

Joe Friggieri and Salvino Busuttill (eds), *Interfaces: essays in philosophy and bordering themes in honour of Peter Serracino Inglott*, University of Malta, Malta, pp. xiv+311.

Turning sixty is not a merit – unless, of course, one has something to show for it.

“Father Peter”, as he is widely and affectionately known (cf p. 91), has so many achievements on his record that it was fitting to bring out in a work dedicated to him the *multifaceted* aspect of his activity. And yet, those who know him even through one activity alone have enough to judge – comparing this one work with the whole person – how true it is that these various faces are *interrelated*, accounting for an unmistakable profile. How PSI found time to indulge in so many activities without losing himself on the way brings unwittingly to mind T.S. Eliot’s *The Love song of J. Alfred Prufrock*: “There will be a time, there will be a time/ To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet ...”. Indeed, to somebody who knows PSI primarily from his poetry a comparison with Eliot may come by itself!

Father Peter’s own biography reads like a Horatio Alger story, with plenty of rags (he slept under bridges so as to be able to afford his studies) and a multitude of riches (many an

unconventional platform served as a makeshift cathedra). All these vibrating strands of humanity meet, as with the swinging of a pendulum, at *Ta’ l-Għaxra u Nofs* in All Souls’ chapel (cf p. 279), to form an improbable congregation. What with the nearby Neolithic Temples as background scenery and PSI’s four whining cats as background music, Christian wit here acquires time-hallowed perspective. Revelling in imagery, PSI likes to match image and music, while architecture becomes the sounding-board of his ideas (pp. 268–271). No wonder that the Manikata church, which he helped inspire and inaugurate, is cast as a theatre of the Spirit, which opens onto the post-modern world without losing sight of Malta’s Baroque past (p. 269). Interesting is in this regard PSI’s comment: far from dwarfing the rest of the village, the Baroque church introduces an electrifying touch of anticipation (p. 259).

Indeed, a recurrent image in Fr Peter is the clown, but this is never taken lightly or reduced to a sheer play on words. “Time flies” is a facetious quote with which *Peopled Silence* begins urging us to time insect velocity; but, in an amazing little essay which says so much in the compass of so little, he understands Dun Gorg as a “fool in Christ” (see pp. 283f on spiritual childhood). One is amazed how resilient, and not just well-read, PSI can

be to the multiplicity and multivalence of traditions, in both East and West (cf p. 261).

The reverse side of the clown is the world of "Silenced People," a follow-up he never wrote (though *It-tieni mewta' Lazzru* is good for a start); of the hunchback of Notre Dame; of Rigoletto, hoist with his own petard; of the thousand and one victims ushered out too quickly to be able to attain even tragic status. Enigma, after all, leaves an uncanny feeling and paradox is what truth manages to engender by way of suspense, whether jolly or jolty. In his *Curriculum Vitae* PSI speaks of initial bouts of grovelling nightlong on his prayer mat without a hint of a smile (p. 304); and, while he did not become a social worker to console the afflicted, he was even willing to champion a cause, so long as he was convinced of its rightness, whether in bringing to light old fossils (cf pp. 262–264) or in upholding the rights of future generations (pp. 167f).

The present essays are an intelligent token of gratitude to one of the most gifted Maltese of our times. The Preface well delineates the physiomy and the achievement, although it is far too short. Father Peter may well be termed the second founder of the university of Malta, which, in his own words, from a university became a "multiversity" (p. xiii). Even if Mary Ann Cassar's

"Annotated Bibliography" (pp. 261–302) is a most welcome pointer in a labyrinth, a real indepth study and presentation of PSI is lacking in the book as a whole; and one may regret that PSI's bibliography is not complete (p. 301).

Much can be said in favour of the first part on logic and philosophy of language (pp. 1–88). Given its abstract character, logic is a way of making faces at the truth; yet the owl makes a living out of it and, besides, making faces can run the whole gamut from dull to brilliant, saucy or just silly. The philosophical essays raise a number of interesting issues; but I miss an overview study of Maltese philosophers, among whom PSI would occupy an important place.

From the philosophy of religion section may be mentioned, on the background of the soulsearching concerning the papacy and the *Final Report* of the Anglican/Roman-Catholic International Commission, J. Haldane's attempt to show that the doctrine of infallibility is neither incoherent nor empty (p. 93). But as the pope himself, in *Ut Unum sint* (1995), seems to consider the practical running of his office to be the real issue, it would have been interesting to relate the theme to this aspect.

How much earnestness there is to

PSI's approach is shown by part three, which broaches ethical themes. F. Mayor strikes a keynote in his "Ethique du temps": in order not to arrive too late with vital decisions, as those which regard the environment, when the damage is irreversible, we need the alertness which philosophy inculcates. Such a presence of mind the author finds in PSI's book, *Beginning Philosophy* (pp. 151f).

Paul Streeten's tribute in "Hunger" (pp. 153–164) is moving: "Peter, among his many interests, has always had a deep concern for the poor. I therefore thought that an essay on hunger in the world today would be an appropriate contribution to honour him" (pp. 153f).

In his "The Rights of Future Generations" (pp. 165–187) E. Agius brings out PSI's contribution to the debate on the rights of future generations, an interest which ultimately goes back to the mid-sixties, but which was revamped in the early eighties, when UNESCO chose PSI as a member of a team to work out an overall document on precisely this topic (p. 167f). In insisting that the rights of

posterity are part of the collective rights of humanity (p. 172) PSI helped shape the new Law of the Sea of the United Nations (pp. 175f).

The founder of the International Ocean Institute, Elisabeth Mann Borgese, while acknowledging the yeoman service Arvid Pardo, Malta's representative to the United Nations General Assembly, rendered in introducing the concept of the "common heritage of mankind" (p. 190; cfr p. 168), makes a pressing appeal to PSI, who was behind the move (p. xii), to see to it that this excellent human platform weathers the storm (p. 189; cf. pp. 191, 193).

So there goes Fr Peter. The personal touch present everywhere in this book sizes him up in the mirror of the environment's warm response to him, yet also goes to show that his huge success did not rise to his head. He remained all along a thinker with a big heart.

Edward G. Farrugia, SJ
Pontificio Istituto Orientale
Piazza S. Maria Maggiore, 7
00185 ROMA – ITALIA