in provocative thinking. A poem is like a rose; its beauty is judged by the combination of its shape, fragrance and colour which lose their identity when they fall apart, and its ugliness by the absence of these three attributes which grow from within the rose bush and are not imposed upon it from outside. Genius creates the native product which it fits in the right pattern instinctively. Where there is no real genius, there is artifice, and who prefers an artificial rose to the real genuine Super-Star, to mention one particular rose, for instance? I feel that those who speak too glibly about old and new techniques sometimes get lost or entangled in confusing, often pretentious, verbiage and in the process forget that the dynamics of genuine poetry have always been, and will continue to be, the dynamics of a compelling poetic force which moves the poet's thought and heart in unison from inside. There was some sense in the description of poetry or its inspiration as *afflatus divinus*. Poetry is often prophetic precisely for that reason.

This is a subject that deserves a more detailed expert study with illustrations from past and contemporary poets, and this is more than I can do in an editorial. But in inviting Prof. P. Serracino Inglott to let me publish his British Council talk in this journal, I think I have provided some good material for discussion and debate by our poetry societies.

I end with the remark that, as in everything else, we grow and evolve within tradition, and if tradition in this sense permits the process of evolution, one can hardly justify the attitude of those who turn their backs on the past or even their immediate predecessors under the impression that in looking away and ahead they are going to create everything from scratch in form and content, like a band of brave, daring Columboises discovering new territories.

In the meantime, let there be more experiments. We leave the final sifting to our great Master and Teacher: Time.

28th September, 1971

THE EDITOR

## MALTESE POETRY, 1960-1970

(Abstract to the Maltese Text)

By PETER SERRACINO-INGLOTT

THE decade 1960-1970 was marked by the belated growth of a 'modernist' school of poets in Maltese Literature. In the first edition (1948) of the representative anthology compiled by Professor Aquilina, *Il-Muza Maltija*, all 22 poets included wrote in verse-forms adapted from traditional Italian poetry. In the second edition (1964), 23 new poets were included, but of these only two, Achille Mizzi and the writer of this note, departed from the conventional forms. In the third edition (1970), 20 new names were added, of whom 6 can be counted as belonging to the 'moderns', while several others show the influence of the new trends. These figures show that, at last, Maltese poetry is breaking out of the isolation from the modern world which marked the first period of its growth.

Why was 'modernism' so late in coming to Malta? It is suggested that the characteristics of modern poetry required several conditions for its birth which were not until now fulfilled. Maltese society, culture, language and personality were still in a state which did not correspond to the situation elsewhere in the world where the typical poetry of our age was born.

In the first place, Malta was dependent on alien forces. There was hardly the possibility of an independent expression of the specific features of the national character. Of this, the Maltese language itself is the reflexion. It is a mixed semitic-romance language, and hence hard to fit into the verse-forms connatural to either Italian or Arabic. Only a very unsophisticated poet (Mary Meilaq) expressed herself in forms resembling (unintentionally) popular Arab verse, which remains largely unknown in Malta. All the others used Italian verse forms. It is only with the realisation of the distinctive character of the Maltese Language, which is a dialect neither of Italian, nor of Arabic, that the need for distinctive poetic forms came to be felt.

In the second place, Malta was still a 'closed' society, with a very ordered framework of existence, in which experience readily fell into a predetermined pattern established by long tradition and tight convention. To this, the 'closed' forms of traditional poetry conformed perfectly. The fixed units of expression, cast into closely-bound syntactical structures, in strictly-regulated order, reflected the social condition of pre-Second-World-War Malta. A word was bound to its neighbour in a dense cluster