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THE ROYAL UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

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COMMENT

THE PUBLICATION of this review gives us great pleasure and great pain. The pleasure is our reward and the pain is our punishment – the reward is for the time we spend on its preparation which makes possible the printing of some good articles and the pain is our disappointment at its irregular appearance for which we apologise to our readers. Our hope is that one day we shall succeed in regularising our publication dates; but there are still some hurdles in the way not easy to overcome such as our many personal academic commitments and the type of time-wasting Composomatic printing machine on which we have to rely. Even so, though we are a small University with small means, we think we are doing our best. After all, not all the Faculties of much larger universities publish their own review. We do hope that the articles in this number will please at least some of our readers. With so many books and reviews on the market intelligent busy readers short of time have to be selective. To deserve their attention, we publish articles which we consider worth reading and interesting from one angle or another. One particular angle which we think will interest non-Maltese readers is the Maltese angle. We are a small but very hardy people – people with our own history and immemorial civilization. We describe our civilization as immemorial because it begins with a very high grade civilization from the prehistoric era (the earliest Maltese built wonderful megalithic temples) continuing into contemporary times with a largely humanitarian civilization, religiously Christian and culturally Latin.

We are trying to promote the welfare of the University of Malta which is the oldest University in the British Commonwealth Overseas, but the burdens which the new times are imposing on our University are too heavy for us to carry alone unaided. Malta, which has ceased to be a British Colony but has remained within the British Commonwealth, for a long

time will have to continue relying on the good will and help of the Friends of Malta. Fortunately, we still have our friends in the U.K. to whom we are grateful for help in many ways. Such invaluable friends are the British Council whose Representative in Malta, Mr. P.R.V. Deed, has proved himself a friend of our University. The Faculty of Arts is very grateful to Mr. Deed and the British Council for the donation of 12 booths which have made possible the creation of a Language Laboratory in our department. We are grateful to the Inter-University Council and the R.U.M. Commission, thanks to whose efforts and functions of an advisory and executive nature, we shall shortly move to our University buildings beautifully situated on top of *Tal-Qroqq* (Msida).

We take this opportunity to congratulate the Chairman of the R.U.M. Commission on his elevation to the peerage. To Lord John Fulton, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sussex and his colleagues on the R.U.M. Commission, the Maltese members of the teaching staff look for justice in their plea for an urgent rectification of the anomalous salaries which are paid to the local staff who have put up so long with the ignominy of seeing highly qualified Heads of Departments being paid less than expatriate lecturers. Among these expatriate lecturers there are also some Maltese who are being paid expatriates' higher salaries because though Maltese, born of Maltese parents, they were born outside Malta and are not Maltese citizens! These deserve their salary, but their native countrymen deserve better treatment. Because fair is fair, all our expatriate colleagues agree.

No wonder that some of the members of the Faculty of Arts have sought and obtained teaching posts in other Universities. Two from the Faculty of Arts are: Dr. D. Sultana, who has joined the Department of English in the University of Edinburgh and the Rev. Professor R. Cirillo, who has joined the Catholic University of America, (Washington).

This number contains a very interesting article on the Welsh Language by Ceinwen Thomas who is a lecturer in Phonetics and Linguistics in the Department of Welsh at Cardiff University College, the University of Wales. It is an informative, well-documented article which we single out for the special attention of our Maltese readers because it tells the dramatic story of the survival of the Welsh Language which, in many respects, resembles the not less dramatic story of the survival of the Maltese language. Welsh and Maltese are both minority languages in the sense that they are spoken by small populations. But though more people speak Welsh than Maltese, our tongue being the language of an island people, has survived the impact of territorial invasions which, throughout the history of mankind, stamped out may interesting minority languages.

Some English readers may resent, or disapprove of, some of the statements made by the writer of the article. We are prepared to publish similarly documented articles which will present the other side of the picture as seen by one of the non-Welsh speaking Welsh.

As the speakers of a minority language, there is much that we Maltese can consider common trials and troubles in the history of the Welsh Language which has attained a much higher academic and official status in some British Universities than Maltese has in the University of Malta. Strangely enough, though Maltese has been recognised as our official language in the Constitution of Independent Malta, it is still not recognised as its official language by the autonomous University of Malta. This is a case of the common people and their government moving far ahead of the University which, as the only centre of our higher education, should have given the nation a lead in the question of linguistic self-respect which is part of the general question of our national identity.

THE WELSH LANGUAGE

By CEINWEN H. THOMAS

'LANGUAGES do not die natural deaths', as Daniel Corkery, the distinguished Irish scholar has observed, 'they are murdered, and their murderers are those who would destroy the soul of the nation'. The truth of this observation becomes plain if we glance at those communities troubled by a 'Language Problem'. Language problems are in fact a disease, of which imperialism is the carrier, and they trouble communities which are, or until relatively recently were, subject to the political domination of an imperialist state.

This is certainly true of the Welsh language, whose survival is in question for the second time in five centuries. In the nineteenth century, over 90% of the population of Wales was Welsh speaking, many of them monoglot; by the recent Census the number had dropped to under 30%,[1] while the monoglot speakers had all but disappeared. It is true that the rate of decrease has slowed down, so we seem to be reaching a turn of the tide, but the danger is so great that Welsh patriots are rousing themselves to a determined effort to save the language and to recover lost ground.

HISTORICAL SURVEY

Throughout the period of independence, Welsh was the language of the royal courts and the aristocracy as well as of the common people. Not merely was it the vernacular of everyday life, but the instrument of the highest culture of which the Welsh nation was capable. Consequently, even

Since this article was written, the Northern Section of the Union of Parents' Associations of Welsh Schools has made an important move in the matter of the place of Welsh in the re-arrangement of higher-grade schools now in progress. It regards an official announcement on the subject as a matter of urgency. It has, therefore, asked the Secretary of the Welsh Department of the Ministry to receive a deputation forthwith. It has also called upon the General Secretary of the Union to summon a National Conference of the Union immediately to discuss the matter and to press for a system of bilingual higher-grade education, so that the language be not merely a medium of instruction – this it no longer regards as enough – but also a medium of official communication and of social intercourse in the system of education.

[1] This does not include the large number of Welsh speakers in England. The Census forms allow no means of assessing their number.

the Laws[2] reveal a language of ample resources and as much alive with the exuberance and exultation of the artist as the poetry and prose tales of the period.

This ascendancy of the language survived the loss of independence and the disappearance of the royal court in 1282. It remained the language of the aristocracy who took pride in patronising Welsh literature until the sixteenth century was under way. Indeed, Wales participated to the full in the intellectual life of Western Europe right up to the establishment of the Tudor order in Wales, whose effect was even more catastrophic than the loss of independence in 1282.

The Tudors had some Welsh blood in their veins and received the allegiance of the Welsh because it was beleived that their aim was to restore the rights and liberties of Wales. But Tudor monarchs aimed at achieving a strong, united kingdom, which was deemed to require complete uniformity of all its parts in religion, language, habits and law. Wales must be absorbed entirely into the realm of England and in pursuance of this policy, two acts were passed by the English Parliament in 1536 and 1542.

The first of these acts of incorporation, which goes by the name of the Act of Union, brought the Welsh language under official disapproval for the first time in its long history. Its use was officially and definitely discouraged in the following provision:

'No Person or Persons that use the Welsh Speech or Language shall have or enjoy any Manner Office or Fees within this Realm of England, Wales, or other the King's Dominion, upon pain of forfeiting the same Offices or Fees, unless he or they use and exercise the English Speech or Language'.

This clause has never been revoked. The Welsh language is still denied official recognition, more than four centuries later and advancement to Welsh people has been possible only if they use the English language.

The cumulative effect of this clause and of Tudor policy generally has been very serious. A rift appeared between the aristocracy and the common people. The latter remained Welsh while the former were encouraged to seek preferment at the English court, and to educate their sons at the new Tudor Grammar Schools, centres of anglicising influence. Hence they gradually lost their Welsh speech and outlook and ceased to patronise Welsh literature. English culture came to be regarded as the only kind of culture, and the Welsh language, abandoned to the common people, was in danger of degenerating into a mere patois and there were fears that it would disappear altogether.

[2] Traditionally believed to have been first codified circa A.D. 942-950 by scholars called together by the prince Hywel Dda (Hywel the Good).

Happily, this fate was averted, mainly owing to religious influences. As a result of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century which brought about the translation of the Prayer Book (1567), and the Bible (1588), combined with the work of seventeenth century Puritans and especially the Methodist Revival of the eighteenth century with its emphasis on the sermon, the Welsh became a people who read the Bible extensively, and the language not only survived among the commonalty but was enriched and revitalized.

In the nineteenth century it flourished over the greater part of Wales, and nowhere more than in the newly industrialised areas of Glamorgan and Monmouthshire, now extensively anglicised. For the first time since Tudor days Welsh became recognised as fit for all the intercourse of social life and all solemn occasions; the dignity it had acquired in the pulpit giving it right of entry to every circle controlled by the common people.

Education

But the language of a people lacking its own Government is never safe. The nineteenth century saw the forging of the instrument which has ravaged the Welsh language so extensively in the present century – compulsory State education. Those concerned with shaping education in Wales stood for outright suppression of Welsh in favour of English and the schools were dominated by the vicious assumption that one language must be exterminated before another can be taught.

The State began giving aid to education in 1833 when Parliament voted money for erecting schools for the children of the poor. The two societies that disbursed this money failed utterly to appreciate that in Wales the use of Welsh as a medium of education was a fundamental principle of education, and no directive in the matter was given to them from the appropriate Government quarters.

The English attitude towards the Welsh language is reflected in the 1848 Government Blue Books, known to the Welsh as 'The Betrayal of the Blue Books'. These consisted of a report of an inquiry by three monoglot English Commissioners into the state of the schools in Wales. They contained not only severe strictures on the schools (probably justified) but an indictment of the language, religion and personal morality of the whole Welsh nation. 'The Welsh language' it declares 'is a vast drawback to Wales and a manifold barrier to the moral progress and commercial prosperity of the people. It is not easy to underestimate its evil effects'!

The indignation aroused in Wales by this Report was intensified by the comments of the Times and other London newspapers which revealed the strong antipathy felt in England for Wales and its language. This antipa-

thy has not diminished in a hundred years. In October, 1962, the Times devoted a leading article to a vigorous attack on the efforts now being made to foster the Welsh language in Welsh life and education. Letters by eminent Welsh scholars replying to the attack were thrown into the waste-paper basket while letters supporting it were published.

Despite all efforts by Welshmen to secure a place for the language in the developing system of education, it was not even mentioned in the 1861 Revised Code of Education, which introduced the pernicious 'payment by results' by which the pay of teachers depended on their pupils' success in examinations. Henceforth, for more than a generation, since Welsh was not acknowledged as an examination subject, boycotting it was financially rewarding to every schoolmaster and, to help in the struggle to eradicate it, many resorted to a system of fines or to the infamous device the 'Welsh Not', by which a child, caught speaking Welsh in the school precincts, was compelled to wear a board inscribed W.N., and, if he could not get rid of it by catching another child in the same offence, was whipped by the teacher before being relieved of it.

The psychological effect of such devices upon children was most damaging, and did not pass uncondemned. 'Is it calculated to conduce to the formation of habits of self-confidence and self-respect in the children of Wales', observed one eminent Welshmen, 'that the first lesson impressed upon them when they enter school should be this: that their own native language is a thing to be straightway forgotten and despised? Is there no danger that the lesson should be transferred in the child's mind from the language itself to its associations and become a lesson of contempt and distrust for his parentage, his home, his religion, his nationality and himself?'. Anyone acquainted with Wales today knows how prophetic these words were.

The influence of the State upon the schools became a stranglehold with the passing of the 1870 Education Act, which made attendance at school compulsory upon all children, and to which the serious decline of the Welsh language can be traced.

In the old Grammar and Endowed Schools, some of them dating from Tudor times, Welsh of course, had no place. Welsh has a very subsidiary place also in the new Grammar Schools built after the passing of the Welsh Intermediate Education Act, 1889, being named, simply as an optional subject, in the schemes of two counties only. These schools remain the blackest spots in our school system: – strong centres of anglicising and often anti-Welsh influence. In none of them is Welsh obligatory for the external examinations taken at the school, what is called the 'O' level of the General Certificate of Education. It *could* be obligatory, as is English,

if the headteacher chose, for within certain limits, headteachers have a very free hand in choosing their range of options. But the headteachers are the products of the system and generally, Welsh is pitted against a foreign language or Latin, or some popular school subject and strong pressure is brought to bear on bright pupils, attracted to Welsh, to change their minds. In my own experience, I have known the headmaster send determined pupils back five times to their parents to induce them not to choose Welsh. Among the staffs overt – or at best a veiled – contempt for the language is general, as indeed for anything connected with Wales, and there is much readiness to stress to pupils and their parents the great value of the foreign languages for a career, and the uselessness of Welsh – quite regardless of the true facts.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Welsh patriots advocated a bilingual policy for the schools; they still do. Nothing compulsory was contemplated, however, until recent years, everyone concerned with the place of Welsh in education has recoiled in horror from the idea of compulsory Welsh, on the pretext that compulsion would alienate the pupils! The fact that most school subjects are compulsory and the evidence before their eyes of the triumph of compulsory English in Wales have been conveniently ignored.

There have been gains in the present century. In 1907, e.g., a separate Welsh Department of the Board (now Ministry) of Education was established. Its inspectorate, a high percentage of which consists of Welsh people, in the main has been sympathetic to the language, which now gained a foothold, very precarious at first, in the school curriculum, and by means of its publications and the organisation of teachers' courses has sought to improve the status of the language in the schools, the effectiveness of the teaching, and to press for its use as a medium of instruction wherever practicable.

An important landmark in this aspect of the Ministry's work was the publication, in 1928, of the Report 'Welsh in Education and Life', a survey of the place of the language in the schools of Wales to that date. It urged much greater use of the language as a *medium* in addition to improvements in methods of teaching it as a second language.

This Report aroused much enthusiasm in educational circles at the time and among the general public, many of whom were in despair at the way their children refused to speak Welsh as soon as they started school, so that only very determined parents could keep their children Welsh-speaking. Most parents were unequal to the struggle, having themselves suffered the debilitating effects of the 'murder machine' as Patrick Pearse called the so similar English State Schools of Ireland.

Unfortunately, the Report's appearance coincided with the beginning of the severe economic depression of the 30's in Wales. Men's minds were diverted to the bare struggle for a living and the vast Government – directed exodus to England of over half a million people in a decade, many of them Welsh speakers, struck a heavy blow at the language.

WELSH AS A MEDIUM IN EDUCATION

However, the idea that children in the Infants Departments (between 5-7 years of age) should be taught through the medium of the home language now began to influence the minds of educators in Wales. This gradually led to a policy of teaching through the medium of Welsh, first in infants' departments in the Welsh-speaking districts and then in primary departments as well. By today, many schools in Welsh areas now make some use of Welsh as a medium. Many, however, do not. Even where Welsh has a place as a medium, the position is far from satisfactory, and parents who attach importance to pure and dignified Welsh are concemed at the way their children's Welsh degenerates during their school life into an undignified hotch potch of English and Welsh.

There are a number of reasons for this:

1. The primary schools are dominated by the fact that they must prepare their pupils for the English-medium Grammar Schools. Hence, English must oust Welsh as a medium quite early, so that by the time the child is 9 years old his instruction may be almost entirely through English.

2. The teachers, though native speakers, may not necessarily be educated speakers of Welsh. They may never have been instructed in Welsh beyond the primary school and so have not the same sense of the importance of educated Welsh as they have of educated English. That is, as Welsh people, they are badly educated.

3. The Training Colleges have steadily improved the courses they offer students studying Welsh, and their practical method courses. But they have nothing to offer Welsh speakers who have not studied Welsh at school, but may yet find themselves using Welsh as a teaching medium in a Welsh district. Such students commonly speak the debased form of Welsh they subsequently pass on to their pupils. Such 'Welsh Schools' plus the Grammar Schools are creating a serious problem which is at last attracting attention however and at least one training college, Barry Training College, is now arranging courses of one term's duration for teachers who use Welsh as a medium.

The existence of these Welsh schools can be very precarious. The arrival of a couple of English families in a Welsh district may change the language policy of the school; the English parents often arrogantly demand

that their children be instructed through English only and the headteacher may not always be able to stand his ground. A change of headteacher may also affect the language policy of the school.

The New Welsh Medium Schools

The outbreak of the war in 1939 on the heels of the depression came as another pressing danger to the Welsh language. It occasioned the transference of thousands of children from England into all corners of Wales. This constituted an invasion of the securest fastnesses of the language, and many feared that, in their psychologically debilitated state, the Welsh people would be unable to hold on to their language against such a flood of English, especially since they gave way so readily with their own children.

Happily no wholesale abandonment of Welsh occurred. Instead, many evacuated children speedily became fluent Welsh speakers. Indeed, many came to know Welsh better than English and were so Cymricised that, when evacuation ended, they returned of their own accord to their Welsh foster parents.

This result caused heart-searching in Wales. Why did *Welsh* children lose the language then? It was obviously possible to save the language if the right things were done. A re-appraisal of the situation was called for.

This feeling was reinforced by the record of a new type of school started at Lluest, Aberystwyth, in 1939 by a group of parents belonging to the professional classes. Lluest was a private Welsh-medium school run entirely according to the wishes of the parents, who formed themselves into a parents' association and bore the entire cost. It was so successful that it attracted widespread attention. Here was a new way of dealing with the language problem. The school did a number of things:

1. It safeguarded the Welsh of its pupils. None of these children showed any tendency to slough off Welsh in favour of English and the full richness of their Welsh speech satisfied the most meticulous parent.

2. Being a private, fee-paying school it gave the language snob value in a town not insusceptible to snobbery. Whatever one may think of snobbery, the acquisition of snob value is a very valuable asset to a language fighting for survival. Indeed an aura of snobbishness, of being the fashionable thing, has clung to the Welsh language in English speaking areas ever since! So much so that, about a year ago, the Western Mail, the organ of the English Establishment in Wales, thought it worth while to publish an article attempting to explode the concept of Welsh as a fashionable language.

3. The school created by parents belonging to the professional classes, the nearest thing in Wales to a middle class, attracted the attention of 'middle class' Welsh people everywhere. They were fired by the example here offered, and they have ever since been the force behind the new Welsh School movement which now began and has gathered impetus ever since.

As a private school, Lluest did not offer hope of widespread imitation and it was itself finally taken over by the Local Education Authority, but it fired Welsh parents at a time when the State inadvertently put into their hands the powers to create a new school movement on similar lines. In 1944, an Education Act gave parents reasonable rights in deciding their children's education within the State system. The newly-formed teachers' Union: 'The Association of the Teachers of Wales' which regarded the defence of the Welsh language in the education system as one of its duties, took up the cause. Its first General Secretary was personally responsible for bringing together groups of parents to work for the establishment of Welsh schools in anglicised areas. Individual groups of parents, calling themselves Welsh Schools' Parents' Associations, having achieved their own objective found their help needed in guiding other groups of parents elsewhere. Hence they formed themselves soon into a national association calling itself the Union of Welsh Schools' Parents' Associations. This Union is today the guiding spirit of the movement for the establishment and extension of the new Welsh Schools, co-ordinating the work of local parents' associations and formulating policy for the future on a national scale and acting as a pressure group upon Local Education Authorities and Members of Parliament. To give financial aid to the movement, a Trust calling itself the Glyn Dwr Trust, launched with a gift of £10,000, is in course of formation.

At first, parents found Local Education Authorities indifferent or even hostile. They had, therefore, to find accommodation themselves – usually chapel vestries – and finance and staff the school and buy all necessary equipment. They also paid for the transport of the children to the school; many still do. In those early days, it might take two or three years to persuade the Education Authority to adopt the school and proof had always to be given that the school was free of debt. The financial sacrifice of the parents has, therefore, been considerable. When the Authority finally took the school over, it would be accommodated in an old empty school building or in empty classrooms in an existing school. The arrangements were far from ideal but the parents made no complaints, however unprepossessing the accommodation. The vital thing was to get the school established and accepted.

The work of the local Parents' Association is not finished when the

Education Authority takes over their school. They work in close harmony with the teachers to provide equipment that the Authority does not provide and they are responsible for recruiting new pupils for the nursery schools and for financing it, so that the Welsh primary school may grow to a size comparable with the local English schools.

The first Authority to found a Welsh School was Carmarthenshire, a predominently Welsh-speaking county. This school was established in 1947 at Llanelli, in response to the wishes of a small group of parents. At the time, only 27% of the town children spoke Welsh. It has prospered so much that a second Welsh School was soon set up in the area, and by today surrounding districts are beginning to press for Welsh Schools and there is a growing demand for a Welsh higher-grade school in the area.

These early schools proved themselves so efficient that the hostility of the Education Authorities has gradually evaporated although one still sees complaints in the Welsh Press of the unco-operative attitude of some of them. The go-ahead Director of Education for Flintshire, a much anglicised northern border county, became interested and pioneered several schools in the county in a short time. His expressed aim was the provision of a Welsh School within reach of every child in the county.

As the movement has grown, it has assumed a definite pattern. A handful of children between the ages 2½-5 years is collected to form a nursery school in some convenient building and taught voluntarily by a retired woman teacher, often for nothing. The school may meet two or even five mornings a week. As the children reach five years of age they enter a Welsh class in some local primary school under the auspices of the Education Authority on the understanding that this is the nucleus of a Welsh School. When this Welsh stream has grown large enough it is housed in its own building as a seperate Welsh school.

In the very early days only Welsh-speaking children were accepted into the nursery school or children from families in which one parent spoke Welsh and gave a pledge to speak Welsh to the children henceforth. Such a system was a defensive system, ensuring simply that Welsh-speaking children would retain their language. This was important, but if adhered to, would leave Welsh speakers in a permanent minority in the country, an idea that satisfied few Welsh patriots. Moreover, English speaking parents began pressing the organisers to accept *their* children, and it went very much against the grain to refuse. The General Secretary of the National Association of the Teachers of Wales was anxious for a more adventurous policy from the start and he asked the writer of this article to publish a pamphlet describing a visit made in 1953 to the Danish Schools of South Slesvig where they were successfully tackling the problem of teaching

Danish to children whose parents or even grand-parents had lost it.

This was a policy of attack and one which everybody realised must be followed ultimately in Wales if the language was to become once again the speech of the whole nation. Practical considerations, however, soon forced this policy upon the Welsh School Movement. When a Welsh School was founded at Barry, a sea-port near the capital, Cardiff, it had no prospect of growth, since all the Welsh speaking children of the town – a mere handful – had already been gathered in. There was nothing for it, therefore, but to *create* Welsh children. A Welsh nursery school opening its door to English-speaking children was started and, its success had been such that, today, Barry Welsh School has close on 200 pupils, some 80% of them from monoglot English homes. This is now the policy of the movement: the nursery schools, still the property of the parents, gladly accept English-and-Welsh-speaking children from 2½ years of age upwards.

The schools have grown space; there are now between 40 and 50 of them in anglicised areas and their number is still growing. Last year, it was resolved at the Annual Meeting of the Parents' Union that a recruiting campaign should be undertaken among English-speaking parents on behalf of the schools.

The schools have won a reputation, not only as superior schools, since the 'best' people send their children to them, but also as very good schools academically. Their success in the 11+examinations to Grammar Schools has been phenomenal and their pupils have more than held their own in the (English) Grammar Schools, having usually a better command even of English than children educated at the English Schools!

The Parents' Union is now pressing the Welsh M.P.s and the Council for Wales concerning the establishment of Welsh schools on a large scale, an essential development if the language is to be saved. Besides, a Welsh school should be within the reach of every child.

In June of this year they presented a memorandum to the Welsh Joint Education Committee dealing with the re-organisation of schools that is now in process. They oppose the merging of Welsh and English streams in one school, and demand central Welsh Schools for areas in which seperate Welsh streams would be weak. They feel that the time has come for Local Education Authorities to accept full responsibility for giving special education to Welsh children rather than that parents must spend years in pressing for the establishment of Welsh Schools. They claim that an effective bilingual education is being given in these schools and assert that it is the responsibility of Welsh Education Authorities to give them a central place in their education policy, not only in anglicised areas but in Welsh speaking districts as well. Here *every* school should be a Welsh school.

They point out that hitherto it is the parents who have fought for and partially maintained many of the Welsh Schools in their early days, and that it is neither fair nor just to expect them to continue to bear the burden and the responsibility. Specialists in the field of education have a duty to lead worthily in this field. It is time the responsibility for maintaining the Welsh language should be assumed by the Education Authorities.

Such a policy as the parents demand requires a higher quota of teachers, exactly as is the case in England in schools where the number of overseas children in the school is high.

The parents are not satisfied with Welsh primary education only. They now press for adequate higher-grade Welsh schools so that the good work of the primary schools be not undone at the higher schools and they demand a more liberal supply of Welsh books. For the first time too, they demand better buildings to house Welsh schools and ask why they must pay to transport their children to school. 'The nearest school to the home of a Welsh child' they declare 'is the nearest *Welsh* school'.

The parents have earlier taken up the subject of Welsh nursery schools. It is an unfair burden on parents to have to support such schools and the Local Education Authorities should have the right to establish them. Many of the latter would readily co-operate in this matter if allowed to do so. But they are hindered by a Ministry of Education regulation and can only establish a new nursery school if they do not thereby exceed the number of such schools in their area in 1956. Swansea has recently established a Welsh Nursery School, but though this is an important precedent, they could do so only because they were not violating the regulation. This then will certainly be the next object of attack of the Parents' Union.

One interesting development during the present year is that the Welsh Branch of the National Union of Teachers, a teachers' union bases on England and drawing its members mainly, but not exclusively, from the Primary Schools, has produced a memorandum on the language question. This Union has in the past been noted for its unsympathetic attitude towards things Welsh, but a significant change in the attitude of the Union towards the language is observable in this Memorandum, sent during the past summer to the Welsh Joint Education Committee expressing the views of the Welsh Committee of the Union on the language question. The Union here comes out wholeheartedly on the side of bilingual education and of the principle that individual parents should not be allowed to decide whether their children should learn Welsh or not. The Memorandum was based on a questionaire sent out to the 108 branches of the Union in Wales, representing 18,000 members. The replies to this questionaire show

that the teachers came down strongly on the side of Welsh, for the Memorandum states 'the clearest impression we have in reading the whole evidence is that the teachers support wholeheartedly those authorities who announce a definite policy of developing a Welsh sentiment on the basis of a bilingual policy... in general there is strong support for every policy directed at defending and developing our character and our existence as a nation'.

On the subject of the new Welsh Schools, these teachers consider them to be justifiable only in districts where Welsh is losing ground and that where they are set up, care should be taken that their pupils should not become a seperate cultural island. To meet this danger, it is suggested that learners of the language should visit Welsh schools and that the children should be enabled to work and play together, go together on educational trips, or stay together in residential schools. The Union is impressing on its members the need to encourage in every possible way the plan of inter-change visits between the children of English- and Welsh-speaking areas. Where Welsh Schools are founded, it urges that care should be taken not to arouse the hostility of parents of pupils in other types of schools by special treatment of Welsh Schools in the ratio of teachers, in apparatus or building facilities.

On the question of Welsh books for schools it urges greater support by all authorities for the 'Seven Counties' Books Committee. This is a Committee formed a couple of years ago by the authority of seven of the thirteen counties of Wales for the provision of Welsh text books for schools.

Other suggestions made by the Memorandum is that in country districts, schools should have a minimum of three teachers if a bilingual policy is to be undertaken (many country schools are now one-teacher schools) and that research be made into techniques of language learning in a bilingual back-ground, into the question of vocabulary in courses in the second language, and into the psychological effect of speaking two languages upon the child.

The N.U.T., is not the only body to have sent a memorandum recently to the Welsh Joint Education Committee, which is gathering material on the whole question of a language policy for the schools. The Union of the Associations of Welsh Schools Parents has also sent a memorandum putting its own point of view.

Where the N.U.T. asks for larger centralised schools the parents state that they will support a centralising policy only when a policy of education is formulated which caters for the just demands of the nation. They will resist any centralising by which Welsh-speaking children are transferred to schools where Welsh has a secondary place. They claim that the

attempt to keep Welsh children Welsh-speaking is doomed to failure in schools where a high percentage of the children do not speak the language, especially if special provision is not made for the two streams. This will only bring the battle of the language into the playground, and the social activities of the school. These parents are concerned because education in many of the new Welsh Schools is conditioned by the fact that their pupils must go to all-English higher-grade schools after 11 years of age, where all the good work of the Welsh primary school is undone.

As for the Welsh-speaking districts, they urge that the new Welsh School be made the pattern for all schools here.

They express disappointment because the Labour Government has not implemented its election promise to put education in Wales under the authority of the newly-created Secretary of State for Wales and urge that the Prime Minister be pressed to do this as soon as possible.

The members of this Union are convinced that the key to the problem of the language in Wales is more Welsh nursery schools and they are pressing for the establishment of such schools all over the country. After every meeting of this Union we see press reports of the establishment of voluntary Welsh nursery schools in various parts of the country, and of proposals to establish others, and of the steady increase in the number of pupils attending the Welsh Primary schools.

One interesting feature of this movement in Wales to give the Welsh language its rightful place in the country's system of education and to make provision for teaching it effectively to non-Welsh speakers is that support for it or hostility to it do not follow rigidly the line of language or of nationality. As we have noted already, although the moving spirits in the establishment of a Welsh school in anglicised districts are almost invariably Welsh speaking people belonging to the professions, the school once founded usually draws most of its pupils from ordinary anglicised Welsh and even English families. Cases can be quoted of Welsh-speaking parents in these areas sending their children to English medium schools and of cultured immigrant English parents sending their children to the Welsh school. One of these cultured English people who have consistently given support to the Welsh schools movement since its inception a quarter of a century ago is Mr. R.M. Presswood, Director of Education for Cardiff, who was reported in the Welsh paper 'Y Cymro' in April of this year as stating that as an Englishman he understood the desire of Cardiff Welsh people to secure an education for their children which linked them to their language, history and culture. He could not understand the attitude of some English people and non-Welsh speakers who showed a spirit of hatred to the language. They came to Wales to good jobs he said, and

became hostile to the Welsh language. They should be proud to be allowed to be in the capital of Wales and to support the language and to show tolerance to those who desire to speak it and secure its future. When the figures showed that the time had come to establish a Welsh higher-grade school in Cardiff he would be ready to consider this or alternatively to establish Welsh streams in existing schools where a number of subjects could be taught through the medium of Welsh. In the meantime, Cardiff Education Authority would continue to send the city's Welsh children to Glamorgan's higher-grade school at Rhydfelen.

All this shows how completely out of touch with the Welsh educational scene Government Ministerial circles can be. In the early part of the summer this year, Miss Jennie Lee, Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Department of Education, met the Welsh Joint Education Committee and in reply to the Committee's plea for more Government help to publish Welsh books, Miss Lee took upon herself to stress that the W.J.E.C. in making themselves custodians of the language 'should not put themselves in the position of having parents knocking on the doors of the education departments saying "They are trying to put my child in a Welsh school and we don't want it" 'Her comments brought murmurs of surprise from the august assembly and caused much indignation in Wales. There were many letters in the correspondence columns of the Press in Wales protesting at what was felt to be a gross insult to Welsh nationhood, advising Miss Lee to open her ears to the knocking of Welsh parents and their cries of 'You are putting our children in anglicised schools and we don't want it', and suggesting she visit the Welsh medium schools to acquaint herself with the high proportion of pupils who came from monoglot English homes.

The Welsh Higher-Grade Schools

When Cardiff Welsh Primary School was founded in 1950, Mr. Presswood the Director of Education, asked the parents what they envisaged at the end of their children's primary education. Was not the obvious next step a Welsh medium secondary school? At the time such a step was impracticable owing to the small number of pupils involved in the area. But the movement has grown so rapidly that Welsh higher-grades schools have become essential. They are usually comprehensive, schools grammar and modern streams; their pupils may be drawn from quite a wide area, not all of it administered by the same Education Authority. Cardiff for instance, at present sends its Welsh School pupils to Rhydfelen, a Welsh higher-grade school belonging to Glamorgan situated some 8-9 miles outside the city boundary.

Flintshire first led the way with the establishment of two such schools.

There are now four such schools in the anglicised north east, and more are being called for. Three years ago, Glamorgan, the most populous county in Wales, established the first higher-grade school in the South, at Rhydfelen, with Cardiff joining in the venture. It was founded with some trepidation for its success was in some doubt. It opened in September, 1962, with 85 pupils; it now has 345 pupils and has completely outgrown its buildings, which are to be extended before the 1966 session in order that the school may continue to grow. Yet there are still schools in its area which have not yet been established long enough to begin sending pupils to it. Its success is typical and has emboldened Glamorgan Education Authority to agree to the request of the Union of Welsh Schools Parents' Association for a second higher grade school in the near future in the west of the county. The Union is now campaigning energetically for more such schools in many other parts of Wales.

Welsh is the language of all social intercourse in these schools, and most subjects are taught through Welsh. Lack of textbooks hinders the use of Welsh in some subjects, a difficulty which is gradually being overcome. The sciences are, to date, taught through the medium of English, and the reasons given are, first, a difficulty of terminology in Welsh, and, second, the fact that Sixth Formers and University students will need to use reference books in English since we should never be able in Wales to afford to translate all the necessary reference books into our language.

The first of these difficulties is being resolved by Welsh scientists at the University, who began in March, 1963, to publish a quarterly science magazine in the language; an adequate scientific vocabulary is therefore already taking shape. The second 'difficulty' is not a material difficulty at all, but is simply a manifestation of the psychological outlook of a long-subjected people. English has never been the only European language in which important scholarly works in all branches of human knowledge have appeared and in our generation we have seen Russian come to the fore in the sciences. Setting aside the situation among speakers of the big languages, no small nation can afford to be insular or parochial in its reading of scholarly works. Wales is no different in this respect from, say, Denmark. The fact that it is not practicable to make available in Danish all the important reference books a University student must need has not prevented the Danes from using Danish as the only medium of education in their whole education system. Yet at University level, the student is expected to be capable of reading widely in several languages.

Many feel that there is here a lesson for Wales. At present, most of those interested in the Welsh schools movement regard them as 'bilingual' schools and by 'bilingual' schools they mean schools in which both Welsh

and English are used as media of instruction, but with Welsh as the language of social intercourse among the pupils and between staff and pupils. They contrast such schools with the old style monolingual English school, designed as a tool to eradicate Welsh entirely from the country. But there is a minority which regards the 'bilingual' concept as too narrow and insular for the needs of Wales. By all means, they say, let English be well taught and it *is* well-taught in the Welsh schools, so well that English people sometimes contrast the 'elegant' English spoken by products of the Welsh schools with the very inelegant English spoken by the anglicised products of the English schools of Wales. But the language policy of the Welsh schools system must be broadly based so that their pupils may have access to the culture and learning of many nations and come to regard the act of acquiring yet another language if the need arises as neither an abnormal nor a stupendous task. This point of view will probably remain a minority view for some time, especially in the Welsh speaking areas where for many reasons the concept of a bilingual education in which the Welsh language is given a just place is only slowly making headway. Indeed, the Welsh school is so misunderstood in some Welsh speaking areas in Wales that a recent proposal put before the Education Committee of Caernarvonshire in the North West to turn four of its Grammar schools into Welsh schools aroused such a furore that the matter is still under consideration and there was much writing in the Press by persons involved in the Welsh schools movement in anglicised areas seeking to enlighten Caernarvonshire people on the aims and beneficial results of the Welsh schools.

The Training Colleges and the University

The rise of the Welsh schools has inevitably affected the Colleges and the University. The Training Colleges have already been obliged to offer courses to students wishing to teach Welsh either as first or as second language. They must now train teachers who will use Welsh as a medium in all primary school subjects. Two Colleges now make provision for students to be taught through the medium of Welsh for their entire College course and two others are moving in that direction. Indeed, they have shown a commendable readiness to yield to pressure on behalf of the language. In 1955, two training colleges: Bangor Normal College and Trinity College, Carmarthen, were invited to offer courses using Welsh as a medium. Even before this Bangor Normal College had courses in Religious Instruction, History and Bilingual Education through the medium of Welsh.

These courses were quickly added to, and by 1957-58 Welsh was used as a medium in Geography, Drawing, History, Physical Training, Religious

Instruction, Mathematical Methods, Bilingual Education, Art and Craft for Infants' Teachers, Biology, Physiology and Education.

Once established, the courses attracted more and more students. In Bangor e.g., 28 students left the College after following these courses when first established; by 1965 they number about 70 annually.

Welsh Local Authorities have helped the scheme commendably, and most of these students find appointments in Wales.

When the courses were established there were the usual terminological difficulties, and a Panel was established by the Faculty of Education in Bangor and Aberystwyth Colleges to prepare lists of terms for many subjects and more on are the way.

It is now the turn of the University to face pressure from the Welsh higher-grade schools and the Union of Parents' Associations. A stiff fight can be anticipated here, for although the University was founded on the pennies of Welsh peasants and although its charter in 1893 declares that it was founded 'in Wales and for Wales', the concept of the University as a truly National University has always been lacking. In the administration of its constituent colleges nothing was done to make truly Welsh institutions of them, and for a long time the Welsh language was not used as a medium of instruction even in the Departments of Welsh. There has been some slight improvement, but the University of Wales, despite its name, remains to all intents and purposes an English institution.

It was not until 1950 that a committee to consider the possibility of establishing a College using Welsh as its medium was set up. After deliberating for some years the Committee produced a report in which it recommended, not a Welsh College, but the appointment of special lecturers in each of the four colleges who might lecture in certain courses in Welsh. The recommendation has been adopted and some dozen lecturers (out of more than a 1,000 teachers at the University) appointed to lecture on such subjects as education, the history of Wales, and philosophy.

The University, then, is a highly anglicised body; the staffs and student body are drawn mainly from England and the Welsh are an insignificant minority. The new Welsh higher-grade schools are beginning to cause a flutter in the dovecotes of this English citadel by asking what provision is being made to enable their pupils to continue their studies through Welsh at the University. This is an important issue; it is essential to Wales to have a University that gives its rightful place to the national language and culture and the language must be allowed to penetrate every aspect of the life of the nation if it is to survive. The Parents Union is as interested as the headteachers in the response of the University, which cannot ignore this issue for ever. Small wonder that the Welsh schools

have been described as 'a pocket of renaissance firmly embedded in the structure of State education'.

A significant sidelight on the English atmosphere of the University is the struggle the Welsh students of Bangor University College – once the most Welsh now the most English of the University Colleges – have been waging for several years for official recognition of the language in the administration of the College. Their demands, rejected by the College Senate (an internal body) and agreed to by the College Court (an external body), have had no practical results. The situation led to a most remarkable scene at the 1964 Degree Ceremony of the College. A Welsh student, about to be initiated into his degree, turned suddenly to the assembled congregation and said in a loud voice in Welsh 'I refuse to accept the Degree of the University of Wales because the University has disowned the Welsh language, the language of the nation whose University it is. For almost two years, we students have asked repeatedly that the Welsh language be given an honourable place in the College; the authorities have substantially refused all requests. The fight will continue; but for me this is the final opportunity. I refuse the Degree and shall continue to so so while the University is so hostile to the Welsh language'.

The congregation applauded. But it is a sad reflection on the state of the nation and of the University that a young student feels it his patriotic duty to reject the degree he has won.

The English medium Schools. It is difficult to give a clear picture of the state of the Welsh language in these schools. The Education Authorities have no co-ordinated policy; indeed, many have no policy at all. In two border counties, the language is not even taught. In most cases, the subject depends on the whim of individuals – headteachers or even teachers. That the subject – and in these schools it is only a subject – figures on the school timetable is no guarantee that it will be taught. An enthusiastic headteacher may work out his own syllabus, prepare individual cards and wall charts and train his teachers so thoroughly that even those with a limited knowledge of Welsh learn to perform their part adequately, if mechanically; under an indifferent head, the language may not be taught at all.

A high proportion of primary teachers are ignorant of Welsh; some Authorities employ peripatetic teachers of Welsh, therefore, while others put one specialised teacher in each school. But the time given to the language – usually three half hours per class per week – is so inadequate that no results are possible. To add to the general futility, its study is dropped altogether in the class studying for the 11 + examination to the Grammar school. It only figures in this examination, incidentally, in Welsh districts.

Glamorgan Education Authority has for many years, been concerned at the decline of the language within its borders, and has tried to do something about it. About twenty years ago, it appointed an Inspector for Welsh, who drew up a definite language policy for its schools requiring for example, that at least *six* lessons a week be devoted to Welsh per class and that 50% of the staff of each school be Welsh speakers. Stress was laid upon cultivating an ability to *speak* the language (something quite new!) and the policy was interpreted as a bilingual policy. It was impossible for one man to make the policy work in such a large, populous county, and the Authority itself did not help by filling many of the 'Welsh' posts with temporary English-speaking teachers, the post to be made permanent when the teachers learnt Welsh. No time limit was imposed in the contract, and most of these teachers did not fulfil their obligation. After a time they developed a chip on their shoulder and regarded themselves as hard done by.

The schools in general came to regard the policy as just so much bluff. In 1957, therefore, two organisers were appointed to assist the Inspector in making the policy work. It was obvious now that the Authority meant business and most of the teachers proved co-operative when it was explained to them that a bilingual policy did not mean 'to teach Welsh better than we are doing now' as most of them naively defined it, but to teach Welsh to the English-speaking children of Glamorgan as effectively as English is taught in Welsh districts, so that in a short space of time, Glamorgan schools could use both languages as media of instruction.

Faced with this interpretation, teachers began *asking* for classes to learn Welsh instead of refusing to attend such classes as formerly and for guidance in teaching the language effectively. Since then, the organisers, with the co-operation of specialist Welsh teachers have prepared a scheme of work for primary schools, which the Authority readily published and distributed to the schools. They have also run many courses to train the teachers to handle the scheme. The scheme is not perfect, and many of the teachers using it are not language teachers. But it does ensure a serious attempt to teach the language in the English schools.

One important development is that the Authority has now extended its language policy to include the Infants' Departments and schemes designed for children of 5-7 years of age are now being worked out.

It has at last been recognised that languages can be successfully taught only if they are used in communication. In the case of Welsh in the English schools, this must mean ultimately its use as a medium in them also. In Glamorgan and elsewhere, a few schools have been chosen for pilot schemes for using Welsh as a medium in the few months between the 11+ examination and moving up to the next school.

The advent of the language laboratory on the Welsh scene also underlines the fact that a language is something to be *spoken*. There is little audio-visual or audio-lingual material yet available for Welsh, but the problem of producing it is being actively faced. The Department of Education of Aberystwyth University College is active in the matter, certain Teachers' Training Colleges are also experimenting in this field and Welsh teachers within reach of language laboratories are busily preparing their own material. Last year, the Welsh Department of the Ministry of Education called a conference to discuss the same problem.

In May, 1964 a three-team working party was set up by the Central Advisory Council for Wales to enquire into the Welsh language in the primary schools. One is to investigate the present situation, the second to investigate the supply, training, and deployment of teachers and other educational staff in primary education in Wales, and the third to look into the curriculum and organisation of primary schools.

There is, therefore much activity going on, which may revolutionise the teaching of Welsh in the English schools in the near future. One thing is certain: Welsh cannot remain much longer the Cinderella of the English-medium schools nor will the temper of the nation continue to tolerate the sending out of their pupils inadequately equipped or not equipped at all with the historic language.

Bilingualism in Wales. The word 'bilingualism' has been bandied about Wales for a very long time. If one presses for a definition one commonly hears reference to the example of Switzerland whose 'bilingualism' is misunderstood in Wales, for it is taken to mean that every normal individual leaves school equally fluent in at least two languages. In terms of Wales, it is taken to mean that everybody should have equal grasp of Welsh and English.

This concept is a dangerous one, and if pressed too rigorously could cause the final annihilation of Welsh. For many educators are led to assume that English must be introduced into schools in Welsh districts at the same time as Welsh in anglicised areas. But the two languages are not in a position of parity in the life of the country; if they were, something might be said for such a scheme. But even in the remoter Welsh districts, the children come early into contact with English, through radio, television etc., and soon pick it up, whereas Welsh may not be heard at all in the English districts. Parity for the two languages in the education system, therefore, makes it imperative that Welsh should be introduced to the English speaking child early – in the nursery school, if possible, – while English should be delayed in schools in Welsh areas until the child's 10th or 11th year, so that he is well grounded in Welsh first.

Welsh parents are also beginning to ask with whom will the two languages be used if everybody can speak both equally well. It is a commonplace that no one habitually used two languages with the *same* persons. They choose, and a bilingual system that will not ensure that all who speak Welsh will have a preference for it will be as unsatisfactory and as dangerous to its survival as the monolingual English system we have suffered so long. That is, confronted with someone who speaks both Welsh and English, natives of Wales must naturally choose *Welsh* as their medium of communication.

Welsh people have not yet realised the difference between bilingualism in individuals and in the community. It is not true that we are heirs of two cultures as we have been told for so long. If we were, we would be schizophrenic. We are heirs of the historic culture of *Wales* of which the *Welsh* language is the creator and the repository. The English language gives us a window on to English culture, nothing more. Wales is historically a monolingual, Welsh speaking community; it must become so again.

This is not to say that individual Welsh people should not be bi- or even multi-lingual. Denmark has already been mentioned in this article. Any visitor to Denmark cannot but be impressed by the fact that individual Danes often speak several languages fluently; yet, confronted with other Danes, and removed even momentarily from the need to speak another language with a foreign guest, they slide instinctively into Danish. Individual Danes are frequently multi-lingual. Denmark is a monolingual nation. Nothing less can justly resolve the language problem of Wales. We are willing, as individuals to learn English as a second language, and to learn it well, but the *first* language of everybody born within the borders of Wales *must* be Welsh. It is a goal that will not be quickly achieved, and its permanent success requires political action, but it is a goal towards which Welsh patriots must press unswervingly if the future of the language is to be secured. Success depends, not only upon giving the language its rightful place in our system of education, but also its rightful status in the life of the country.

Welsh in the Life of Wales. After the 1536 Act of Incorporation, Welsh simply did not exist in the official life of the country. It is significant that it is not until the nineteenth century that Welsh inscriptions began to appear on gravestones and not until the latter part of the same century that the Nonconformist chapels, pillars of the Welsh language though they were, ceased to announce themselves in English. Inscriptions such as 'Bethlehem, Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, Built 1860' are common above their doors. Common also are later, significant additions such as 'Ail-adeiladwyd 1895' 1895 i.e. Rebuilt, 1895.

In 1925 the Welsh Nationalist Party, now called Plaid Cymru, was found-

ed. This is a political party pledged to secure Dominion Status for Wales within the Commonwealth. That is its official policy. Many individual members, however, want complete independance from England. The Nationalist movement has not yet been very successful at the polls, mainly because the two major English Parties, the Conservatives and Socialists have combined to refuse it access to those powerful instruments of propaganda radio and television at election time, despite constant pressure from all shades of political opinion in Wales. They only yielded last year granting *five minutes* only and even then they refused to allow the concession to come into force during the last election. It came into force on September 29th of this year.

The Nationalist Party attaches great importance to the Welsh language and is determined that in a free Wales it shall be acceded its rightful place. Large numbers of its members are English-speaking, but they support its language policy warmly, learn the language themselves and send their children to Welsh schools.

The Nationalists have always realised that the problem of the language is political, deriving from the fact that it is banned by English Law, and they have called for many years for equal status for it with English in Wales. They have always supported movements on its behalf whether initiated by themselves or by others.

The agitation on behalf of the language has suddenly 'hotted up' in recent years, led mainly by Nationalist members of the student bodies and young lecturers at the University. It is one of the most obvious features of the Welsh scene at the present time.

The first agitation to secure official recognition for Welsh began just before the second World War. A petition was organised for the purpose. A representative cross-section of the nation in English and Welsh districts, was canvassed and a large number of signatures collected. Few refused to sign, and even some English settlers in Wales lent their support. The Petition was presented to the Government, but the only result, after the usual delay, was the Welsh Courts Act of 1942. This gave to Welshmen who elected to plead in Welsh in a court of law the right to an interpreter paid by the State. This Act was introduced in the English manner by a fanfare as an important and generous concession. Actually, it simply gave to Welsh parity in Wales with, such foreign languages as Chinese, Russian Arabic etc. For, whereas formerly foreign nationals could claim as of right to use their language in the courts with the aid of an interpreter paid by the State, a Welshman could use Welsh in Wales by favour of the judge only and had to pay his interpreter himself. Even now the judge can, and frequently does, refuse a Welsh man the right to use Welsh in court, if in

the judge's opinion his English is good enough, for the Act gives only a Welshmen the right to plead in Welsh if his English is not equal to it.

The farcical nature of the situation was brought to light in 1936 when three prominent Welsh Nationalists burnt an English R.A.F. Bombing School in Wales. The men were: an eminent Baptist minister, a University lecturer in Welsh, and a Grammar School teacher, a Welsh writer of renown. All three sought to plead in Welsh, but only the teacher was allowed to do so, on the grounds that he was the only one who had not been heard to speak English. Yet the court authorities could not but have known that this man was the specialist teacher of *English* at his school!

For many years, Welsh patriots have done the small things on behalf of the language, like addressing letters in Welsh or addressing telephone operators in Welsh. These efforts usually met with considerable rudeness from operators and refusals to put the calls through; letters were prone to be 'lost in the Post' or else reached their destination days or even weeks late and covered with pencilled injunctions to 'try' here and there. The peregrinations of some of these letters were unbelievable and the most improbable places 'tried'. Protests to the Postmaster General elicited apologies, undertakings to 'look into' the matter, declarations that postal staffs had orders to accept letters directed in Welsh and that lists of Welsh place names were available to them all. But the delays and the futile 'trying' went on. Welsh agitation has secured some concessions, however. Census forms are obtainable in Welsh; the Welsh Department of the Ministry of Education has published its Reports in both languages almost from the beginning; Government reports on other aspects of Welsh life may be published in both languages; the Highway Code and certain agricultural forms are obtainable in Welsh; National Savings posters are issued in Welsh.

But much play is made of the fact that the Welsh versions are rarely called for. There are reasons for this:

1. No publicity is given to the existence of these Welsh versions; many people, therefore do not know of their existence. Census form distributors commonly bring only the English version with them. The Welsh version has to be specially asked for, often in the midst of a great fuss and efforts to persuade the Welsh speaker not to cause inconvenience.

2. The Welsh of most official forms is often execrable and even more difficult to understand than the English ones. There is no reason for this, Welsh can be written with a clarity easily understood by the least intelligent, whatever the subject.

3. For over 90 years the Welshman's education has conditioned him to think of everything official in terms of the English language, and brain

washed him to the point where he is reluctant to use Welsh, and regards an admission that he would prefer Welsh as an admission of his own ignorance. Part of the task before Welsh patriots is to re-educate the Welsh people in the use of their language in official communications and to restore their pride and self-respect with regard to it. An interesting development was apparent at the last Census. An appreciable number of people in the anglicised areas admitted to a knowledge of Welsh only. This is certainly a movement among the educated, professional classes. It will be interesting to watch the development of this trend and its effect upon the common people of the Welsh districts where an inferiority complex regarding the language is strongest.

For the 1964 General Election, Welsh versions of Nomination Forms were made available. This is the outcome of a legal battle in 1962 when a Nationalist at a local election in Carmarthenshire filled his Nomination Form in Welsh. The Returning Officer pronounced the Form illegal and declared the other candidate elected. The rejected candidate, a local farmer, carried the case to the High court. It was heard before judges, one of whom was of Irish extraction, who treated the Welshman's case with surprising sympathy. 'It is a little late to treat the Welsh as tribesmen', he remarked the latter in the course of the hearing. The Welsh nomination form was declared legal and the judge's prouncement on the right to use Welsh was couched in such general terms that it left the door ajar to a wide use of the language for official purposes. It will be our duty to push the door open.

It is still rather a pleasant surprise when anyone connected with the English legal and administrative system in Wales shows respect for the Welsh language. It was considered news by a Welsh weekly paper in August, 1964, that a magistrates' court at Rhyl had adopted what the paper called 'a reasonable and fair attitude towards the language'. The defendant had asked that his case be heard in Welsh and all concerned had co-operated readily, even translating the evidence of three non-Welsh speaking witnesses. At the end, the magistrate had expressed his pleasure at this co-operation in holding the court in Welsh and said that his court possessed all the necessary means for using Welsh to the full. 'What a splendid statement' comments the paper, 'and what a pity that the same readiness to hear a case in Welsh is not forthcoming all over our country'.

Some people have suffered much inconvenience in their struggle for the right to use Welsh officially. Some years ago, a Carmarthenshire coal-miner and his wife refused to pay their rates unless the demand note was bilingual. The Labour local council refused their request – this in a Welsh speaking district – and sent the bailiffs repeatedly to the house to con-

fiscate articles of furniture in lieu of the rates. The affair dragged on for years, and attracted much attention. While the struggle was going on, other local councils received similar requests and began issuing bilingual Rates Demands. In the Carmarthenshire case, the Council gave way only when the local M.P. (Mr. James Griffiths, now Secretary of State for Wales) at last intervened, concerned, it would seem, not at the injustice to the language, but at the ill repute the affair was giving the Labour Party.

About four years ago, a group of young adults formed a society called Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (The Welsh language Society), to press by every means for official recognition of Welsh. Its first act was to organise a minor act of lawbreaking to provoke summonses, which it was intended to disobey until they were issued in Welsh. The members stuck bills voicing their demands on the Post Office and other places in Aberystwyth, where to do so was illegal. The police held aloof, so the group proceeded to block traffic on a busy road by a sit-down strike. By this time the town roughs were out and began provoking the sitters, even throwing some of the young women bodily against walls. Some motorists in their irritation tried to drive over the sitters. The affair gradually developed into a melée which, when shown on the television screen, looked remarkably like a small version of the Belgian language riots. The police merely looked on and their behaviour caused much criticism in the country. Ultimately, some of the members succeeded in provoking summonses and duly demanded Welsh versions. The town magistrates timidly requested the Home Secretary's ruling in the matter and there was a long delay.

Meanwhile, one of the Secretaries of the Movement, a young Oxford student, left his car without lights on a Cardiff road. A summons duly arrived and was returned with a polite request for a Welsh version. Cardiff magistrates consulted a member of the city's legal staff who declared a Welsh version legal and undertook to provide a translation. This was indeed a historic occasion. The Cardiff magistrates forced the hand of the Home Secretary, who now perforce advised Aberystwyth magistrates that they were free to do as they liked in the matter!

Those in official position are slow to accede victory to the Welsh language, however. In the spring of this year, a young member of the Welsh Language Society had a long struggle with the clerk to the magistrates of Neath, a town in Glamorgan, over a summons concerning a motoring offence. The young man refused an English summons and the clerk refused to send a Welsh one. The upshot was that the young man was fined, but refused to pay. At this point the Society appealed to the Secretary of State for Wales after having earlier announced its intention of supporting its

member by militant means if he was imprisoned for his refusal to pay. Mr. James Griffiths' private secretary replied to the Society that the present legal position is that magistrates have a legal right to issue a summons in Welsh but they have no obligation to do so. With regard to the possibility of changing the law, the reply refers to the committee set up to consider the legal status of the Welsh language, and whether the law should be changed in any way. When the Report of the Committee is received, the letter goes on to say 'this will be on opportunity to review the whole legal position of the Welsh language'.

Early in August, 1964, the Welsh language Society once more did a symbolic act, this time to draw attention to the way Welsh place names are mutilated on official signposts. Just prior to the important annual national festival, the National Eisteddfod, society members went secretly to Tre-Fin, the Pembrokeshire birth place of a recent Archdruid of Wales,[3] and removed the signposts which read 'Trevine', putting correctly spelled ones in their places. The villagers, 90% of them Welsh speaking, were pleased with the exchange, but the police began to 'make enquiries'. When the Eisteddfod opened, the confiscated signs were displayed at the Society's stand on the field, together with copies of its correspondence with the clerk of Pembrokeshire County Council, which showed that he had no intention of acceding to the Society's request for correctly spelled signs. The Society's letters were in Welsh, that of the clerk in English.

The Society has already issued leaflets urging its members to use Welsh in all circumstances: to fill income tax forms, address letters, speak on the telephone, fill cheques and many other things, all in Welsh. It has asked banks to issue Welsh cheque books, and has received the stock English reply: 'Impracticable'. Some banks have, however, since shown signs that they are prepared to make limited concessions, possibly as a result of the Society's announcement that it would issue its own cheque books to members! It has circulated Local Authorities, in Welsh of course, asking how many answer Welsh letters in Welsh. Some have replied in Welsh, others in English, others have not deigned to reply at all.

Such actions are infectious. Before the 1964 National Eisteddfod, the Postmaster-General was approached by the Conservative M.P. for Barry, one of the best of the Welsh Members of Parliament, with a request that a special stamp be issued to mark the National Eisteddfod. Naturally, the request was refused. Nationalists took up the challenge, and overstamped 3d stamps with the word 'Cymru' (Wales) which they sold in great numbers on the Eisteddfod field. Post Officials declared such stamps illegal.

[3] The Archdruid is head of the Gorsedd, an organisation closely linked with the Eisteddfod.

But they were sent all over Britain. One individual claimed that he had actually sent a letter to the Postmaster-General himself bearing one of these stamps, and that it had been accepted without question!

This hardening of the temper of Welsh speakers about the language has already had an effect on Post Office and telephone circles. Letters addressed in Welsh now get to their destination without delay, and telephone operators are mending their manners. A letter in the Welsh Press some months ago described how the writer had asked for his number in Welsh as usual at his Cardiff home and, instead of the usual fuss, he had been civilly answered in the same language. When he expressed pleasure at this unexpected convenience, the operator answered that he had been engaged because of the increased use of Welsh on the telephone in the area.

Yet another way of drawing attention to the inferior status of the Welsh language in Wales has been taken by certain young parents during the present calendar year. Some weeks before the expected birth of their child some young parents have written to the Registrar General asking permission to register their expected child's birth in Welsh. The reply has each time been that the birth must be registered in English. On the child's birth, some of the parents have duly given the local registrar the required details of the child's birth in Welsh, only to have the document disowned as illegal by Somerset House. One young mother was fined 10/- together with £5 15 0d., costs at Aberystwyth on September 8th of this year because she still refused to register the birth of her seven-months old son until permitted to do so in the Welsh language. Last March a neighbour of hers was fined for the same 'offence'. In May, Somerset House made one small concession when they allowed a Bangor couple to include in Welsh the name of the hospital at which their daughter was born! The child's father took the view that in permitting the hospital's name to appear in Welsh, Somerset House had established a precedent for the further use of the Welsh language in registration of births, marriages and deaths, and he commented 'This concession may be a mere crumb but the inferior status of the Welsh language in Wales remains an insult to our nation and should stimulate further efforts to win elementary linguistic rights'.

The gains, of course, have been small and there is a long struggle ahead. Already the overprinted stamps have caused the Western Mail, an English paper published in Cardiff (one of the Thompson group of papers), to indulge in near-obscenity in its attempt to ridicule such action. The Welsh speaker has been a despised second class citizen in his own land so long that it is going to be hard for the English Establishment to realise that he means to be such no longer.

They will not give way easily; for nothing is more annoying to the En-

glish ruling class than to accord rights to languages other than English in territories under their control. A fundamental article of faith to these people is that English is destined to go on increasing for ever, while other languages disappear before its advance. To be compelled to yield political freedom to nations has been bad enough, but the idea that Englsih must recede in favour of a 'small' language hits their very vitals. And when the 'small' language shares the same island as their own, to accord it even its most elementary rights is even more painful.

Perhaps the most dramatic incident in the whole struggle for the Welsh language of recent years was an affair which took place at a small light - engineering works in Blaenau, Ffestiniog, North Wales, in June of this year. In an area where 95% of the population are Welsh-speaking the manager demanded that the workers should sign an undertaking to speak only English inside the factory on pain of dismissal. Welsh was not allowed even during tea break. Two men immediately refused and were instantly dismissed.

The indignation inside the town and throughout Wales was intense and some lively demonstrations were staged outside the factory gates. The M.P. for the locality and the workers' trade union were called in to defend the rights of the workers to use their own language at all times in their own country. Finally the Secretary of State for Wales was asked to intervene. The upshot of the affair was that the tyrannical manager was obliged to reconsider his decision in face of the strength of the opposition.

The affair has been beneficial in its effects upon Welsh people and their opponents. It has roused ordinary Welsh people to vigorous action in defence of their language and helped strengthen their self respect as well as showing opponents of the language the strength of the feeling for it despite all the efforts made to weaken the people's allegiance to it.

The agitation for official recognition has at least procured the setting up, by the Central Advisory Council for Wales, of a Committee of Three, known familiarly in Wales as Sir David Hughes Parry's Committee, to take evidence on the question and to prepare a recommendation on the subject. Sir David Hughes Parry, a Welshman, is a legal expert who has been for many years a Professor of Law in the University of London and was, at his retirement, Vice-Chancellor of that University.

At the time of writing, the recommendation of the Committee has not yet been published, though it is now in the hands of the Minister of State for Welsh affairs. A newspaper report on the 14th of September claims that the Committee has recommended that the Welsh language should be given officially an equal status with the English language in the legal, administrative, and everyday life of Wales.

If this is so, the Committee claims no more than the most elementary inalienable rights for the Welsh language and the Welsh people. But it is difficult to believe that the recommendation will be implemented without a struggle. The Secretary of State for Wales himself is believed in many quarters in Wales to be cool to the idea of equal status for Welsh with English in Wales and a number of Welsh M.P.'s are expected to oppose it. This if true is not surprising, since the Labour Party in Wales has been for most of its history a de-nationalizing factor in the life of the country; moreover, subjection as complete as Wales has suffered for the past four centuries does not leave a people unscarred.

From the English point of view, to accede official status to the Welsh language in Wales will be a revolutionary act, even more revolutionary then was the granting of home-rule to Ireland at the height of their imperial pomp. No sea divides Wales and England; recognition of our rights means, for England, learning to share the island with neighbours, something she has never done with any grace and not done at all for centuries.

The Labour Government if it survives long enough, can of course refuse to give Welsh equality of status with English in Wales, and by so doing will reveal the unreality of its claim to be considered a Socialist Party. But it will merely stave off the inevitable. The Welshman has nothing to lose but his chains. Our gains have been small and undramatic, but they have given us a foothold from which to make further advances and they have strengthened the nation's morale. We claim no more than the elementary, inalienable rights of human beings and human communities. We shall struggle on until those rights are ours.

THE GENTLEMAN AND HIS PRIDE

By I. E. BEVAN

CASTIGLIONE'S *Il Cortegiano* gives us the picture of a perfect gentleman whose ostensible *raison d'être* is to serve his prince. Yet Burckhardt remarks of this paragon: 'The impulse which inspired him was directed, though our author does not acknowledge the fact, not to the service of the prince, but to his own perfection...'[1] In fact the ideal gentleman, as he appears in sixteenth century fiction as well, was essentially a believer in himself: as such, he loved grand gestures and elaborate displays; and these might take the form of magnanimous pardon for his enemies, lavish entertainment for his guests, compliments for ladies, or presents for foe and friend alike. In such demonstrations, he exalted himself rather than others. This dedication to one's own gentility and worth I would call 'the code of arrogance'; although, of course, the term implies a modern and therefore an unhistorical way of looking at sixteenth century ideas, for the quality was then scarcely recognized as arrogance: 'Magnanimity' was the word most often used to describe it.

The grand gesture, in its various forms, is a theme used particularly often by Italian story-tellers. The form of the *novella* usually demands some striking climax: and such a gesture on the part of the hero offers an effective one. But it is not in the *novella* only that this kind of action is described and applauded.[2] The Italian comedies are generally frivolous throughout, and less concerned with the strange and marvellous acts of individuals than the *novella*. But in Aretino's *Lo Ipocrito* we find a character who makes a magnanimous act of renunciation in love. The unselfishness with which Prelio releases Porfiria from her promise to become his mistress, is qualified by the spirit of arrogance so typical of sixteenth century heroes. He has fulfilled the task imposed on him as a condition of the enjoyment of her favours, but cannot bring himself to insist on his reward against her inclination. He finally decides that the 'gentilezza somma' of releasing her will most befit him. But his magnanimous decision is precipitated by Porfiria's announcement that she has taken poison; and as this action necessarily lessens his magnanimity, depriving him of some stature, he rebukes her for 'l'offesa che fatta havete a la mia magnanimitade, solo col non degnarvi di chiederle in dono l'obligo, del quale

[1] *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Phaidon Edition), p. 235.
[2] *Orlando Furioso* (Papini), XXII, 93.

mi sete tenuta.' Thus in releasing her, he punishes her ungraciousness 'con la bontà e con la gentilezza'.[3]

A magnificent and self-conscious act of pardon is one form of the grand gesture celebrated by writers of fiction. The presence of arrogance is very evident, though at the same time hard to define, in the story of the King of Hungary and his servant, which is told in Erizzo's *Le Sei Giornate.*[4] This King not only pardons his servant for stealing a ring, and for putting the blame on an innocent man, but refrains from dismissing him outright, and saves his honour by suggesting that he ask leave in public to depart from the court on a pilgrimage. Not content with this, he finally presents to him the very ring in question. The action seems on the surface to be as lacking in ostentation as it is full of generosity, and it is admired as such by the young men listening to the story. But meanwhile, the innocent man accused of the theft has been tortured to make him confess to it, although the King is aware of the real thief's guilt. The man is eventually released, but no reparation is made or remorse expressed, the young men listening, who have made comments on virtually every part of the tale, completely ignore this aspect of it: contemporary interest would be focused exclusively on the one fine gesture, the act of magnanimity in itself: and the king, consenting to the pain of an innocent man in order to demonstrate his boundless magnanimity, would not be considered at fault.

The love of the splendid act is well illustrated by another story of forgiveness,[5] in which Raffaello dei Rusponi, having forgiven his mortal enemies, adds liberality to restraint by providing a sumptuous dinner for them, prepared in a magnificent room. He publicly embraces each offender and makes a long and noble speech, suitable for such an occasion. But so great is the shame of these men for their defeat in courtesy and so intense their hatred of being obliged to Raffaello, that they are driven to further mad assaults, which end in their deaths.

The cult of the grand gesture plays an important part in the serious literature of entertainment written during the sixteenth century, especially in the *novella.* It can happen that the dramatic extravagance of a courteous act reaches a pitch which makes it appear (to our eyes) absurd. In Bandello's tale of the Spanish ambassador, this extravagance blots out all real sense of consideration for others. The ambassador, while visiting a woman who lived in very splendid rooms in Rome, chooses rather to spit in his servant's face, than on the floor, – his explanation being that this face is the ugliest thing in the lady's room. Bandello gravely commends this action: 'un atto incivile, secondo che si fa, merta talora com-

[3] *Lo Ipocrito* V, 1. (*Quattro Commedie, 1588*)
[4] S. Erizzo, *Le Sei Giornate* (*Scrittori d'Italia*, Vol. 40), XI.
[5] G.B. Giraldi Cintio, *Gli Ecatommiti* (Turin 1853) I, 7.

mendazione.'[6]

Only once have I found any criticism of the consciously magnanimous gesture made, if need be, at the expense of others, including those who ostensibly benefit by it. This is in Bandello's story of Camillo and Cintia. Camillo mistakenly believes that his friend Giulio has seduced his mistress Cintia. Having accused him of this misdeed, he then says he will forgive him, and take no revenge for the treacherous dishonour done him, because a friend is more important than a mistress. A third friend, Delio, warmly commends Camillo's attitude at first: 'tu parli da gentiluomo'. But Camillo will not accept Giulio's solemn protestations of innocence: he insists that Giulio has offended, and thus insists on forgiving him; for to believe in his innocence would be a much less striking of act magnanimity than to forgive him while convinced of his guilt. Here the subtle egoism of the fine gesture is carried to an absurdity of self-glorification; and this does not escape Delio's criticism: 'ché, se tu brami mostrar la grandezza de l'animo tuo, mostrala in altro, e non volere con dimostrarti magnanimo e generoso far che Giulio sia tenuto disleale e villano.'[7] But it seems to me that most, if not all acts of magnanimity, even those more genuine than Camillo's, are designed to raise those who perform them above the level of their fellow-men, and sometimes even at the expense of their fellow men.

This desire to triumph over others in being liberal, magnanimous and courteous in every way, also manifests itself in a dread of being obliged to anyone. Hatred of obligation, in fact, is an emotion which leads to and accompanies many a grand gesture; and sometimes it can make a man rebel against his very benefactor, who has made the gesture. Raffaello dei Rusponi's forgiveness and liberality only incense his enemies to further injury and outrage. In another of his tales, Bandello tells us of a king of Persia and his seneschal, who fight like two deadly enemies in unwearying combat: Ariabarzane the Seneschal is fighting to make the King obliged to him for his courtesy and liberality; Artese the King is fighting not to be obliged. Ariabarzane, in the writer's words, 'sapeva molto bene che queste sue cortesie non piacevano al re'; but he determined to persevere with them, 'non perché più roba volesse che il re li donasse, ma solamente per onorarsi ed acquistar fama.' But the King finally punishes Aria-

[6] M.M. Bandello, *Il Novelliere* (Flora), III, 42. Vol. II, p. 463. This story may be a distorted version of the account (in Diogenes Laertes, Book VI,32) of a similar action, which was praised by Alexander, on the part of the philosopher Diogenes. But even the warmest admirer of his philosophy would scarecely claim gentility for Diogenes as he is traditionally portrayed. Yet this Bandello does for the Spanish ambassador.

[7] *Ibid*, II, 40. Vol. II, p. 36.

barzane for his pride.[8] Here, in fact, hatred of obligation is carried to such extremes that it arouses a tacit criticism on the writer's part. But in his tale of Anselmo, who nobly refuses to take advantage of an old family enemy's imprisonment to seduce his unprotected sister, Bandello gives no such hint of criticism. Anselmo is tempted by the situation, but resists his feelings successfully by remembering that he is a gentleman. Not only does he spare the sister's honour, but with 'animo magnanimo e cesareo' (his own words), overlooks the ancestral quarrel, and pays the required amount of money for the brother's release. Indeed, he overpays, and such is his liberality, will take nothing back. But his enemy has only exchanged a material prison for the more irksome bonds of obligation; and in order to escape these, he asks his sister to forfeit her honour voluntarily to Anselmo, and thus show that her will conforms to the nobility of their ancestors. He explains to her: 'non cape che in quella persona ove regna il brutissimo vizio de l'ingratitudine possa lacuna gentil virtù abitare'; but he is thinking of his own gratitude, not his sister's. He begs her, therefore, 'che te e me tu voglia cavar d'obligo.' Anselmo, not to be outdone, marries the girl lawfully, giving her his goods as a dowry, and restoring her brother's wasted fortunes.[9]

Reminiscent of many a prose *novella* is Ariosto's account of the contest in courtesies between Ruggiero and Leone.[10] This is acted out in the context and with the trappings of a past chivalry, but its spirit is very much of the sixteenth century. Ruggiero has decided to find and kill Leone, his rival (favoured by her father) for the hand of Bradamante. But meanwhile Leone sees and admires Ruggiero's courage in battle. In friendship for the unknown knight, he rescues him from imprisonment and imminent death in the Greek camp. Thus Ruggiero comes to owe his life to the very man whom he most hates, and it is impossible for him to ignore this distressing obligation:

> Molto la notte, e molto il giorno pensa,
> d'altro non cura, et altro non disia,
> che da l'obligazion che gli aveva immensa,
> sciorsi con pari e maggior cortesia.[11]

An opportunity to free himself by a greater courtesy comes when Leone, still ignorant of his friend's identity, begs Ruggiero to wear his arms and colours, and to undertake the single combat against Bradamante in which

[8] *Ibid*, I, 2. Vol. I, p. 21.
[9] *Ibid*, I,49. Vol. 1, pp. 575-586. See also Giraldi Cintio's tale of the exchanges between Fabrizio Colonna and Alfonso d'Este. (*Gli Ecatommiti*, VI,2. Vol. II, p. 313).
[10] *Orlando Furioso*, Cantos XLV–XLVI.
[11] *Ibid*, XLV, 52.

all her suitors must engage, the successful one being he who remains unconquered by her after a day's fighting. If Ruggiero agrees to help Leone, he will of course be fighting in order not to marry the lady he loves. Yet his sense of obligation drives him to take this bitter step,[12] and when he remains unconquered by her, Leone is judged to have won Bradamante. But when Leone is told of the true situation by an enchantress he determines not to be outdone in courtesy. He surrenders Bradamante, and so saves Ruggiero from despair, though not from an eternal feeling of obligation:

> Ma quando ti sciorrò l'obligo mai;
> che due volte la vita dato m'hai?[13]

None the less, the author considers Ruggiero to have performed the more gorgeous act of courtesy.[14]

Ingratitude, 'il brutissimo vizio de l'ingratitudine,' as Anselmo's debtor calls it, is simply the failure to remember or honour an obligation. Gratitude itself has always been one of the virtues, but in the sixteenth century it was a virtue with perhaps a greater element of uneasy pride about it than at other times. Giraldi Cintio, who devotes the whole of his eighth *deca* to tales of ingratitude, calls it 'il più scelerato ed abominevole vizio, che sia nel mondo.'[15] The ungrateful man, like Lucifer, is angry with his benefactor for being greater than himself, and unlike the grateful man, he does not seek the right remedy for his sense of inferiority. The gentleman, more intelligent than the vile man, will never be ungrateful to a benefactor, but will try to outstrip him in well-doing and courtesy: to ignore an obligation is not the way to wipe it out. In fact, the sixteenth century attitude to the exchange of courtesies, to being grateful, is the same in essence as one of the attitudes to revenge and injury: both are governed by the desire to mend one's personal honour by a certain kind of repayment, to make oneself equal in stature (or superior) to some other person with whom injury or benefit has created a special relationship.[16]

When Giraldi Cintio says that a 'vile' person is likely to be ungrateful. he is not referring to vileness of character alone; 'vile' is an epithet of scorn applied commonly to the low-born, though it may be used of a man of any origin if he has ignoble traits in him. In fact the bulk of the stories in the eighth *deca* prove that ingratitude is a characteristic vice of the

[12] *Ibid*, XLV, 56.
[13] *Ibid*, XLVI, 45.
[14] *Ibid*, XLVI, 62.
[15] *Gli Ecatommiti*, VII,10. Vol. III, p. 39. Cf. *Ibid*, I, Conclusion. Vol. I, p. 234.
[16] *Ibid*, VI,2. Vol. II, p. 316. 'Onde si può vedere che, come chi fa ingiuria dee sempre temere la vendetta, così chi usa cortesia, se forse il beneficio non cade in persona vile ed ingrata, ne dee sempre sperare dicevole guiderdone.'

lower orders. In the first story, for instance, the ungrateful man is one 'nato della vil feccia della plebe'[17]; and in the fourth story, the low-born Matea conforms to her ignoble origin in showing ingratitude towards the queen who has favoured her.[18] After the final story of the *Ecatommiti* has been told, the company praise its courteous hero, Ottone, for magnanimity towards an enemy, and end by reiterating this opinion of the day on gratitude, and birth.[19]

Behind most gentlemanly displays of liberality, valour, and magnanimity, from the wearing of fine clothes, to the pardon of an enemy or the sacrifice of a love, lies concern for reputation. This concern also partly (though not entirely) explains the special sensitivity with which obligation and ingratitude are regarded by writers and their characters. Characteristic of the ideal sixteenth century gentleman is his implicit faith in his own merit; he longs for fame, not as a compensation for any inner sense of inadequacy, but as the just fulfilment of his worth and gentility. It is true that a consiousness of this worth is sometimes in itself felt to be satisfying, and in times of doubt and trouble, reassuring. Sidney's Evarchus, for instance, called on to administer justice in Arcadia, is encouraged to accept this responsibility by 'the secret assurance of his own worthyness ... whiche although yt bee never so wellclothed in modesty yet allwayes lives in the worthiest myndes.'[20] Guyon, in all his vicissitudes, never loses this inner assurance,

> And evermore himselfe with comfort feedes,
> Of his own vertues, and prayse-worthie deedes; [21]

and Tasso's Rinaldo is just as conscious of 'i suoi propri pregi,'[22] Of course, they have their precedent in Aristotle's magnanimous man, who 'thinks himself worthy of great things, being worthy of them.'[23]Ingratitude

[17] *Ibid*, VIII, 1. Vol. III, p. 41.
[18] *Ibid*, VIII, 4. Vol. III, p. 68.
[19] *Ibid*, X,10. Vol. III, p. 323. For English examples of the same assumption, see Sidney's *Arcadia* (Feuillerat, Cambridge, 1912) II,9, where Antiphilus betrays his origin by his ingratitude to Musidorus and Pyrocles, who have saved his life: 'he would not be one to acknowledge his obligation', and Ford's *Ornatus and Artesia*, where Ornatus rebukes his base servant for killing his sovereign and his benefactor; the man is not only a traitor and a violator of the sacrosanctity of kings, but also an ingrate. [Henderson, *Shorter Novels*. London, 1930. Vol. II, pp. 130-133] *Cf.* also *The Merchant of Venice* (New Arden) V,i,217. *Twelfth Night* (New Cambridge) III,iv,353. R. Greene, *Perimedes the Blacke-Smith*, Perimedes' Tale. First Night, (Vol. VII, p. 39. Grosart).
[20] *Arcadia*, V. Vol. II of Feuillerat's edition, p. 155.
[21] *The Faerie Queene* (H.J. Smith and E.de Delincourt) II,vii,2.
[22] *Gerusalemme Liberata*, V,16.
[23] *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1123b.

itself should not dismay the gentleman who has confidence in his own noble actions: 'quando mai non ci fosse chi grato si dimostrasse, l'uomo almeno, che magnifica e liberalmente opera, fa officio di vero gentiluomo e vertuoso e fa ciò che deve.'[24] But generally, fame is the immediate goal of the man who acts with virtue and magnanimity. Ariabarzane's dangerous liberality towards his king is all 'per... acquistar fama'; and the moral Erizzo, in the *Proemio* to the *Sei Giornate*, affirms that the desire to know oneself, and also to be known as virtuous, should be the chief end of life.[25] One of the justifications which Castiglione gives for modest self-praise, is that a virtuous man will not wish to be deprived by others' ignorance of his worth, of the fame and honour justly due to him.[26]

It is not likely that any sixteenth century hero would regard the desire of fame as an infirmity, even of noble minds. On the contrary, it is accepted as a quality full of strength and worth.' To glitter in the eye of glorious grace'[27] may be the hope which inspires an act of liberality involving huge spending; but it also inspires deeds of valour, performed with unceasing effort:

> The noble hart, that harbours vertuous thought,
> And is with childe of glorious great intent,
> Can never rest, until it forth have brought
> Th' eternall brood of glorie excellent. [28]

This is proper pride on the part of the Red Crosse Knight; it is quite different from the sinful pride which is also portrayed in the first book of the *Faerie Queene*. Pleusidippus, the lost prince of Green's *Menaphon* feels within him a like aspiration to fame and honour, and though ignorant of his birth, he takes it as an indication that this is gentle;[29] and Arivragus' impatience with his obscurity is one of the signs of his noble birth.[30] In a sense, Pleusidippus and Arviragus remain only gentlemen potential until they gain the recognition which is their due. For a gentleman cannot fulfil himself in solitude, and even if his reputation is already bright, he

[24] *Il Novelliere*, III, 67. Vol. II, p. 603. cf. *The Faerie Queene* V. xi. 17.
[25] *Le Sei Giornate*, p. 203.
[26] *Il Cortegiano*, (*La Letteratura Italiana*, Vol. 27) I, XVIII. p. 38.
[27] John Marston, *Jacke Drum's Entertainment*, line 115.
[28] *The Faerie Queene*, I,v,1.
[29] R. Greene, *Menaphon*, (G. B. Harrison, Oxford, 1927) p. 80. 'Although my parents and progenie are envied by obscuritie, yet the sparkes of renown that make my Eagle minded thoughts tomount, the heave(n)ly fire imprisoned in the pannicles of my crest, inciting me to more deeds of honor, than Stout Perseus effected with his fauchon in the fields of Hesperia, assertaineth my soule I was the sonne of no coward, but a gentleman'.
[30] *Cymbeline* (New Arden), IV,Iv,40.

must labour to keep it so. This is the advice by Ulysses to Achilles, as he skulks in his tent before Troy.[31] For secret gentility is like a light hidden under a bushel: it is the quality of gentility to shine afar like the sun, and of a gentleman to be known and applauded by many. Barnaby Riche's hero Silvanus, who is an ideal type of sixteenth century gentleman, is essentially a gentleman resplendant, *in actu;* for he is 'the glorie and honour of all yong gentlemen that ever were, that bee now, or shall be hereafter this, whose vertue, valliaunce, and worthie exploites, doe glister emongst the multitude, as the sunne beames doe upon the cirquet of the yearth.'[32]

Sidney, describing Evarchus' worthiness, implies that it is 'well-cloth-ed in modesty'; and it may be appropriate at this point to stress that modesty, as distinct from humility, is an approved virtue in the gentleman of the sixteenth century. That there is a profound difference between humility and modesty is made very clear in the passage of Castiglione where he justifies self-praise, provided that it is judicious and modest: 'Ho conosciuti pochi omini eccellenti in qualsivoglia cosa che non laudino se stessi... non si dee pigliar mala opinion d'un omo valoroso, che modestamente si laudi'. Praising oneself modestly is one of the courtly accomplishments; and the modesty of the sixteenth century gentleman, especially perhaps the Italian, is as elaborate as the sweeping bow he gives to a lady. In the frameworks of both Erizzo's *Sei Giornate* and of *Gli Ecatommiti*, where the companies of young men meet, and discuss who is to tell what tale and when, the speeches of modesty are formidably long.

Arrogance which is unmitigated by the slightest touch of modesty is surely regarded as undesirable in any age. It is their lack of modesty in expressing self-approval, not principally the self-approval itself (for this is not always groundless) which makes the *milites gloriosi* ungentlemanly and ridiculous. Ben Jonson delights in exposing the absurd manifestations of arrogance which are adopted (for example by Stephen Knowell in *Everyman in his Humour*) as a substitute for gentility. Yet the characters of which he evidently approves most, show in their self-righteous and lofty contempt for the world, a more subtle form of arrogance. In fact a reading of some sixteenth century works of entertainment has led me to believe that two principal kinds of arrogance existed: the approved kind, which manifests itself in self-confidence, a desire to win fame to excel in cour-

[31] *Troilus and Cressida* (The New Cambridge), III,iii,115-123. *Cf. Everyman in his Humour,* IV,vi,7: 'To keep his valour in obscurity, is to keep himself, as it were, in a cloak bag. What's a musician, unless he play?'

[32] Barnaby Riche, *Farewell to Military Profession,* I, (*Eight Novels*, Shakespeare Society, 1846), p. 64.

tesy and magnanimity, and a dread of being obliged, or of being ungrateful to another man. Then there is that other kind, which Jonson is particular satirizes; and this manifests itself in unworthy posturing, and in discourtesy rather than courtesy; it has not the saving grace of modesty, and unlike the first kind of arrogance, it wins approval from noone of any judgement. To some extent the characters of Hotspur and the Prince in *Henry IV* illustrate the difference between these two kinds of arrogance. It is necessary to say 'to some extent', because unlike the objects of Jonson's scorn, Hotspur is neither a despicable nor an affected man, but merely one who mars his perfection as a brave gentleman by lack of moderation, lack of Castiglione's 'disinvoltura'. It does not occur to Shakespeare, certainly, to regard the Prince's confidence in his own worthiness as arrogance, and perhaps the explanation for a still prevalent reluctance to sympathize with the Prince is that since the eighteenth century, ideals of gentility, especially those connected with proper pride, have changed. But Hotspur's arrogance is consciously and critically depicted in the play. The Earl of Worcester, who has already noted his overenthusiastic self-confidence, which comes out in his mixed metaphors in the speech about honour,[34] later shows him how his haughty impatient bearing towards others lessens his gentility.[35] Prince Henry's arrogance does not lie in haughty speeches, but in that sense of his own worth shared by Guyon and Evarchus, in the complete confidence that he can leave his discreditable way of life at will, and dazzle the world by his nobility and virtue:

> ... herein will I imitate the sun,
> Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
> To smother up his beauty from the world,
> That, when he please again to be himself,
> Being wanted he may be more wonder'd at
> By breaking through the foul and ugly mists
> Of vapours that did seem to strangle him.[36]

Sixteenth century fiction, in fact, contains little evidence that true humility in a gentleman was regarded as desirable, in the way that it was in Chaucer's Knight and Squire. Spenser, it is true, as a Christian, abhors Pride, which he sees as the Queen of Deadly sins: in his description of Cleopatra, he actually uses the word 'highminded' (used admiringly by

[33] *Il Cortegiano*, I,xviii. *Cf. Ibid* I,xliv.
[34] *Henry IV*, Part I (New Arden), I,iii,199-206.
[35] *Ibid*, III,i,174 *seq.*
[36] *Ibid*, I,ii,192 *seq.* Nobility which is recognized by the world comes, naturally enough to be described in terms of sun, fire, and glittering light. *Cf.* Ulysses' speech to Achilles, *Troilus and Cressida*, III,iii,115-123. See also, footnotes 27, 29 and 32.

many authors in describing gentlemen) as a term of reproach.[37] And elsewhere he shows that true courtesy, which is kindness, is not ashamed to stoop to acts of humility.[38] But Spenser's heroes, in so much as they are Elizabethan gentleman as well as faery knights and moral emblems, are possessed of a quiet pride in themselves. In prose fiction too, there are instances where a character expresses the idea that lack of humility is a fault. In William Warner's *Syrinx*, the King of Lydia rebukes his proud courtier Opheltes, telling him 'that honor standeth not without humility, that humility teacheth a man without oversight to have of himself an insight, and that in a poor man it is graceful, in a rich man glorious.'[39] Thus humility, paradoxically enough, can bestow on a gentleman added glory. Even Lodge's Rosader, who is very conscious of his own worth, and desirous that others should be so, does not forget his father's precept 'think that you are not born for yourselves'; and so, like Arthur, Guyon and Calidore, he does not scorn to show courtesy to his inferiors, – he even carries his old servant upon his back. In a truly noble knight, consideration for others can even prove stronger than anxiety about reputation. Pyrocles runs away from a challenger in arms, thereby incurring great personal dishonour, in order to rescue a lady: for 'the Ladies misery over-balanced my reputation.'[40] But none of these exercises in humility, I feel, involves any surrender of the inner self-esteem of those who practise them. One gentleman-hero who perhaps comes very near to being a humble man is Clarence in the anonymous play *Sir Gyles Goose-cappe:* his humility is felt by his friends to be part of his 'inward wealth and nobleness', yet even so, it is not felt to be incompatible with the 'high spirit' of a gentleman.[41]

The English may sometimes regard the cruder and the more dramatic manifestations of arrogance with a more critical eye than do the Italians. They seem to be less fascinated with the grand gesture, designed to glorify the individual who makes it; at least, they do not base so many stories on actions of this sort. Moreover, if implications that humility is a

[37] *The Faerie Queene*, I,v,50. *Cf.* The Prayer Book Psalter, Psalm 131, verse 1.
[38] See *Ibid*, II,ii,3, and Iv,viii,22.
[39] William Warner, *Pan his Syrinx*, chapter XLVIII (W.A. Bacon, North Western University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1950), pp. 152-153.
[40] *Arcadia*, II, 19.
[41] *Sir Gyles Goose-cappe*, V,.i.

'*Furnival:* I never knew a man of so sweet a temper,
So soft and humble, of so high a spirit.
Momford: Alas my noble lord, he is not rich
Nor titles hath, nor in his tender cheekes
The standing kake of impudence corrupts...'

virtue befitting gentlemen are exceptional, the exceptions which I have noted certainly all occur in English stories. But both English and Italian literature alike offer evidence that an inner consciousness of his own worth, usually coupled with a desire that this worth should become renowned, is an approved characteristic of the true gentleman. And this consciousness alone, which in its way is no less proud than an elaborate display of magnanimity, lies at the very heart of the sixteenth century cult of gentility.

POETI DEL DUECENTO NELLA DIVINA COMMEDIA*

di CARLO ALBERTO DORIGO

LA DIVINA COMMEDIA, è stato detto più volte, è una sintesi completa del mondo del suo tempo. In essa appaiono tutti i valori, i sentimenti, le passioni che si sono espressi nella coscienza medioevale, non solo italiana, bensí, si può affermare, europea. Attraverso la personalità, dantesca, che si rivela potentemente in ogni pagina del poema, noi ricostruiamo facilmente il quadro di tutta un'età, piena di fermenti religiosi, permeata di slanci mistici, ma anche agitata da fierissime passioni che continuano a far vibrare quel regno di morti con un fremito che raramente si riscontra nelle opere che parlano di vivi. C'è il mondo della politica, presente sia nel violento cozzo delle fazioni cittadine, sia nell'accorata deplorazione delle tristi condizioni di tutta la penisola, sia, infine, nel sogno di un'umanità raccolta nell'obbedienza ad un solo supremo reggitore, che, tenendo a freno con le leggi le intemperanze umane, assicuri a tutti, per sempre, con la giustizia la pace. Non manca nella *Divina Commedia*, anzi occupa una parte rilevante, il mondo degli ecclesiastici, di cui Dante bolla a sangue la corruzione, l'avarizia, la cupidigia di potere, in una impressionante serie di episodi che vanno dallo schieramento di teste chercute fra gli avari dell'*Inferno*, alla grottesca scena dei simoniaci, fra i quali si prepara il posto all'aborrito Bonifacio VIII, alle severe condanne pronunziate in cielo dai grandi santi, che si scagliano contro la depravazione proprio di quegli uomini di chiesa che dovrebbero guidare il prossimo sulla via del bene.

La scienza e la filosofia del tempo, poi, sono componenti essenziali del poema, e vi appaiono sia nei frequenti riferimenti dottrinali, sia nella struttura generale dell'opera, che, per questo aspetto, è stata giudicata una vera e propria *Summa* del sapere medioevale. Numerosi pure i quadri di costume, volti a condannare la corruzione del presente o a rimpiangere nostalgicamente il buon tempo antico.

È pertanto naturale che in un'opera poetica in cui la vita del Duecento appare in tutta la multiformità dei suoi aspetti, non manchino pagine dedicate a quel mondo che è tanta parte della vita di Dante, e che finisce coll'essere, dopo il malinconico tramonto dei suoi sogni di esule, l'e-

* Conferenza tenuta per invito del Circolo «Dante Alighieri» a Valletta il 29 maggio 1964.

stremo conforto del suo animo ferito e offeso: il mondo dei poeti e della poesia.

Dante ci ha esplicitamente avvertiti della natura dei personaggi che appaiono nel suo poema: vi trovano posto solo le anime che sulla terra hanno raggiunto la fama, hanno lasciato, nel bene o nel male, una vasta eco di sè:

> Questo tuo grido farà come vento,
> che le più alte cime più percuote;
> e ciò non fa d'onor poco argomento.
> Però ti son mostrate in queste rote,
> nel monte e ne la valle dolorosa
> pur l'anime che son di fama note.
>
> (Par. XVII, 133 e segg.)

Fra queste, logicamente, i poeti: e un gran numero di essi compare infatti lungo l'arco di tutta la *Divina Commedia*, poeti antichi e moderni, pagani e cristiani fra i quali abbiamo scelto i poeti del Duecento, proprio perchè quelli di loro che figurano nel poema sono sufficienti a darci un animato quadro delle principali vicende della poesia del secolo di Dante. Ci sarà così possibile, accostando in una specie di antologia ragionata alcuni episodi della *Divina Commedia*, ricostruire una pagina di storia letteraria, che non restringe i suoi confini nell'ambito dell'Italia, ma abbraccia anche quegli autori che, vissuti fuori della penisola, fecero sentire direttamente la loro influenza sul nascere e formarsi della nostra prima lirica d'arte: mi riferisco ai Provenzali, qualcuno dei quali sta, anche cronologicamente, al limite del nostro quadro.

Quando ci siamo accinti a passare in rassegna queste figure, è sorto immediatamente un interrogativo che ci ha lasciati lungamente perplessi: dobbiamo presentare questi poeti inserendoli nel contesto di un dibattito culturale, che ai loro tempi fu vivo ed animato, e insistere cioè sul loro valore letterario quale Dante lo ha misurato e quale si è venuto più esattamente determinando nel corso degli studi critici, oppure dobbiamo cercare di ricostruire la figura umana di questi spiriti, che, accanto all'attività poetica ebbero tutta una loro vita di relazioni che talvolta assorbì o sopraffece la poesia, e che si riflette per l'eternità nel loro destino? In altre parole: è più opportuno sottolineare l'importanza che questi uomini ebbero nella cultura letteraria del tempo di Dante, o sulla trasfigurazione poetica che Dante ha fatto di loro? Il dubbio è legittimo: perchè Dante, presentandoci, per esempio, Arnaldo Daniello o Bonagiunta Orbicciani, si pone nettamente sul piano del dibattito letterario; quando invece presenta le stupende figure di Beltram dal Bornio o di Pier della Vigna non fa un

solo accenno alla loro opera poetica.

La soluzione che ci è sembrata migliore è questa: seguiremo Dante. Nel quadro della storia letteraria del Duecento, accetteremo le sue indicazioni, accentuando, secondo il suo testo, ora l'aspetto letterario, ora l'aspetto umano, riservandoci, quando sia il caso, di integrare le indicazioni che ci vengono dalla *Divina Commedia* con quelle contenute in un'altra opera dantesca, che in qualche modo si può considerare la prima storia della letteratura italiana: il *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. Il titolo completo che si potrebbe dare al nostro tema dovrebbe pertanto essere questo: I poeti del Duecento nella loro realtà storico-biografica e nel mondo fantastico di Dante.

* * * * * * * *

I momenti significativi della storia della nostra poesia duecentesca sono, essenzialmente, questi: la penetrazione in Italia della poesia in lingua provenzale, penetrazione che avviene sia attraverso i contatti con i trovatori provenzali stessi, sia attraverso l'opera di quegli Italiani che rimarono nella lingua d'oc; la scuola poetica siciliana; il trapasso in Toscana delle forme siciliane, trapasso contrassegnato dalla presenza dominante di Guittone d'Arezzo e dei suoi seguaci; il fiorire della nuova lirica, a Bologna prima e a Firenze poi, per opera di quella scuola che, con definizione dantesca, si chiama il «dolce stil novo».

Separata da questi movimenti, e in un certo senso quasi isolata anche in un'area geografica ben definita, e pur tuttavia non immune da sottili influenze di cultura e di stile da parte della letteratura profana, fiorisce, nel medesimo periodo, la lirica religiosa di ispirazione francescana, la più schiettamente italiana delle forme poetiche del '200, che spiega il suo canto nelle verdi vallata dell'Umbria. Di tutti questi momenti poetici le personalità più rappresentative appaiono nella *Divina Commedia*.

Gli studiosi della nostra poesia delle origini hanno facilmente individuato gli apporti e i contributi di cui la lirica italiana del primo secolo è debitrice alla letteratura d'Oltralpe: in particolare, è stato messo in rilievo quanto vasta e profonda sia stata la penetrazione in Italia della lirica della Provenza, la poesia in lingua d'oc, che costituisce, per così dire, lo sfondo del quadro della lirica italiana del Duecento.

Sorta nell'ambito delle raffinate corti feudali della Francia meridionale, in mezzo ad una aristocratica società di costumi cortesi e liberali e di elevata cultura, la poesia provenzale si espresse in forme liriche, nelle quali fu presto evidente un proposito d'arte squisita e sottile, dove non di rado l'intelletto ha il sopravvento sulla fantasia, e la riflessione domina e comprime il sentimento. A questa elegante *Art de trobar*, come si disse,

cioè arte di comporre in rima, si dedicarono con passione signori feudali e uomini di corte; e non mancarono le donne. La loro poesia circolava lieta e bene accolta a rallegrare la vita un po' monotona dei castelli, diffondendosi con un meraviglioso slancio che la porterà presto a varcare i confini della regione e a penetrar in modo sempre più vasto nelle corti della nostra penisola. Immensa fu l'importanza dell'insegnamento artistico che dai Provenzali venne ai nostri più antichi rimatori: esso li sollevò sopra la rozzezza dei primi esperimenti di letteratura gnomica e didattica e offerse loro il fondamento di una poesia colta e raffinata, della quale il fiore supremo fu la nostra lirica d'amore, dal dolce stil novo al Petrarca.

Dante, che è osservatore attentissimo dei fatti letterari che sono venuti maturando in tutta l'area di eredità linguistica neolatina, non manca di studiare questo fenomeno nel *De Vulgari Eloquentia* e di ricavare poi, dallo studio delle personalità considerate, suggestivi spunti per la creazione di alcune indimenticabili figure poetiche.

Nel *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante ricorda a più riprese otto fra i maestri della lirica occitanica,[1] additandoli quali esemplari degni di imitazione per l'uno o per l'altro aspetto della loro poesia; fra questi, i nomi che hanno maggior rilievo sono quelli di Bertram dal Bornio, Arnaldo Daniello e Gerardo del Bornello, che egli cita in un famoso capitolo, insieme all'italiano Cino da Pistoia e all'amico suo, espressione con la quale Dante indica se stesso. Dopo aver affermato che al volgare illustre devono essere riservati i tre più sublimi argomenti che si possano cantare, la gagliardia nelle armi, la passione d'amore e la rettitudine della volontà, egli aggiunge: «E se ben consideriamo, troveremo che gli uomini illustri hanno cantato in volgare solo questi tre argomenti: Bertram dal Bornio le armi, Arnaldo Daniello l'amore, Gerardo del Bornello la rettitudine; Cino da Pistoia l'amore, l'amico suo la rettitudine».[2]

Dei trovatori citati, quello che nella *Divina Commedia* si presenterà con più drammatico rilievo è il primo, Bertram dal Bornio, che appare nel canto XXVIII dell'*Inferno*, nella bolgia dei seminatori di discordie.

Bertram dal Bornio, feudatario del Perigord e signore del castello di Hautefort nella seconda metà del sec. XII, era stato suddito di Enrico II d'Inghilterra, che era anche duca d'Aquitania. Secondo la tradizione, Bertram aveva spinto il figlio di lui, Enrico III, detto il Re Giovane, a ribellarsi contro il padre. Per aver cercato di separare due persone così

[1] Bertram dal Bornio, Arnaldo Daniello, Gerardo del Bornello, Tebaldo I Re di Navarra, Folco da Marsiglia, Aimeric di Belinoi, Aimeric di Peguilhan, Piero d'Alvernia.
[2] D.V.E. II, 2.

strettamente congiunte per vincolo di sangue, Bertram è sottoposto a una pena spaventosa. Ricordiamo che con rigorosa applicazione della legge del contrappasso, coloro che introdussero nella società umana le ferite delle discordie, l'atrocità degli odi, delle vendette e del sangue, sono a loro volta orrendamente dilaniati, lacerati e insanguinati nelle loro stesse carni. Un diavolo armato di spada taglia le membra dei dannati, infliggendo profonde ferite che continuamente si rimarginano, per essere eternamente rinnovate. Le ferite sono, naturalmente, proporzionate alla gravità della colpa. Ed ecco l'orrenda apparizione di Bertram dal Bornio, nei versi stessi di Dante:

Io vidi certo, ed ancor par ch'i' 'l veggia,
un busto sanza capo andar sí come
andavan li altri della trista greggia;
e 'l capo tronco tenea per le chiome,
pesol con mano a guisa di lanterna;
e quel mirava noi, e dicea: «Oh me!»
Di sè facea a se stesso lucerna,
ed eran due in uno e uno in due:
com'esser può, quei sa che sí governa.

(Inf. XXVIII, 118-126)

Con allucinante evidenza, come ha notato il Momigliano, i versi ci mettono dinanzi agli occhi l'incredibile naturalezza di quel camminare di un tronco senza capo; e il busto tiene con la mano per le chiome il capo tronco, a guisa di lanterna, quasi per illuminare il tragico cammino. Dal capo parte uno sguardo di agonizzante e, in armonia con lo sguardo, il sospiro, musicalmente tradotto nello smorzato della rima composta.

Quando diritto al piè del ponte fue,
levò 'l braccio alto con tutta la testa,
per appressarne le parole sue,
che fuoro: «Or vedi la pena molesta
tu che, spirando, vai veggendo i morti:
vedi s'alcuna è grande come questa.
E perchè tu di me novella porti,
sappi ch'i' son Bertram dal Bornio, quelli
che diedi al Re giovane i ma' conforti:
Io feci il padre e 'l figlio in sé ribelli:
Achitofèl non fe' più d'Absalone
e di David coi malvagi punzelli.
Perch'io partí cosí giunte persone,

partito porto il mio cerebro, lasso!,
dal suo principio ch'è in questo troncone.
Cosí s'osserva in me lo contrapasso.»

(Inf. XXVIII, 118-142)

La rappresentazione, tutta viva, raggiunge l'apice della sua spaventosa naturalezza nel verso

«levò 'l braccio alto con tutta la testa»

dove la parola *tutta* avvicina e ingrandisce via via quella testa di decapitato con una evidenza da far indietreggiare. E la commozione culmina nel tragico lamento di una testa sospesa e innalzata verso Dante nel bisogno pietoso e miserando di alleviare almento con uno sfogo di parole il proprio interminabile strazio.

Come sarà sorta in Dante questa terribile fantasia, riferita per di più a un poeta che egli, oltre a lodarlo nel *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, aveva anche celebrato nel *Convivio*[3] per la liberalità e la magnificenza dei costumi? È sempre azzardato avanzare ipotesi su quale possa essere stato il primo stimolo per una fantasia potente come quella di Dante; ma qui ci sembra di poterne arrischiare una. Nella più famosa delle sue canzoni[4] Bertram esalta la bellezza della battaglia e della strage: i colpi dati e ricevuti con gagliarda potenza, i cavalli dei morti che errano sbandati sul campo, le teste e le braccia mozzate, i cadaveri giacenti nei fossati che recano infitti i tronconi delle lance. E ci sembra verosimile pensare che da questa violenta e compiaciuta descrizione Dante abbia preso lo spunto per ritrarre la congerie di mostruose piaghe che si addensa nella bolgia, e culmina nella raccapricciante visione del busto senza testa che tiene il capo tronco per le chiome.

Il secondo poeta provenzale che appare nella *Divina Commedia* è Arnaldo Daniello, fiorito anch'esso verso la fine del sec. XII, uno dei maestri del *trobar clus*, cioè dell'arte di comporre in modo raffinato e difficile. L'arte di Arnaldo, è stato notato,[5] è il risultato di una assidua ricerca di mezzi espressivi, di un'ansiosa, tenace, faticata conquista della forma atta a tradurre in parole il fantasma poetico. «Fabbro del parlar materno», lo chiama Dante: ed è veramente l'artefice che forgia e tempra il verso con un'arte vigorosa, energica, e si crea una sua lingua robusta, potentemente significativa e realistica, se pur dura e difficile.

Dell'arte di Arnaldo Dante ha sentito vivo il fascino, e ne ha imitato la maniera in un gruppo di rime che si sogliono chiamare «petrose», per-

[3] Conv. IV, XI, 14.
[4] *Bem platz lo gais temps de pascor.*
[5] Viscardi: Storia della letteratura italiana; Milano; 1960; pag. 289.

chè dirette a una donna che il Poeta raffigura dura come pietra verso di lui; rime in cui all'amore quasi mistico della *Vita Nuova* si sostituisce, come nel trovatore provenzale, una passione ardente, un sensualismo acuto e fremente.

Arnaldo Daniello è collocato nel Purgatorio, fra i lussuriosi. La sua presentazione è fatta da Guido Guinizzelli con parole che, prendendo l'avvio da un atto di umiltà, si trasformano poi in una affermazione polemica che, sfiorato solo Girardo del Bornello, si appunta direttamente su Guittone d'Arezzo, da molti allora considerato come il maggiore fra i rimatori italiani. Ma su questa polemica dovremo necessariamente ritornare più avanti.

Quando Guinizzelli, concluso il suo dire, scompare nel fuoco in cui espia la sua pena

come per l'acqua il pesce andando al fondo,

Dante chiede allo spirito che gli è stato indicato di rivelargli il proprio nome. E quello risponde

«Tan m'abellis vostre cortes deman,
qu'ieu no me puesc ni voill a vos cobrire.»

e continua per altri sei versi in provenzale, che Dante ha composto dimostrando approfondita conoscenza di quella lingua. Eccone la traduzione:

«Tanto mi piace la vostra cortese domanda ch'io non mi posso nè voglio a voi celare. Io sono Arnaldo, che piango e vado cantando; pensieroso contemplo la mia passata follia, e vedo gioioso, innanzi a me, il giorno che spero. Ora vi prego in nome di quella virtù (divina) che vi conduce al sommo della scala, ricordatevi a tempo del mio dolore!»

E dopo questa dolente preghiera Dante conclude:

Poi s'ascose nel foco che li affina.

Felicemente il Sapegno commenta l'episodio: «L'uso del linguaggio forestiero e aulico sottolinea il tono distaccato della risposta del trovatore, serve a stilizzare in una formula vaga il contrasto fra l'esperienza terrena e lo stato presente di penitenza, fra le contrite memorie e le luminose speranze; mentre al ripudio delle passioni mondane s'accompagna, appena accennato, il rifiuto anche di un gusto già caro di scene arcane e chiuse. Il dramma dei sentimenti vanisce in una preghiera sospirosa, a quel modo che la figura dello spirito si dilegua e si dissolve nel fuoco purificatore».

Chi avesse pratica di poesia provenzale avrebbe riconosciuto nell'avvio del primo verso citato l'inizio di una celebre lirica, che Dante stesso

riporta nel *De Vulgari Eloquentia*[6] come modello di canzone illustre:

Tan m'abellis l'amoros pensamen

È un componimento di Folchetto da Marsiglia, l'ultimo dei poeti provenzali che incontreremo nella *Divina Commedia*, nel IX canto del *Paradiso*, fra gli spiriti amanti del cielo di Venere.

Anche Folco è presentato dalle parole di un'altra anima, Cunizza da Romano; e nel suo dire riecheggia, almeno parzialmente, il concetto fondamentale espresso da quella: nel cielo non si ricorda con tristezza la vita trascorsa sulla terra, anche se in essa l'anima si lasciò talvolta travolgere dalla passione d'amore. Perchè, anche se l'innata inclinazione amorosa spinse dapprima lo spirito alla lussuria, in seguito, riportata alla sua retta destinazione, essa divenne fervore di carità ed amore celeste, e fu quindi la causa prima della beatitudine raggiunta in Paradiso. Questo è stato l'itinerario spirituale di Cunizza e di Folchetto da Marsiglia, insigne trovatore fiorito tra la fine del XII e gli inizi del XIII secolo. Nelle sue canzoni celebrò con appassionato fervore Azalais, moglie di Barral du Baux, visconte di Marsiglia, e dopo la morte di lei, a quanto narrano gli antichi biografi, fu preso da tanta tristezza che si ritirò dal mondo ed entrò nell'ordine cistercense. Nel 1205 divenne vescovo di Tolosa, segnalandosi come ardente e talora feroce persecutore degli Albigesi. Morí nel 1231. Nel suo colloquio con Dante, Folchetto ripercorre le tappe della sua vita, prima spensierata, poi rigidamente ascetica. Delle sua gloria poetica, di cui aveva fatto cenno Cunizza, nessun ricordo: mentre il misticismo e l'intransigenza del vescovo e dell'inquisitore risuonano nel tono di accesa polemica dell'ultima parte, con il richiamo al dovere di liberare la Terrasanta dagli infedeli e la profezia della giusta punizione divina che attende la curia romana traviata dalla cupidigia.

E qui ci sia lecito constatare come anche il cammino percorso da Dante è analogo a quello seguito da Folchetto, dalla poesia d'amore alla vita religiosa. Anche Dante ebbe in giovinezza i suoi travagli d'amore: e ricordiamo il turbamento da cui è colto nel canto V dell'*Inferno* dinanzi alle schiere degli antichi amanti. Ma da quella passione tutta terrena si riscosse per ritrovare, sulla strada della poesia, i più alti valori della religione, in una pratica intransigente che lo spinge a condannare con fierissimo sdegno tutte le deformazioni e i compromessi a cui si abbandonavano i cristiani di allora. La figura di Folco, insomma, è, per la somiglianza delle esperienze terrene, più vicina al cuore di Dante di quanto non sia solitamente apparso agli studiosi.

[6] II, VI.

Con essa si conclude il quadro dei trovatori provenzali che Dante presenta, e che si collocano al limite estremo della nostra indagine (e anche un po' al di là dei limiti strettamente cronologici che abbiamo scelto); trovatori che, nella storia delle lettere non solo italiane ma europee, hanno l'immenso merito di avere espresso, superando senza rinnegarla la tradizione latina, la novità e l'originalità dei moti spirituali da cui nascono le letterature volgari, nelle quali, dopo secoli di fredda e vacua letteratura, finalmente si esprime la vera poesia.

Era pertanto doveroso cominciare da questi il nostro breve excursus, seguendo del resto le indicazioni di Dante stesso, che nel *De Vulgari Eloquentia* proprio da loro prende le mosse.

* * * * * * * * *

La primitiva fase della nostra storia letteraria è contrassegnata, come abbiamo detto, dalla diffusione in Italia della letteratura in lingua provenzale: diffusione che, come ben ha mostrato il Viscardi,[7] non è avvenuta soltanto per esportazione della poesia trobadorica in centri diversi da quelli di origine, operata da trovatori nomadi o esuli o emigrati al seguito di grandi dame andate spose a signori di altre nazioni. È stato piuttosto un'opera di «importazione» consapevole e attiva di quella poesia nelle varie regioni d'Europa, per opera di letterati o amatori di poesia, là residenti.

I più noti fra i rimatori italiani in lingua provenzale furono il bolognese Rambertino Buvalelli, il veneziano Bartolomè Zorzi, i genovesi Lanfranco Cigala, Bonifacio Calvo e Percivalle Doria e il mantovano Sordello da Goito.

Sordello è senza dubbio il più celebre di loro: non tanto per una maggiore validità della sua poesia, quanto per la grandiosa raffigurazione che di lui ha dato Dante nel canto VI del *Purgatorio*: dove è ritratto disdegnoso e immoto, in attitudine leonina, quasi ad incarnare il tipo ideale dell'uomo e del cittadino nobilissimo, amante del patrio suolo al di sopra di ogni altra cosa.

Rileggiamo insieme l'episodio dantesco: abbandonata la schiera dei morti di morte violenta, Dante e Virgilio proseguono il cammino su per la montagna. Dante è ora pieno di slancio, perchè Virgilio gli ha ripetuto la promessa che sulla cima del Purgatorio gli apparirà Beatrice:

> tu la vedrai di sopra, in su la vetta
> di questo monte, ridere e felice.

Ma ormai il sole si è nascosto dietro la costa della montagna, e per

[7] op. cit. pag. 200.

orientarsi meglio, ora che l'oscurità sta per scendere, è opportuno chiedere consiglio sulla via da seguire.

E perciò Virgilio aggiunge:

Ma vedi là un'anima che posta
sola soletta inverso noi riguarda:
quella ne 'nsegnerà la via più tosta.
Venimmo a lei: o anima lombarda,
come ti stavi altera e disdegnosa
e nel mover de gli occhi onesta e tarda!
Ella non ci dicea alcuna cosa;
ma lasciavane gir, solo sguardando
a guisa di leon quando si posa.

(Purg. VI, 58-66)

Altero e disdegnoso è, secondo un antico commentatore, il Landino, «colui che per eccellenza d'animo non riguarda nè con pensiero a cose vili, nè quelle degna; sí che dimostra una certa schifezza generosa e senza vizio». E il Sapegno aggiunge: «La potente rappresentazione statuaria, che isola il personaggio in una solitudine sdegnosa, suggerendo l'idea di un'immobilità piena di interiore tensione, prepara lo scoppio del movimento drammatico dei versi seguenti».

Pur Virgilio si trasse a lei, pregando
che ne mostrasse la miglior salita;
e quella non rispuose al suo dimando,
ma di nostro paese e de la vita
c'inchiese; e 'l dolce duca incominciava
«Mantova...», e l'ombra, tutta in sé romita,
surse ver lui del loco ove pria stava,
dicendo: «O Mantovano, io son Sordello
de la tua terra!». E l'un l'altro abbracciava.

(Purg. VI, 67-75)

La drammaticità implicita nella situazione si condensa in un gesto imprevisto, di profondo significato simbolico, e prepara l'ampio sfogo delle terzine che seguono. È bastato il nome della propria città per strappare Sordello dallo sdegnoso isolamento e spingerlo ad abbracciare uno sconosciuto, per il solo fatto che è un concittadino. E Dante, che ripensa agli odi e alle lotte intestine che dilaniano tutta l'Italia, quelle di cui egli sconta in sè le tragiche conseguenze con il doloroso esilio che durerà tutta la vita, prorompe nella lunga, violenta e accorata invettiva, che abbraccerà tutto il resto del canto:

Ahi serva Italia, di dolore ostello,...

Ma chi è Sordello? Cavaliere di piccola nobiltà e di modeste risorse, aveva cercato avventurosamente fortuna per le varie corti d'Italia e di Provenza. Messosi poi al servizio di Carlo d'Angiò, era divenuto nobile e austero consigliere di principi, sí che infine Carlo gli cedette in feudo alcuni castelli d'Abruzzo. Di lui abbiamo quarantacinque componimenti: poesie amorose, politiche, didattiche. La più famosa di tutte è il *Compianto in morte di Sire Blacatz*, dettato per rinfrancare lo spirito a principi e a re pavidi e ignavi, che del cuore del morto Blacatz dovrebbero cibarsi per riacquistare coraggio e valore.

Tale compianto dovette avere gran peso nell'ispirare a Dante l'immagine ideale dell'anima altera e disdegnosa; e probabilmente gli suggerí anche l'idea e lo schema della rassegna dei principi, che sarà svolta nel canto immediatamente seguente.

Dell'eloquenza di Sordello Dante pronuncia alto elogio nel *De Vulgari Eloquentia*[8] affermando che egli, come maestro della parola, ha abbandonato il suo volgare mantovano, per accogliere tutto ciò che di elegante gli veniva offerto dagli idiomi vicini. Si è, cioè, accostato a quel tipo di volgare illustre «quod in qualibet redolet civitate nec cubat in ulla»,[9] che costituisce per Dante la lingua ideale. Tale lingua, per altro, egli crede di veder realizzata soprattutto nei maestri della scuola poetica siciliana, quella che viene giustamente considerata come il primo cenacolo d'arte della nuova poesia italiana.

La scuola poetica siciliana fu una vivace accolta di ingegni che da ogni parte d'Italia si strinsero intorno al più geniale e liberale dei sovrani, l'imperatore Federico II di Svevia, che fu non solo figura politica dominante ai suoi tempi, ma uomo di cultura e generoso protettore di dotti in ogni genere di scienze ed arti.

Dopo il giudizio severo dato dalla critica romantica nei confronti di questi primi rimatori, l'importanza della scuola poetica siciliana nella storia delle nostre lettere viene oggi ricercata nella consapevolezza e nella disciplina dell'intelligenza, che impone un freno all'immediatezza dei sentimenti, sottoponendosi ad un tirocinio artistico, che obbedisce ad esigenze di raffinatezza psicologica e tecnica, di eleganza, di dignità e squisitezza di eloquio. E Dante ha avvertito benissimo che cosa veramente siano questi rimatori: grandi artefici della parola, creatori di una lingua che è opera d'arte altissima e intensa, una lingua polita e lucida e tersa, in cui la parola ha quasi perduto ogni peso concettuale.

Capo e maestro dei poeti che costituiscono tale scuola, oggi viene

[8] I, XV, 2.
[9] D.V.E.I, 16.

considerato il Notaro Giacomo da Lentini: e questo riconoscimento trova anche conferma in un luogo di Dante che avremo occasione di citare fra poco. Ma la figura che per il suo tragico destino ha maggiormente eccitato la fantasia dantesca è quella di Pier della Vigna.

Pier della Vigna, da Capua, fu altissimo funzionario e per lunghi anni il più ascoltato consigliere di Federico II: dal 1220 circa fu notaio e scrittore della Cancelleria imperiale, poi giudice della Magna Curia, logoteta del regno di Sicilia e protonotaro della corte, fino a che, caduto in disgrazio nel 1249, fu arrestato a Cremona e tradotto poi in Toscana, forse a Pisa, dove, sembra, morí suicida.

La sua attività di rimatore volgare è piuttosto secondaria rispetto a quella, importantissima, di «litterarum imperatoris dictator», per la quale occupa un posto di rilievo nella storia della epistolografia medievale.

Dante, nel celebre episodio dell'*Inferno*, non fa cenno della sua opera poetica, e si sofferma solo a considerare con commozione gli aspetti salienti della sua personalità e della sua storia.

Rileggiamo la parte centrale dell'episodio: Dante e Virgilio stanno procedendo insieme nella selva dei suicidi che si presenta con tutto l'orrore delle piante dai rami nodosi e involti, delle voci lamentose che risuonano da ogni parte senza che se ne veda l'origine. Al poeta agghiacciato dallo spavento Virgilio non ha neppure il coraggio di dare una spiegazione: provi da solo a troncare un rametto da una di quelle piante, e vedrà cose incredibili ad udirsi.

Allor porsi la mano un poco avante,
e colsi un ramicel da un gran pruno;
e 'l tronco suo gridò: «Perchè mi schiante?»
Da che fatto fu poi di sangue bruno,
ricominciò a dir: «Perchè mi scerpi?
non hai tu spirto di pietà alcuno?
Uomini fummo, e or siam fatti sterpi:
ben dovrebb'esser la tua man più pia,
se state fossimo anime di serpi».
Come d'un stizzo verde ch'arso sia
da l'un de' capi, che da l'altro geme
e cigola per vento che va via;
sí de la scheggia rotta usciva insieme
parole e sangue; ond'io lasciai la cima
cadere, e stetti come l'uom che teme.

(Inf. XIII, 31-45)

La raccapricciante situazione della pianta che parla e gronda sangue

prende le mosse dal noto episodio virgiliano di Polidoro; ma la rappresentazione dantesca è collocata in un'atmosfera diversa e ben più tragica che non sia quella del poeta latino. In Virgilio, infatti, la pianta non si identifica, come qui, con la persona; e non è il tronco che parla dai suoi rami lacerati, bensí la voce emana dalla tomba coperta di cornioli e di mirti. In Dante invece la trasformazione dell'anima in pianta è l'essenza stessa della pena del suicida: il quale, privatosi volontariamente del proprio corpo, è costretto a restarne eternamente separato: perfino, immagina il poeta, dopo il giudizio universale, quando anche i suicidi andranno sí a riprendere le loro spoglie, ma solo per trascinarle all'inferno, perchè ciascuna resti appesa per sempre all'albero in cui è rinchiuso lo spirito che prima l'animava.

Dopo il drammatico lamento dell'anima e la mirabile similitudine che illustra il fatto, («la cui bellezza, è stato scritto,[10] non è tanto nella pittura, meravigliosa di concisione e di evidenza, del tizzone, quanto nella sua inaspettata efficacia a dar risalto, col richiamo d'un cosí semplice e usuale e, direi quasi, domestico fenomeno, all'orrenda innaturalezza del fenomeno infernale»), dopo la similitudine, dicevamo, interviene Virgilio a confortare lo spirito che geme e a invitarlo a rivelare il suo nome, assicurandogli, in compenso, che Dante rinnoverà sulla terra la sua memoria.

E 'l tronco: «Sí col dolce dir m'adeschi,
ch'i' non posso tacere; e voi non gravi
perch'io un poco a ragionar m'inveschi.
Io son colui che tenni ambo le chiavi
del cor di Federigo, e che le volsi,
serrando e diserrando, sí soavi,
che dal secreto suo quasi ogn'uomo tolsi:
fede portai al glorioso offizio,
tanto ch'i' ne perde' li sonni e' polsi.
La meretrice che mai da l'ospizio
di Cesare non torse gli occhi putti,
morte comune, de le corti vizio,
infiammò contra me li animi tutti;
e li 'nfiammati infiammar sí Augusto,
che' lieti onor tornaro in tristi lutti.
L'animo mio, per disdegnoso gusto,
credendo col morir fuggir disdegno,
ingiusto fece me contra me giusto.

[10] La Divina Commedia, commentata da V. Rossi e S. Frascino; Roma 1949; vol I, pag. 168.

Per le nove radici d'esto legno
vi giuro che già mai non ruppi fede
al mio signor, che fu d'onor sí degno.
E se di voi alcun nel mondo riede,
conforti la memoria mia, che giace
ancor del colpo che 'nvidia le diede.»

(Inf. XIII, 55-78)

L'eloquenza di Pier della Vigna, è stato notato, ha insieme un'accortezza e un giro aulico e un tono dignitosamente appassionato; queste sue parole cosi chiare, ordinate e serrate, racchiudono la sapienza e l'esperienza di un cortigiano magnanimo. Perciò questo suo primo discorso con l'alto senso di fedeltà, con la sicura chiaroveggenza, con la virile ribellione contro l'ingiustizia della sorte, con l'incrollabile senso dell'onore, col desiderio di riscattarlo anche dopo la morte, ravvolti nelle pieghe di un'eloquenza severamente adorna, rimane nella mente come solenne ritratto di uomo di corte e fa perfino dimenticare la colpa commessa.

Il secondo discorso, che ha per oggetto la legge generale dei suicidi, è più pacatamente discorsivo e si conclude, come abbiamo sopra accennato, con la funerea immagine dei poveri corpi appesi per l'eternità

«ciascuno al prun dell'ombra sua molesta».

Pier della Vigna, come abbiamo detto, è l'autore della scuola poetica siciliana su cui Dante si sofferma maggiormente: quella scuola che meglio di ogni altra cosa caratterizza l'elegante ambiente della corte di Federico II, e sopravvive anche alla morte dell'Imperatore, continuando a fiorire sotto re Manfredi, per dissolversi solo dopo la battaglia di Benevento (1266). Dopo quella data il centro dell'artività artistica e letteraria si sposta dalla Sicilia alla Toscana, e particolarmente a Pisa, a Lucca, ad Arezzo: cioè nelle città che furono, prima dell'egemonia fiorentina, i centri più cospicui della Toscana.

Firenze, in questo periodo, ha una vita culturale molto scarsa; ma già in essa vive ed efficacemente opera ser Brunetto Latino, uomo politico eminente, «sommo maestro in rettorica, tanto in bene saper dire come in bene dittare»: la definizione è di Giovanni Villani. Quest'ultima caratteristica di «dittatore del nostro Comune», ci ricorda quella di Pier della Vigna «litterarum imperatoris dictator»: tutti e due quindi, maestri dello stile epistolare. È stato merito di uno studioso inglese, il Davidsohn[11] notare che nei documenti fiorentini della seconda metà del '200 si fanno evidenti certe caratteristiche dello *stilus altus* proprie della scuola di

[11] Citato in: Contini: Poeti del Duecento, Milano, 1960; vol. II, pag. 171.

Pier della Vigna, introdotte nell'uso fiorentino appunto da Brunetto.

Costui, vissuto dal 1220 al 1294, ebbe parte attiva nella vita politica del Comune e seguí le vicende del partito guelfo a cui aderiva; mentre ritornava in patria, nel 1260, da un'ambasceria al re Alfonso X di Castiglia, seppe della sconfitta dei Fiorentini a Montaperti e rimase esule in Francia fino al 1266, quando, mutate le condizioni politiche in seguito alla battaglia di Benevento, poté rientrare nella sua città. Fu in seguito notaio e scriba del Comune e coprí molte cariche pubbliche. Durante l'esilio scrisse in francese il *Trésor*, che è un grosso trattato enciclopedico; in settenari italiani compose il *Tesoretto*, un poemetto allegorico didattico; in prosa italiana robustamente modellata sugli esemplari classici tradusse e adattò modernamente gli scritti retorici di Cicerone.

Si è creduto a lungo che Brunetto Latini avesse veramente esercitato la professione di maestro di retorica. Ma dall'episodio dell'*Inferno* che leggeremo si ricava un senso assai più ampio, tale comunque da confermare un altro giudizio del Villani: «... fu cominciatore e maestro in digrossare i Fiorentini e fargli scorti in bene parlare e in sapere guidare e reggere la nostra repubblica secondo politica». Oggi non si pensa ormai più a una vera e propria attività didattica di Brunetto, ma a un magistero del tutto libero, a una consuetudine di conversazione con gli ingegni più promettenti della città. Il valore della sua opera come formatore dei Fiorentini del secolo XIII si avverte appieno nei versi commossi con cui Dante, che del magistero di Brunetto sentí vivamente l'influsso, esprime al vecchio erudito la sua filiale devozione e riconoscenza, perchè da lui ha appreso ben più che delle regole retoriche, ma, addirittura, «come l'uom s'eterna».

Ricordiamo l'episodio: nel cerchio dei peccatori contro natura, Dante e Virgilio, camminando lungo l'argine che costeggia l'orribile sabbione, incontrano una schiera di anime che li guardano con insistenza.

Cosí adocchiato da cotal famiglia,
fui conosciuto da un che mi prese
per lo lembo e gridò: «Qual maraviglia!»
E io, quando 'l suo braccio a me distese,
ficcai li occhi per lo cotto aspetto,
sí che 'l viso abbruciato non difese
la conoscenza sua al mio intelletto;
e chinando la mano a la sua faccia,
rispuosi: «Siete voi qui, ser Brunetto?»

(Inf. XV, 22-30)

«Il quadro, nota il Momigliano, è immerso non più nell'ombra fosca degli

altri cerchi, ma in una penombra che avvolge d'intimità e di serenità le figure. Da questo gruppo raccolto viene avanti, con un gesto familiare e con l'esclamazione spontanea d'un incontro inaspettato, l'antico maestro di Dante». Dopo il primo scambio di saluti Brunetto riprende il cammino insieme ai due poeti; e Dante procede accanto a lui a capo chino, «com'om che riverente vada». Brunetto gli domanda perchè egli faccia quella via mentre è ancora in vita. La domanda è quella solita di tanti altri trapassati; ma l'andamento del colloquio e il giro alto della frase già fanno capire che essa è l'introduzione di un maestro che reprende qui il suo ufficio terreno. E il seguito del discorso si mantiene tutto su quel tono magnanimo, non di maestro di grammatica, ma di maestro di umanità, e si fa energico e sdegnoso via via che s'inoltra nell'argomento, che è l'avvenire di Dante, col suo destino di grandezza poetica e di infelicità politica:

Ed elli a me: «Se tu segui tua stella,
non puoi fallire a glorioso porto,
se ben m'accorsi ne la vita bella;
e s'io non fossi sí per tempo morto,
veggendo il cielo a te cosí benigno,
dato t'avrei a l'opera conforto.
Ma quello ingrato popolo maligno
che discese di Fiesole ab antico,
e tiene ancor del monte e del macigno,
ti si farà, per tuo ben far, nemico:
ed è ragion, chè tra i lazzi sorbi
si disconvien fruttare il dolce fico.
Vecchia fama nel mondo li chiama orbi;
gente avara, invidiosa e superba:
dai lor costumi fa che tu ti forbi.

(Inf. XV, 55-69)

Il vigoroso discorso di Brunetto ridesta un sentimento simile nell'animo di Dante che, dopo essersi piegato con tenerezza riconoscente dinanzi al maestro, ribadisce la sua fierezza di fronte ai colpi del destino:

«Se fosse tutto pieno il mio dimando»
rispuosi lui, «voi non sareste ancora
de l'umana natura posta in bando;
chè 'n la mente m'è fitta, e or m'accora,
la cara e buona imagine paterna
di voi quando nel mondo ad ora ad ora

m'insegnavate come l'uom s'etterna:
e quant'io l'abbia in grado, mentr'io vivo
convien che ne la mia lingua si scerna.
Ciò che narrate di mio corso scrivo,
e serbolo a chiosar con altro testo
a donna che saprà, s'a lei arrivo.
Tanto vogl'io che vi sia manifesto,
pur che mia coscienza non mi garra,
ch'a la Fortuna, come vuol, son presto.

(Inf. XV, 79-93)

La dignità virile di fronte alle sventure: ecco quello che Dante ha imparato dal vecchio maestro. E l'opera di alta educazione compiuta su tanto discepolo conserva all'immortalità la fama di ser Brunetto, assai più di quanto non faccia il suo poema, quel *Tesoro* che egli raccomanda a Dante prima di allontanarsi.

Sarebbe senza dubbio eccessivo attribuire a Brunetto il merito di aver dato vita alla cultura a Firenze negli ultimi decenni del secolo: pure, le testimonianze di Dante e del Villani concordano nel farlo ritenere un iniziatore e promotore di quella vasta fioritura di attività letteraria che porterà in breve tempo Firenze ad avere il predominio della cultura dapprima in Toscana, poi in tutta l'Italia. Brunetto ha quindi contribuito a creare quell'ambiente alacre e impegnato di vita dell'intelligenza che costituirà l'humus più fecondo per la nuova generazione di poeti, quelli che con espressione comprensiva si designano come gli stilnovisti. È quindi merito per buona parte suo se nella Firenze della giovinezza di Dante vediamo sorgere cenacoli di poesia e diffondersi il gusto della corrispondenza poetica: anche la *Vita Nuova* prende l'avvio da una corrispondenza poetica; e un solenne ammonimento in versi rivolgerà a Dante Guido Cavalcanti, «l'amico *suo* primo», quando il giovane Alighieri si abbandonerà ad un temporaneo traviamento morale: quel traviamento di cui è, fra l'altro, non gloriosa testimonianza la plebea tenzone in sonetti scambiati fra Dante e Forese Donati, l'amico che il Poeta, quasi come atto di postuma ammenda, ricorderà con affettuosa commozione nel canto XXIII del *Purgatorio*.

Col nome di Guido Cavalcanti ci spostiamo però già verso quell'ultima fase della storia letteraria del Duecento, con cui si concluderà il nostro excursus; nel periodo invece che stiamo ora considerando il caposcuola della poesia toscana è senza dubbio Guittone d'Arezzo, anche se recentissime indagini storiografiche,[12] anticipando di alcuni decenni la data di

[12] Contini, op. cit. vol. II, pag. 119.

nascita di Bonagiunta da Lucca, hanno riaperto un problema di priorità, la cui soluzione era fino ad ora ritenuta pacifica. Una cosa comunque si può ancora affermare con sicurezza, e cioè che, anche se più anziano di Guittone e più vicino ai modi e alle formule dei Siciliani veri e propri, Bonagiunta ha subito fortemente l'influenza del frate aretino, cosí come l'hanno sentita tutti i rimatori toscani prima dell'avvento della nuova scuola.

Dante non è tenero con Guittone, a cui, nel *De Vulgari Eloquentia*[13] rimprovera di non aver saputo usare il volgare illustre: e nella lingua di Guittone infatti, ricca ed elaboratissima, entrano in abbondanza, accanto a latinismi e a provenzalismi, modi plebei e forme dialettali aretine. La condanna del *De Vulgari Eloquentia* è ribadita nel XXVI del *Purgatorio*, dove Guido Guinizzelli considera stolti quelli che danno il primo posto a Girardo del Bornello nella poesia provenzale e a Guittone nel volgare italico.

Cosí fer molti antichi di Guittone,
di grido in grido pur lui dando pregio,
fin che l'ha vinto il ver con più persone.

(Purg. XXVI, 124-126)

In questi versi è il riconoscimento dell'altissima fama e autorità che Guittone godette presso gli «antichi»; ma anche l'affermazione dell'illegittimità del giudizio tradizionale, su cui a un certo momento la verità trionfa.

Oggi invece la critica è molto più favorevole a Guittone, di cui riconosce la ricchezza della cultura, del linguaggio e anche della vita spirituale. Dopo una lunga esperienza nella poesia d'amore l'aretino ha una crisi, per cui abbandona la vita mondana, entra nell'Ordine dei Cavalieri di S. Maria e si dà interamente alla preghiera e alla meditazione delle verità eterne. Allora nella sua poesia si viene affermando l'elemento dottrinale e morale, che già appariva episodicamente nelle rime amorose. E, forte del prestigio acquistato con la poesia e con la vita, Guittone si fa anche maestro, consigliere e guida nei fieri dibattiti della libera vita comunale, dove, oltre alla continua opera di persuasione testimoniata da un ricco epistolario, fa risuonare talvolta accenti di sincera poesia, realizzati in canzoni di ispirazione politica. Basterà citare la canzone composta dopo la sconfitta fiorentina a Montaperti (*Ahi lasso! or è stagion di doler tanto*), in cui il gran dramma della lotta civile è ritratto con parola solenne e veemente; e il compianto per la sventura di Firenze, la fiera rampogna agli Aretini vittoriosi e l'esortazione al retto agire sono espressi con accenti nobilissimi e forti.

[13] I, XIII.

Senza dubbio più pallida e scolorita è la personalità di Bonagiunta da Lucca, che pure ebbe corrispondenza poetica con i rimatori più illustri del suo tempo, Guittone, Guido Guinizzelli, Cino da Pistoia e, al dire di Benvenuto da Imola, con Dante stesso. Certo la fama di Bonagiunta dipende, molto più che dai suoi meriti, dal notissimo passo del Canto XXIV del *Purgatorio*, che contiene la professione di fede poetica di Dante e della nuova scuola.

Rivediamo l'episodio: siamo nella cornice dei golosi, dove Dante, incontrato l'amico Forese, si vede da lui presentare alcune anime. Fra queste, la più desiderosa di parlare con Dante è quella di Bonagiunta Orbicciani, che, dopo un breve preambolo, pone a Dante una precisa domanda:

Ma di' s'i' veggio qui colui che fore
trasse le nove rime, cominciando
«Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore».

Bonagiunta, che per primo forse aveva segnalato la novità delle poesie di Guinizzelli, si rivolge a Dante con parole nelle quali è implicito un elogio per la fama da lui acquistata con una canzone che, secondo le parole della *Vita Nova*, fu assai presto «alquanto divulgata fra le genti».

La risposta di Dante è modesta nel tono, ma recisa nel contenuto:

E io a lui: «I' mi son un, che quando
Amor mi spira, noto, e a quel modo
ch'e' ditta dentro vo significando».

(Purg. XXIV, 52-54)

La definizione è semplice e chiara: io scrivo solo quando l'amore mi ispira, e esprimo con tutta fedeltà quello che esso mi detta dentro. Senza entrare nelle complicazioni troppo sottili, e probabilmente arbitrarie, che gli studiosi hanno voluto vedere in questi versi, dalla terzina si ricavano due precisi canoni della nuova poesia: la sincerità dell'ispirazione e l'immediatezza dell'espressione.

«La novità della formula, ha acutamente precisato il Sapegno, deve essere misurata da una parte in rapporto con l'accezione della parola *Amore*, che qui è certamente intesa in un senso che trascende la comune materia erotica della lirica tradizionale e acquista il valore di un'esperienza intima e quasi religiosa; e dall'altra, in rapporto all'aderenza del poeta al dettato dell'ispirazione, che importa una nuova maturità espressiva e una scelta più rigorosa del linguaggio, al fine di renderlo meglio capace di assecondare le sfumature d'una raffinata sensibilità.»

E non è poco: anzi è esattamente tutto ciò che era sfuggito ai rimatori

precedenti. Ascoltiamo la replica di Bonagiunta:

«O frate, issa vegg'io» diss'elli «il nodo
che 'l Notaro e Guittone e me ritenne
di qua dal dolce stil novo ch'i' odo.
Io veggio ben come le vostre penne
di retro al dittator sen vanno strette,
che de le nostre certo non avvenne;
e qual più a riguardare oltre si mette
non vede più da l'uno a l'altro stilo.»
E, quasi contentato, si tacette.

(Purg. XXIV, 55-63)

Questo, dunque, era il nodo, l'impedimento che aveva separato la vecchia scuola dal dolce stil novo. E chi per primo aveva tagliato il nodo, scavalcato l'impedimento? Proprio quel Guido Guinizzelli a cui Bonagiunta aveva rimproverato di aver «mutato la mainera» delle rime tradizionali. Anche Dante riconosce a lui il merito di essere stato l'iniziatore, il padre di una nuova poesia. Ciò è esplicitamente detto in un altro episodio del *Purgatorio* poco lontano da questo: basterà salire la scala che porta all'ultimo balzo, fra i lussuriosi. E lí nel fuoco purificatore espia le sue colpe l'anima di Guido Guinizzelli, colui che tanto aveva cantato del foco d'amore.

Alla rivelazione del suo nome Dante vorrebbe lanciarsi ad abbracciarlo e solo il terrore delle fiamme lo trattiene: tanta è la commozione che prova

quand'io odo nomar se stesso il padre
mio e de li altri miei miglior che mai
rime d'amor usar dolci e leggiadre;
e sanza udire e dir pensoso andai
lunga fiata rimirando lui,
nè, per lo foco, in là più m'appressai.

(Purg. XXVI, 97-102)

«Padre mio e de li altri miei miglior...», cioè degli altri poeti migliori di me. Con questi versi Dante non solo fissa un caposaldo della storia letteraria del Duecento, indicando in Guinizzelli il capostipite della scuola del dolce stil novo, ma esprime anche, sul piano di un legame affettivo, il rapporto culturale che lo unisce agli altri rimatori e tutti insieme al primo Guido. La commozione di questa situazione lirica è sottolineata dal lungo silenzio, pieno di pensieri taciuti, che è espresso nella seconda terzina. Questo affettuoso senso di riverenza di Dante verso di

lui, che fa ricordare un poco l'incontro con Brunetto Latini, non sfugge al Guinizzelli, che chiede quale ne sia la ragione.

E io a lui: «Li dolci detti vostri,
che, quanto durerà l'uso moderno,
faranno cari ancora i loro inchiostri».

Nella replica di Guido si avvertono, come già notato, due elementi: la polemica letteraria contro Guittone e i suoi ciechi esaltatori, sconfitti ormai dalla forza della verità, e la modestia con la quale allontana egli da sè il tributo di gloria che Dante gli rivolge, indicando in Arnaldo Daniello il massimo dei poeti volgari. Del resto alla gloria terrena Guinizzelli non pensa più. Assai più urgente è ora la necessità di una preghiera che lo aiuti nel suo travaglio di purificazione:

Or se tu hai sí ampio privilegio,
che licito ti sia l'andare al chiostro
nel quale è Cristo abate del collegio,
falli per me un dir d'un paternostro,
quanto bisogna a noi di questo mondo,
dove poter peccar non è più nostro.»

(Purg. XXVI 127-132)

E anche Dante sa che la gloria terrena è come un soffio di vento di breve durata, «che muta nome perchè muta lato». Proprio questo si era sentito dire in una solenne lezione di umiltà da Oderisi da Gubbio nel cerchio dei superbi: e proprio lí Dante aveva pronunziato un altro importante giudizio di storia letteraria:

Oh vana gloria de l'umane posse!
com poco verde in su la cime dura,
se non è giunta da l'etati grosse!
Credette Cimabue ne la pintura
tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido,
sí che la fama di colui è scura.
Cosí ha tolto l'uno a l'altro Guido
la gloria de la lingua; e forse è nato
chi l'uno e l'altro caccerà del nido.

(Purg. XI, 91-99)

Se nel canto XXVI Dante riconosce al Guinizzelli il titolo di iniziatore della nuova poesia, qui afferma che il primo Guido è stato superato dal secondo, Guido Cavalcanti, l'amico di Dante che egli ha ricordato simile a sè per altezza d'ingegno in un celebre episodio dell'*Inferno*:

quel poeta a cui per essere perfetto è mancato, forse, solo l'interesse per i sublimi valori della verità rivelata (questa è, almeno, l'interpretazione più plausibile di un disputatissimo verso dantesco). Guido Cavalcanti era stato la personalità poetica più ricca ed originale di Firenze verso la fine del Duecento: aveva cantato d'amore con varietà di accenti, presentando talvolta questa passione come una forza fatale che si abbatte senza remissione sull'amante, tutto assorto in una contemplazione angosciosa della bellezza. Altre volte invece aveva intessuto la sua lirica di freschi motivi popolari, disegnando in agili ballate liete avventure d'amore, con vivezza e spontaneità felicissime. Per la novità degli atteggiamenti e per l'estrema perfezione a cui aveva condotto i modi della tradizione lirica dotta, il Cavalcanti era veramente ritenuto un caposcuola.

Dante aveva compiuto sotto la sua ombra le prime prove poetiche e a lui aveva dedicato il suo libretto giovanile, la *Vita Nuova*. Nel brano citato gli riconosce anche il merito di aver tenuto per un certo tempo il primato letterario, pur se ammette che forse è nato il poeta che supererà anche lui. Chi è il poeta destinato a oscurare la fama dell'uno e dell'altro Guido? Sentiamo il pensiero di un dantista del '300, Francesco da Buti: «Ecco che l'autore induce che Oderisi profeti di lui, e per onestà la dà a Oderisi che elli ne sia il dicitore, e anco vi mette *forse* per più onestà». Con il Buti si accorda la maggioranza dei commentatori antichi. Qualcuno ha invece pensato che Dante non abbia voluto riferirsi a se stesso, per evitare un atto di superbia, che sarebbe particolarmente disdicevole qui, proprio nel cerchio del Purgatorio dove quel peccato viene punito. «Ma superbia non c'è, osserva il Sapegno, sí tutt'al più esatta coscienza (anche altrove dichiarata) del proprio valore e della propria posizione storica; ove si pensi che l'affermazione di un oggettivo primato si inquadra in un discorso tutto inteso a sottolineare il carattere effimero di ogni primato comunque valido in un determinato tempo». In ultima analisi il senso più profondo del discorso è questo: che cos'è la fama degli uomini? «un fiato di vento che ieri si chiamava Guido Guinizzelli, oggi si chiama Guido Cavalcanti, domani si chiamerà Dante: ma, da qualunque parte venga questo fiato, si chiami Guido o Dante, non importa: è sempre soltanto un fiato». (Momigliano)

Intesa in questo senso, l'astratta considerazione morale del vecchio miniatore si trasforma in una drammatica e poetica meditazione sulla vanità della fama, in una esplicita lezione di umiltà.

I commentatori che si sono soffermati su questo passo hanno trovato analogie con i testi della letteratura ascetica medioevale, in particolare con il *De Consolatione Philosophiae* di Severino Boezio. Le indicazioni sono esatte e convincenti: ma, al di là dei riferimenti testuali, ora che,

arrivati a Dante, è giunto il momento di concludere il nostro esame panoramico sui poeti del Duecento, ci piace pensare che un'eroica lezione di umiltà Dante l'abbia raccolta dalla vita di un altro poeta del suo secolo, che abbiamo lasciato da parte, trascurando in ciò l'ordine cronologico, perchè, come abbiamo accennato all'inizio, la sua poesia, pur se non priva di legami con la cultura del suo tempo, fa veramente parte per se stessa, levandosi pura e originale nel cuore della più centrale regione d'Italia, l'Umbria verde. Mi riferisco al canto di Francesco d'Assisi, la cui vita fu tutta una grande poesia, nutrita dall'amore per le cose create, in compagnia delle quali si innalzava all'altissima lode del Creatore. Dante, che aveva attinto profondamente alle sorgenti della letteratura francescana (come dimostra, ad esempio, la presenza nel canto XI del *Paradiso* di sicuri riferimenti alla leggenda delle mistiche nozze di Francesco e Povertà; in senso più generico, poi, è stato rilevato come tutto l'impianto strutturale della *Divina Commedia* ricordi l'*Itinerarium mentis in Deum* di San Bonaventura, o anche il tempestoso cammino di purificazione contenuto nelle *Laude* di Jacopone da Todi) Dante, dicevamo, ha sentito vivamente il fascino di questa potente personalità e ne ha tracciato nel Paradiso un ritratto indimenticabile.

Non possiamo ripercorrere qui tutta la biografia, scandita con mirabile concisione nei suoi momenti essenziali: le mistiche nozze con la Povertà, la prima approvazione dell'ordine per opera di Innocenzo III, la diffusione della regola nel mondo cristiano, la missione francescana in Oriente, il ritorno in Italia, le stigmate, la morte. «Il complesso, ha notato il Momigliano, è il racconto di una *gesta*, e il profilo di Francesco vien fuori segnato d'una intrepida, dura risolutezza... E, armonicamente, intorno a lui tutto l'ambiente storico e spirituale appare duro ed eroico».

Ci soffermeremo a considerare solo gli ultimi tempi di quella vita che è, nella sua profonda umiltà, un'epopea. Dopo che il desiderio del martirio lo ha spinto a tentare la conversione del Sultano d'Egitto, il Santo, vista l'inutilità dei suoi sforzi, torna in Italia, e qui

> nel crudo sasso intra Tevero e Arno
> da Cristo prese l'ultimo sigillo,
> che le sue membre due anni portarno.
>
> (Par. XI, 106-108)

Nella perifrasi che indica il monte della Verna risalta il significato del luogo, solitario e nudo, in armonia con la dura eroica vita del Santo. E il crudo sasso, isolato in altezze remote fra Tevere ed Arno, è lo scenario più adatto al compiersi del miracolo delle stimmate, preludio a quella solenne trasfigurazione che sarà, nel suo tragico squallore, la morte di

Francesco.

Quando a Colui ch'a tanto ben sortillo
piacque di trarlo suso a la mercede
ch'el meritò nel suo farsi pusillo,
a' frati suoi, sí com'a giuste rede,
raccomandò la donna sua più cara,
e comandò che l'amassero a fede;
e del suo grembo l'anima preclara
mover si volse, tornando al suo regno,
e al suo corpo non volse altra bara.

(Par. XI, 109-117)

Anche qui ci soccorra la lettura del più acuto interprete di questo canto, il Momigliano: «È la chiusa di quella vita: è cadenzata sopra un ritmo più alto e più grave; divisa in tre pause di una maestosa uguaglianza; e termina con una nota isolata (*E al suo corpo non volse altra bara*), che deriva la sua grandezza dal suono disadorno, dall'assoluta semplicità e nudità... Un soffio di sovrana spiritualità avvolge tutta la scena e la trasporta in un'altra sfera: tutto è detto con un'estrema precisione; eppure nulla si configura veramente ai nostri occhi, come quadro visibile di questa terra: la sola parola precisa è quella finale – bara – che designa proprio il solo oggetto che manca... Questa morte, fra un cerchio di poveri frati e sul grembo della Povertà, chiusa come fra due note di gloria è, più che un trapasso, un'assunzione». Ed è, aggiungiamo noi, la fine veramente degna di colui che aveva cantato:

«Laudato si', mi' Signore, per sora nostra morte corporale.»

Con il ricordo di questa morte sublime chiudiamo la nostra panoramica sui poeti del Duecento presenti nella *Divina Commedia*. Il nostro ha finito con l'essere, seguendo le indicazioni dantesche, un lavoro di storiografia letteraria. Non dimentichiamo però che Dante nella *Divina Commedia* fa opera di poeta, sorretta da un vigoroso senso storico e morale, anche quando affronta i temi della polemica letteraria. E, al di là dei dibattiti culturali, suscitati dall'apparire alla ribalta di alcune figure di contemporanei, si può affermare che i poeti del passato forniscono a lui essenzialmente l'occasione di potenti trasfigurazione fantastiche, nelle quali la pagina storiografica si innalza quasi sempre, trascendendo gli aspetti contingenti, a commosse espressioni di sublime ed universale poesia.

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THE SUPPOSITION OF UNIVERSALITY IN ART AND LITERATURE

By GORDON ROSS SMITH

THE belief that great art is universal in its appeal was a favorite doctrine of those fine old nineteenth century liberals to whom we owe so many of our lovely, ineffectual (not to say mendacious), ideals. Reasoning from the assumption presumed a fact, they set out to establish those workingmen's colleges, the public libraries and the museums for which some of us are so much indebted to them. To a small degree, they were right. All social strata of the population produce individuals of intellectual and creative abilities, just as all strata produce dullards and halfwits, and the individuals of innate capacity have been immensely benefitted – as has all society – by those unrealistic nineteenth century ideals.

I say unrealistic because the painfully evident twentieth century fact is that to a very large degree they were wrong. Millions of Europeans, whether still resident in their native countries, or transplanted to America, have shown themselves in this century to be completely indifferent to the great art of the past, whether in music, sculpture, painting, architecture, drama, or poetry. Italy, the birthplace of opera and home of its greatest practitioners, has seen upwards of eighty percent of its opera houses closed permanently since 1900. Modern Italians seem to have traded the lyrical ecstasy of opera for the racket and stench of motor bikes. In England, bombed Wren churches remain unrestored, or move to Missouri, and those incomparable cathedrals are inexorably decaying, so much so that Lincoln wears on its south wall a warning to visitors to beware of falling stones. Although the French are chauvinistic about culture, their attitude is part of that Gaullist posture of importance which leads France into the ridiculous position of spending a greater percentage of her gross national income on foreign aid than does the United States, the French have accepted the restoration of some of their great art with contributions from trans-Atlantic Anglo-Saxons – for example, with Rockefeller funds at Rheims and Versailles – but otherwise they have often left great buildings shambles, as are the interiors of the Chateau of Blois and the Petit Trianon. The trashiest newspapers of England, France, or Italy are worse than the worst in America, but certainly they sell better than Milton, Ronsard, or Tasso. Similar but worse things may be said of the Germans, who

as a group of twentieth century Westerners have certainly preferred war to *Kultur*. When one reflects that the twentieth century spectacle Western humanity has made of itself was committed by an enormous population with the highest literacy rate ever attained by so many people, one can hardly be surprised at the revulsion of African and Asian peoples whose own achievements are in comparision nevertheless so picayune.

It might be answered here that the nineteenth century ideal had scarcely been implemented by 1914, that a little literacy may be a dangerous thing, and that among people with a long history of cultivation, such enormities could not occur. However, I am afraid that history will offer no support for this speculation. If we examine the changes in the reputations of great artists who worked before 1900 (anyone later is too recent to contribute evidence), we find that the educated classes were little more discriminating than their twentieth century successors (and no more humane, either, if we remember the massacres of Albigenses, Anabaptists, Huguenots, and Waldenses). Artists whom all recent generations consider good or great were often neglected during their lifetimes, especially for their best work, and the positions of prestige were often given to men now so nearly forgotten that they go unread, unexhibited, or – final damnation – unauctioned.

I will grant some few exceptions: Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, Rubens, and Bernini in art and architecture, Shakespeare, Molière and Goethe among poets. But even those who were continuously acclaimed have often had their extreme detractors, for example, Voltaire and Tolstoi on Shakespeare, or Horace Walpole on Dante: '...extravagant, absurd, disgusting, in short, a Methodist parson in Bedlam'.

Far larger numbers of great artists received only a partial recognition, either at the beginning of their careers or at the end, but in either case recognition came with conventional work and was lost or not acquired upon the appearance of the artist's most individual, characteristic, creative work – his 'greatest'. Thus Rembrandt's earlier work was in the current fashion but, as he grew more original, individual, and creative, he paid the price in utter poverty and complete obscurity. Caravaggio is another who started from contemporary fashion, but the more he attempted original solutions, the more were paintings returned and commissions lost. The fact that he set a style for later in the seventeenth century cannot obscure the repudiation of his greatest work at the time of its appearance. Mozart also received early recognition, later exchanged for neglect and poverty. Although Bernini himself fell out of favor in his last years, he remains far better known and more highly esteemed than his contemporaries Cortona and Borromini, both of whom are greater artists.

Wordsworth is a good example of a poet who was ill-received at first but who finally saw created the taste by which he was to be appreciated – as he said himself. Yet many living poets think no better of him today than did his first reviewers. Keats and Shelley, had they lived as long as Wordsworth, might have met the acclaim which as it was they died ignorant of. That English-speaking critics should have repudiated Byron in his own day not only in favor of Dryden and Pope but also of Beattie, Blair, and Falconer strains modern credulity but is a matter of public record. In more recent times we have the examples of Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, and Wallace Stevens. All three were neglected for from one to three decades after their first publications, while relative mediocrities like Bridges and Masefield, or T.B. Aldrich and Bliss Carmen, held the public ear with warmed-over Victorian hash. Now all three are recognized as among the very greatest poets of recent times.

Perhaps the most painful examples are artists who could not have hoped to live until their merit was glorified by fame. Many were painters: Vermeer, Guardi, Louis Le Nain, Gauguin, and Van Gogh. Others were poets: Webster, Tourneur, Clare, and Poe. From the evidence of extant manuscripts and contemporaneous comment, we may conclude that Donne's verses had considerable recognition among the knowing in his own time, but certainly the coming of the Augustans ended his popularity for two hundred years. Andrew Marvell's verse, first published in 1681, had to wait two hundred years for general recognition also. What chance has a Fantastic poet in an Age of Reason? Others, Traherne and Edward Taylor, waited two hundred years for initial publication.

If we turn to the Greco-Roman heritage, the spectacle of indifference, neglect, and destruction is appalling: Not a hundred plays left out of so many thousands, and those few of such uneven quality they suggest random survival; so little of Sappho we only surmise how great those nine books must have been; only such pieces of the *Satyricon* as to assure us it was a book that for masterly comic narrative surpassed *Don Quixote*; like Lucretius, it survived by chance in a solitary fragment. Examples could be multiplied endlessly, or transferred to art and architecture. At the thought of the glorious marbles burned for lime or thrown into the river in a frenzy of bigotry, of the tons of manuscripts left to rot in buildings themselves abandoned masterpieces, who could call any art universal? Although some Turks and barbarians looked upon the unspoiled monuments of Byzantium and Rome with helpless awe, their posterity certainly gazed with Gibbon's stupid contempt, shelled the Parthenon, plastered the mosaics.

Such indifference has by no means been peculiar to invaders and bar-

barians, but has characterized successive eras within Western society. To artists and the cultivated aristocracy of the Renaissance, Gothic was a collective term of abuse. It was not Spanish Gothic they disliked, not early English or early French Gothic, not Geometric or Perpendicular or Flamboyant, for those discriminative terms were not invented yet. It was simply all Gothic they abhored. Baroque also was a term of abuse once that era was over, and it still is to some people who cannot cope with all that intricately organized light, movement, and space. Organization is in the mind, and when the baroque organization is not grasped, the experience is confusion. Is the fault in art? Or in the disorganized or differently organized mind? Perhaps there is no fault either place; only difference.

If in literature and art we suppose the critical consensus of the mid-twentieth century to be right, a supposition I have silently employed so far, then we can see that while great artists and styles were acclaimed at one time, and neglected or reviled at another, so also inferior artists were in their day much acclaimed, although now we can see their merits were negligible. The two short-title catalogues include many such writers of before 1700, and a list of England's poets laureate shows an almost exclusive preference for inferiority. In nineteenth century America, Longfellow, Lowell, Riley, Holmes, and Emerson held the centre of attention. Of these, only Emerson maintains anything like his former position; all the rest have been surpassed in general critical esteem by writers whose books failed in their own time and who languished in relative obscurity; Poe, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman, and Dickinson. The art galleries of Rome are crowded to the ceilings with mediocre and forgotten painters, and even the Louvre keeps hanging scores of painters of the utmost onerous tediousness. I suppose they were acquired in those bad old days of the nineteenth century when influence could get any artist hung (even if he should have been hanged): I doubt if the great art museums of London, New York, and Washington would at the present time give so much as storage space to the sentimental and saccharine effusions of Devéria, Chassérian, Guerin, Girodet-Triosan, François Pictor, or Paul de la Roche, all of whom have pictures hung like cenotaphs in the busiest thoroughfares of the Louvre. It reminds one of the Appian Way. Apparently these, gross sentimentalities still appeal to a portion of the French public, along with the theatrical heroics of Jacques Louis David and the Baron Gros. Psychiatric investigators in America assure us that this particular combination of falsities – false sensitivity and false heroics – represents a character syndrome which is not perceptive, not sensitive, not affectionate, not brave, not self-sacrificing, but merely authoritarian and neurotic.

It is perfectly evident that good judgement in the arts is by no means

universal, and that even the greatest art has been and is subject to judgement of extreme divergence in the course of time; in such circumstances there can be no art which is universal because no one knows demonstrably what universality is. Since judgement of works of art is so far from being uniform or 'universal', what we appear to have is a succession of criticisms which are descriptions or indications of people's *reactions* to the works of art, not objective descriptions or evaluations of the works themselves. The reason for the variations of judgement lies not in the work of art, but in the mind of the critic. At best, the work of art is thought to be a revelation of absolute Truth, carried alive into the mind by passion or technique, or at least a glimpse of eternity, or of an eternal verity. At the other extreme it is a conglomeration of pernicious lies, and at worst, a shapeless hunk of battered marble, or peeling pigment on a square of canvas, or black marks on a mildewed page. And in all Truth we must admit that objectively it is only marble, pigment, or print. All significance that invests those material means is *understood* by the artist, but is *not* inherent. If he is both good and lucky, it will be understood by his audience also. The more different he is from them, the less they will understand him. These generalizations bring us to three concrete reasons why no art is or ever has been universal.

1. Art is a system of conventions. The soliloquy and aside in drama, the blue robe of the virgin, her seated or recumbent position, are all conventions in the most superficial sense, and yet even these are enough to bring a rejection of a work of art. For several decades after Ibsen's great problem plays, the use of soliloquies and asides was a good way to ruin the reception of a new play. But it cannot really be said that those two conventions are unrealistic, for everyone enjoys his own internal monologues, and that very real aspect of human existance can be represented dramatically only with those conventions. The facts of having a play at all is a set of conventions, whether with or without a Greek chorus or a god in the machine. There is no really realistic theatrical art: all is convention. Fulminations against the 'artificiality' of ballet, like Tolstoi's tantrum over Italian opera, are not sensible at all but merely naive. Music also is a system of conventions, from elements of notes and scales, and means of arbitrarily constructed instruments, to forms like the sonata and fugue. Painting is conventions of placement of figures, of representation of face, flesh, cloth or trees, of closed form and sourceless light, or open form and point-source light, of linear or painterly styles. Each time some artist deviates from the established conventions of his day, whether for greater precision, for greater expressiveness, or whatever reason, he makes more effort necessary for his audience. The greater the effort, the

more trouble for himself. Similarly, when conventions change, old styles become stale, or apparently crude, and 'begin to disgust this refined age', as John Evelyn said of *Hamlet*. The new age *considers* itself superior to the old, and the old artist's stock sinks, although a later age may reverse the judgement.

2. Art is also a system of abstractions, like language and science. The abstractions of language are indistinguishable from conventions because they are static, and the abstractions of science do not seem so because they have been subjected to verification and seem like that old but impossible human ideal, absolute truth. In all art both the form of representation and the ideas the representations are meant to convey are abstractions. At the Byzantine extreme the form or representation and the idea are doctrinally mandatory, and the artist's only option is within the required limits. At the modern nonrepresentational extreme, the form and the idea are individual, original, and private. The latter style is as rigid in its exclusions as in the former. By the dominant Western standards of art for the last six or seven centuries, the abstractions of a work of art should be new, or at least apparently so, and must also have some form of validity, not verifiable and not otherwise apprehended.

This restless quality in Western standards has had five general consequences. 1. It has produced a succession of new styles because truth was considered infinite. 2. It has rendered new styles initially inacceptable so long as they were not recognized as forms of truth. 3. It has made for the repudiation – after enthusiasm – of styles that have staled. 4. It has rehabilitated long dead styles. 5. It has assimilated styles of alien cultures. These patterns have made the West unique in the multiplicity of new styles created and old or alien styles assimilated. Although Egyptian art experienced discernable changes through its three millenia, it was singularly static compared to Western art; it assimilated little from surrounding cultures and could not be assimilated to them; it died instead. Byzantine art was not concerned with new truths, for all truths that mattered were thought revealed already. Chinese art has experienced changes intermittantly, but Sung dynasty artists were no more concerned with new truths or ways of expressing them than the Byzantines; indefatigably Sung artists copied the T'ang. Meantime the West has grown steadily less dogmatic, steadily more assimilative and tolerant of incompatible styles; no society but our own nineteenth and twentieth century Western has ever been so nearly cognizant of all historical styles. The uncomfortable consequence of our knowledge is that it exacerbates the problem of determining merit. The existence of an extreme multiplicity of mutually exclusive standards always make possible the selection of some by which any

work of art can be accepted or rejected, deified or damned. The only sense in which Western standards are universal is that all previous standards are included in Western cognizance.

3. The art we commonly call 'great' is that which says things we do or can believe, and it does so with a force, economy and complexity that other art cannot summon up. This force, economy and complexity, which together produce its power, are achieved through an elaborate compound of conventions and abstractions, all of which must be understood and accepted for that power to be felt. The conventions and abstractions are themselves assumptions, and where they are accepted, the play of them against each other produces intended and perhaps unintended implications. Both from the deliberate intellectual structure, such as the various levels of meaning in Dante and Spenser, and from the intended and accidental implications, the audience perceives successive major meanings like mountain ranges one beyond the other, or waves coming in to shore, and the major meanings are rendered irridescent with the implications that flash and disappear.

However, when the audience does not accept some portion of the conventions or abstractions, that portion of the work of art goes dead. For example, *Paradise Lost* has begun to lose the power and hence the audience it once had; the loss is a consequence of the evaporation from the minds of the audience of the conventions and abstractions of which it was composed, in this case, the epic convention and the doctrinal certainties (abstractions), of puritanism. The poem suffers additional losses because of its stylistic affinities with the high baroque which has been staled not by its seventeenth century creativity but by its eighteenth century imitation in literature and its nineteenth century imitation in other arts. The shift from what Northrop Frye has called mythic and romantic modes of the middle ages and the sixteenth century to the low mimetic and ironic modes of the nineteenth century has further lowered not only Milton's great epic but the epics of Homer and Virgil and the romance of Boiardo, Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser. It may be that *Paradise Lost* will follow the course that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* had already taken. Modern profundity pundits label Ovid glib and superficial. From the middle ages through the eighteenth century his audience was immense. Every educated person had read the *Metamorphoses*, but how many educated people today can summarize the stories of Ocyrhoe, Aesacus and Hesperia, Iphis and Ianthe, Caunus and Byblis?

I doubt that modern audiences are either more or less discerning than the audiences of past centuries who so greatly acclaimed poems now unread. On the contrary, the conventions and abstractions out of which those

poems were built are either absent from or inacceptable to the modern minds that ignore them. Such works may be said to have drifted out of focus; they may drift back in, as has Gothic art or Lucretius' poetry, or they may drift out of sight, irrevocably as Praxiteles and Zeuxis, or as hopelessly as Du Bartas and *The Golden Grove*.

This phenomenon of inadequate focus and consequent drift may also operate in reverse, as is the case in the West with Persian, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian art. Upon first encounter, Westerners found oriental art chaotic and incomprehensible. As understanding increased, oriental art became better appreciated, until in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it influenced Western artists, sometimes heavily. Though Persian and, far eastern arts have become widely understood, Indian remains exotic and unintelligible for most people, the buildings like great piles of modeled mud, the music like caterwauling from the back fence, the literature when not adapted, naturalized, domesticated and amply footnoted by some translator, a mass of incomprehensible allusions and events without significance or emotional impact. Explanation and long education might in time allow us to appreciate Indian art as well as we do Chinese, but certainly we cannot 'read' it cold, any more than the Renaissance could 'read' Greek plays and appreciate their immense superiority to Roman.

If we examine this pattern of cultural contact from the non-Western side, we find the same phenomena. Africans and Asians must make a major effort to understand Mozart or Beethoven, Donatello or Michelangelo, Racine or Shakespeare, and often they do not think the reward is worth the effort. Laura Bohannan has described quite beautifully how a West African Negro tribe took her account of *Hamlet*: they found it riduculous beneath contempt. Indeed, most people, Western or non-Western, appear cheerfully ready to give up Shakespeare for telly programs of American westerns, which are designed to involve the minimal number of assumptions about conventions and abstractions. The product is intellectually poverty-stricken, but that quality is exactly what makes it internationally – inter-culturally – intelligible.

Between nations and language groups within Western society we can see a comparable phenomenon taking place. The worst commercial trash from America – *Life, Time, Reader's Digest* – have large European circulations, and presumably much appeal. American commercial and journalistic writers like Sinclair Lewis have a smaller circulation, but it is still larger than that of the best. Melville, Thoreau, Hawthorne and Emily Dickinson, all of whom have great power for educated Americans, seem to be the least read abroad, for their complexity is exclusively in American terms. More recent American writers of power and beauty, Sarah Orne Jew-

ett, Euroda Welty, D.C. Peattie, Richard Wilbur, appear to me to be virtually unknown outside of America. Their virtues derive from purely American experience, which is in some respects unique. Strident newspaper headlines about police dogs in Mississippi, gang wars in Chicago, or Negro riots in New York often obscure the silent but vastly more pervasive fact that most of America lives in a degree of security, peace and well-being that has few parallels on earth. No American ports have been blockaded, no hostile aeroplanes have invaded the skies, or foreign troops the land within any living memory. No really irresponsible political party has threatened the orderly processes of government for a hundred years, and there is no sign that any will, although some ill-informed European intellectuals seem to think so. The conditions of civil peace and security are so pervasive in most American lives that many people seek a vicarious escape in the literature of violence. 'Gunsmoke', a telly program, serves a psychological purpose similar to Marie Antoinette's playing shepherdess. But the dominant conditions of security and well-being have also produced writers like those last mentioned. They may seem only trivial to continents recently subject to general war, revolution and famine, invincible superstition, and thugs in power. For many non-American writers, existentialism may be as necessary today as excruciating mannerism was for sixteenth century Florentines. To many Americans existentialism is a temporary foreign phenomenon, the natural result of a ghastly but transitory experience. How can existentialism and the art that embodies it be thought any more 'true' than the Apollonian art of fifth century Greece, the serene and vital Old Kingdom sculpture of ancient Egypt, or the still and harmonious serenities of fifteenth century Florentine art, Brunelleschi and Donatello? An atomic holocaust might make existentialism world-wide, or might end it in favor of compensatory philosophy and art. The fifth century in ancient Greece was hardly serene, and Florentine politics were not placid. One would like to think that in some quieter and happier century than the twentieth these quiet American writers may be found to have handled language with such evocative precision, such beauty of sound and density of idea that some future critic will find in them the greatness that transcends time.

However, I do not expect them to be so fortunate. The prospect before us is of a single, world-wide civilization with minor regional differences induced by history and geography. The achievement of universal education will make most historical ages widely known and understood, preserved even if not admired. Educated Men will acquire a kind of world parochialism in which everything is familiarly from the back yard and nothing is strange. Artists will be obliged to struggle both against the accumula-

ted weight of many moribund traditions and against the lack of established conventions, the thriving and complex tradition out of which great art with all its wealth of meaning and power has always been made. If greatly complex art with all its consequent power is to appear in such circumstances, it must appear not as it did among the ancient Athenians, for everyone present, but as it has in recent times in the West: for a segment of society only. In the course of history on the whole world's stage, the greatest art has been universal only within the limits of the society that produced it; to alien societies it has generally remained incomprehensible. The emergence of a world society does not seem likely to produce very soon conditions favorable to a great art age, and great art is likely to remain for a long time inevitably fugitive.

POETI MALTESI VIVENTI

Di G. Curmi

III. ROSAR BRIFFA[1]

Io definirei Rosar Briffa un poeta lirico elegante. Se questo spieghi e comunichi al lettore quello che io ho in mente, non lo so, anzi non lo credo. Eppure mi piacerebbe ripeterlo: Rosar Briffa è un poeta lirico elegante.

Dico subito che Rosar Briffa è un poeta molto modemo, tanto nel pensiero, quanto nella forma. E il suo pensiero è sempre profondo, e la forma delle sue poesie è sempre nitida e sostenuta. Le sue liriche sono sempre brevi, sintetiche, analitiche. Forse, in parte, questo è dovuto al fatto che Briffa è un medico.

Le sue liriche sono brevi quadri che entro piccola ma salda cornice racchiudono un pensiero, un sentimento, una nostalgia, una impressione, una osservazione, una riflessione o un contrasto.

Ma, soprattutto, Rosar Briffa medita.

E i suoi pensieri, i suoi sentimenti, le sue nostalgie, le sue impressioni, le sue osservazioni, le sue riflessioni, i suoi contrasti, sono sempre il risultato di una lunga e profonda meditazione.[2]

Un pensiero:

Il Crocifisso Dell'Altura
(Il-Krucifiss tal-Għolja)

Solo era sul colle
da tutti obliato,
col cuore afflitto per gli uomini,
ma niuno grazie gli rese.

Da lì lo deposero e dissero:
«Del Crocifisso l'ombra perchè?»
Improvvisa serpeggiò la maledizione,
e l'odio dentro i cuori.

[1] Rosar Briffa nacque a Valletta (Malta) il 16 gennaio 1906. Nel 1932 si laureò in medicina nell'Università di Malta. Morì il 22 febbraio, 1963.

[2] Avverto che le poesie di Briffa sono quasi sempre rimate. Io però ho tralasciato la rima, non solo perchè avrebbe inceppato il mio lavoro, ma anche perchè sarebbe stata a scapito della chiarezza e delle fedeltà e della precisione al testo.

Un sentimento:

LACRYMAE RERUM

Sopra erma spiaggia ove rumor non giunge,
e solo piange, molto stanca, l'onda,
ti vidi, giovinetta, dolce e stanca,
pianger la prima gioia della vita,
e il bel sogno che mai non s'avverò.

La tua angoscia provai senza volerlo
innanzi a quello sterminato mare:
fanciulezza a te corse il mio pensiero,
e al primo amore che m'infranse il cuore,
il bel sogno che mai non s'avverò.

Battè il mio cuore al battito del mare
nel gran pianto che sosta non conosce;
sentii l'angustia d'ogni cosa vana,
gli inganni della vita, ed il miraggio
del nostro sogno che non s'avverò.

Una nostalgia:

NON SOGNARE, RAGAZZA
(Tfajla, toħlomx)

Non sognare, ragazza, perchè i sogni
ingannan troppo e presto si dileguano;
che tutto sarà bello ti fan credere,
senza dirti quanto è grande il dolore.

E come è vano questo sogno nostro
che tutto mostra molle di dolcezza,
mentre la spina del dolore asconde
l'infezione che a noi serba da grandi.

E se mai t'accadrà, come a me accadde,
credei a tutti e non odiai nessuno,
poi mi tradiro e tutto tornò a danno,
tanto che in cuore io tutti rinnegai,

da me vieni, anche tu sarai tapina,
e come me non crederai più in niuno;

vieni da me e a te il mio cuore io apro,
per amar te come non mai ho amato.

E un'altra nostalgia:

AD ANNABELLA
(Lil Annabella)

T'incontrai, ragazza,
della giovinezza nel fiore:
eri felice,
eri bella...

Come sul capo tuo belli
i neri capelli!
come bello negli occhi
lo sguardo si buono...!
E il cuore addormentato
nel sonno dell'apatia
di nuovo si desta
di tua bellezza al raggio.

Ed oggi che si bene ti conosco...
e gli anni son passati...
che sian bianchi i capelli,
che sia lo sguardo nei tuoi occhi stanco:
ti voglio a me vicina...
nelle mie le tue mani...
e il canto che cantai nella mia giovinezza
a cantarlo con te continuerò
nella mia vecchiaia.

Una osservazione:

IL BASTIONE DI SANTA BARBARA
(Is-sur ta' Sta. Barbara)

Le corazzate entrarono nel porto:
e come sotto il sole luccicarono
i cannoni omicidi!
Che bellezza!
Nell'acciaio
il fuoco rugge!

Piansero le suore rattristate;
nel silenzio piansero.

Nella più fonda calma della sera
alla porta bussò Gesù.

Era stanco, triste e pallido;
chè amici fuori non avea trovato.
E gli aprirono,
e lo accolsero con festa.

Un'altra volta ritornò fra loro
la pace.

Due riflessioni:

QUO VADIS?

Solo
sul colle sassoso,
lontano dagli altri fratelli
nel cuor verdeggiante
della valle,
il vecchio carrubo,
piegato
dal peso degli anni,
intorno a sè guarda
per vedere
la gente che va tanto in fretta.

...E pensa:
Quanta fretta hanno,
e dove vanno essi
senza riposo mai
dalla culla alla tomba
tutti questi esseri?
Dove son le radici?
Il bacio del vento non mai li raffrena?
Mai non li rallenta il calore del sole?
Perchè un po' di requie
per loro non c'è,
e la loro sol meta
è il via-vai del mercato?

LA NOTTE
(Il-Lejl)

Farnetica il mio pensier lungo la notte,
lungo tutta la notte.
O Dio,
quando un cielo stellato
luccica sulla terra
di coloro che dormono,
e solo io
non m'addormento!

La mia vita distrutta,
sprecata la mia vita
per gli uomini che amai
benchè tanto bene facessi
che oggi io non ricordo;
oggi scordato mi hanno...
pianger m'hanno oggi fatto...
E tra i dormienti
solo io sono sveglio!

Cosi un giorno nell'Orto
di notte intirizzisti
e solo rimanesti.
Venduto
da tutti coloro
che Tu salvasti;
Col cuore afflitto
Tu lacrimasti,
le amarezze però che T'inflissero
Tu scordasti.

E, infine, due contrasti:

BELLEZZA IMMORTALE
(Sbuħija immortali)

Muoion le rose
arse dal freddo,
perfino il canto di bellezza
dell'uccello
spento col tempo finirà
ma noi non moriamo

perchè Immortali:
il canto resterà dopo di noi
che cerca l'Ideale –
Il gruppo di gente
che sognò
come te, come me.

NATALE ATOMICO
(Milied atomiku)

Comparve nei cieli una stella
e il mondo empì di gioia;
s'infiammarono i cuori d'amor nuovo.
Inginocchiati,
poveri e re
adorarono Dio.

Lanciò l'uomo nei cieli
una sua stella nell'immensa quiete:
nunziatrice d'odio
sul mondo cristiano.
Sangue,
sangue,
in ogni valle...
Sogno lontano
il Natale.

L'ideale di Briffa è l'umanità: il bene dell'umanità:

LA MIA SCELTA
(Il-Għażla tiegħi)

Io me ne vado
per un lungo cammino
che a nessun luogo mena;
so che molto sarò stanco
e accasciato sarò molto:
ma l'ho scelto io il cammino!

Non vorrei trovar conforto,
non vorrei trovar denaro
al termin del cammino che ho scelto io,
al termin del cammin che so spietato.

Viver sol voglio come i miei fratelli
che sognan notte e giorno.
e il loro sogno è il sogno mio:
costruire cose grandi:
e saranno i loro edifici
fatti tutti di piccole cose,
sostruire un mondo nuovo
e per noi, come per te:
un mondo amico,
e un mondo di pace.

Il sentimento della famiglia è in Briffa molto potente. Parecchie sono infatti le liriche in cui egli canta la famiglia. Scelgo da queste *A mia figlia durante una incursione aerea* (Lil binti waqt air raid):

Dormi, bambina mia, dormi,
ogni bene per te e il riposo;
non è la sirena, mio amore,
è questo il fischiare del vento.

Dormi, bambina mia, dormi,
per te della casa il riparo;
bombe non sono, nè son riflettori,
ma è solo un fuoco d'artificio.

Dormi, bambina mia, dormi,
per te senza fine ogni bene;
non gemiti sono, nè pianti,
solo è questo di gente baccano.

Dormi, bambina mia, dormi,
ora per te il riposo;
non è la sirena, mia figlia,
ma è solo l'urlare del vento:

Anche il sentimento religioso è in Briffa vivissimo. Quasi tutte le sue poesie sono informate da questo sentimento, come si può vedere dalle liriche già riportate, e come si vedrà, tra poco, in altre poesie che seguiranno. Basterebbe dare il titolo di alcune di esse: *Mater Dolorosa – Viva Cristo Re – Ave, Maria – In Te, Domine, speravi – Mater Dolorosa – Resurrectio animae – Chiese dimenticate – Tristis est anima mea.* Traduco le ultime due:

CHIESE DIMENTICATE
(Knejjes minsija)

La tristezza infinita
delle Cattedrali
da tempo scordate;
dove nel passato si pregava...
ed oggi
spente sono le luci.

Una luna
senza posa
brilla pensierosa,
brilla stanca
sul passato,
contenta di non essere
una luna cristiana.

Ma non scordò Cristo
le sue chiese,
nella calma della notte
al cuore suo stringe
le pietre sante,
le pietre care,
dove le preci una volta
il cuore gli toccavano.

TRISTIS EST ANIMA MEA

Nella pace del Getsemani,
nel mistero della notte,
era solo,
solo,
solo,
e pregava il Redentore.

Non trovò chi con Lui vegliasse
e il suo sconforto dividesse,
e solo,
solo,
solo,
lacrimò sangue
che la tragedia scorse
di Gerusalemme.

E poi Lo crocifissero,
e poi Lo uccisero!

Due mila anni dopo
Lo rinneghiamo anche noi!

Ed ora riporto le due liriche che secondo me sono le più potenti e le più originali della raccolta: *La folla ed io* e *Il canto dell'addolorata.* Nella prima è molto ben ritratto il mondo d'oggi, egoista e materialista, che non vuole sapere di nessun ideale, e tanto meno di poesia; nella seconda è molto bene espressa la consolazione che dà la Beata Vergine a chi si rivolge a Lei con umiltà, anche se è il più miserabile fra gli uomini.

LA FOLLA ED IO
(Il-Kotra u Jien)

In piazza andai
coi canti miei
e intorno a me la folla io radunai.

Cantai il canto della fanciullezza:
giuochi al sole,
e gioia in cuore,
rose e preci alla Madonna,
e attaccato alla gonna
di mia madre, riposo e protezione;
tutto gioia.
E disse: «Giuoco questo è di bambini».

Passò il tempo,
nella piazza ritornai.

Cantai il canto della giovinezza:
notte lunare,
cuore irrequieto,
ed abbracciata la mia amata a me,
sogni colmi di bellezza;
tutto gioia, tutto luce
e poesia.
«Questo è pazzo, urlò la gente,
e non sa quello che dice.»

E passò tempo e passò.
Ritornai nella piazza, vecchio e stanco.

Cantai il canto allor della vecchiaia:
scesa è la notte,
vuota è la casa,
borbotto, solo, preci e preci;
angoscia in cuore.
Tempo non ebbi a terminare il canto,
che la folla in tumulto
urlò d'un tratto, ad una sola voce:
«Basta col canto della vecchiaia
e del soffrire.
Anche la nostra via è lunga,
e lo sconforto grande».

Lasciai la piazza, la lasciai pensoso,
e la luce si fe' nella mia mente.
«Che può servire alla folla spossata
il canto che le feci io sentire?
All' ammalato non la poesia
ma il refrigerio dell'anestesia.»

IL CANTO DEL TRIBOLATO
(Il-għanja ta' l-Imnikket)

O Maria Addolorata,
non le rose cercai io
per ornare la tua casa
e il tuo altare profumare,
ma sol spine dalla valle
e malati sterpi gialli,
O Maria Addolorata,
solo questo!

O Maria Addolorata,
gli altri vennero
e ornar d'oro la tua casa
e di marmo il tuo altare,
ero solo io l'estraneo
senza rose ed oro fino,
solo io!

O Maria Addolorata,
non sdegnasti
tu l'afflitto in tua dimora,

dal tuo altare sorridesti,
tutta dolce tu e pietosa,
consolasti il cuore stanco,
Solo tu!

Ora, invece, una poesia leggera, che pure ha il suo insegnamento:

IL MONDO È UNA RUOTA
(Id-Dinja rota waħda)

Ed è il mondo una ruota
che senza posa gira,
per chi diventa serio,
per chi sciocco diventa.

Televisione è il mondo
di bruttezza e beltà,
chi gode a maltrattare,
chi piange la crudeltà.

E sempre va la danza
in sale illuminate...
e le candele accese
non mancan nelle chiese.

E tutto è una illusione,
e tutto è vanità –
la ruota sempre gira
nel vuoto dell'Eternità.

Nè manca – e dati i tempi non poteva mancare – la nota patriottica. Gran chiasso succitò nel marzo del 1945 – come protesta perchè allo stadio durante una partita di calcio Malta-Jugoslavia si sonò l'Inno jugoslavo e l'Inno inglese, ma non quello maltese – la sua seguente breve poesia, che è nella realtà uno scatto patriottico veramente bello e sentito:

IL GIORNO DELLA VITTORIA
(Jum ir-Rebħ)

Scattò la folla a un tratto – gridò: «Io son maltese!
E guai a chi mi sprezza – a chi di me si burla!»

La folla cantò a un tratto – e lo disperse ai venti
l'Inno di Malta nostra, – ed era una vittoria

sul sonno del passato – sonno dell'apatia
quando ancor dormivamo – in un letto straniero;

e l'ombra di Vassalli – destossi dalla tomba
gridando: «Finalmente – trovato io ho la pace.»

Voglio infine chiudere con una breve poesia in cui il Poeta ricorda gli anni trascorsi in un ospedale di lebbrosi nell'India, ove si era recato per ragione di studi:

IN INDIA
(Fl-Indja)

...ed io sentìi il riso,
il riso acre e beffardo
di cento e più lebbrosi
nel buio della notte;

e in me si gelò il sangue,
morìi una prima volta:
sepolto vivo io fui per un tempo,
per un tempo non scrissi poesie.

Rosar Briffa ci ha dato soltanto un'unica raccolta di poesie, comprendente 115 liriche. Sarebbe forse il caso di ripetere, riguardo ai suoi versi, la trita e ritrita frase manzoniana – ed ormai troppo logora dall'uso – *sono pochi ma buoni, come i versi del Torti.* Giudizio, del resto, neppure adatto nel caso nostro, perchè i versi di Briffa sono pochi si, ma non semplicemente buoni: ottimi sono da ogni punto di vista.

Nella *Musa Maltese,* il Prof. Aquilina cosi commenta la poesia di Briffa: «Principe della lirica maltese, quell'impeto d'ispirazione che ti fa ricordare la lirica inglese dell'epoca della Regina Elisabetta, ma in cui c'è una nota modema che ti fa ricordare anche la poesia lirica del poeta inglese W.H. Davies (1871-1940) è Briffa... Briffa è poeta dei sentimenti più delicati...poeta di cui senti la nota musicale tremare di tristezza, perchè per il Poeta la vita è vana, si stanca e finisce presto perchè la vita promette ma non dà quello che promette, nè nell'amore, nè nell'ideale.»

In una breve informazione, dedicata ai lettori, Rosar Briffa cosi scrive nella prima pagina di questa sua unica raccolta di liriche: «Non ho avuto mai il pensiero di raccogliere queste poesie in un volume. Alcune di esse le ho scritte in un'epoca di grande tristezza, altre in un'epoca di gioia. E le ho scritte per me, e mi hanno fatto molto bene come un *escapism.* Mia moglie Louisette non ebbe cuore di vederle perdersi come foglie al

vento, e le raccolse con grande amore. Parecchi amici desideravano vederle stampate e mi promisero il loro aiuto, ed io li ringrazio ben di cuore. Malgrado ciò, nulla sarebbe avvenuto se Padre Valentino V. Barbara O.P. non fosse riuscito, per dir cosi, a sottrarmele e a darle alle stampe. Ora, infine, si trovano nelle vostre mani – quello che è avvenuto è avvenuto, per il meglio o per il peggio.»

Senza dubbio per il meglio. Sarebbe stato davvero peccato se una raccolta di poesie – cosi bella e cosi unica – fosse andata perduta. Ed io vorrei qui, non solo in mio nome, ma in nome della Letteratura Maltese, ringraziare pubblicamente la gentile Signora e il buon Frate per aver salvato in tempo un cosi prezioso tesoro.

19 settembre, 1962.

P.S. Carissimo Rosar, I poeti non muoiono. Dunque ti scrivo queste poche parole come se tu fossi ancora vivo. Dove sei? Cosa fai? Pensi ancora da poeta, o di noi e del mondo hai completamente perduto la memoria? Io feci questo breve studio sulla tua poesia nel settembre del 1962, quando tu eri ancora fra noi. Ebbi soltanto tempo di mostrarti alcune di queste mie traduzioni, che tu avevi molto gradito. Ora vorrei aggiungere questo: la raccolta delle tue poesie non sfigura di fronte alle migliori raccolte di poesie pubblicate negli ultimi dieci anni in qualsiasi parte del mondo. Ave!

aprile, 1966. G.C.

SO MUCH TO DO; SO LITTLE DONE

An appeal for more research in Malta

By Bro. Leo Barrington

I once heard that well known surgeon, the late Professor P.P. de Bono, say 'When I was studying in England, I wrote several original papers on Surgery. On my return to Malta I did little original writing; the environment, the atmosphere seemed to be against it.' Now P.P. de Bono was an F.R.C.S. which is about the highest qualification a surgeon can obtain in England. Was there any justification for his curious statement? My own view is that there is absolutely no reason why more original research should not be done in Malta; in fact there is much work waiting to be done and should be done by those on the spot.

It cannot but strike the casual stranger when he scans the books and papers about the island, that much of the original work has been done by outsiders. Archaeology, history, geography, geology, medicine, all have been studied and original work published in these disciplines about the island by foreigners. In archaeology one thinks of John Davies Evans, Elisabeth de Manneville, Dr. Trump; in history Mr Ryan, Miss Schemerhorn, Harrison Smith, Mlle Claire Engel and a host of Italian and French historians of the Order of St. John; in medicine David Bruce, famous as co-discoverer of the cause of undulant fever; in geography the Durham school under Prof. W.B. Fisher; in geology of Dr. Hyde and Dr. Morris and in engineering that unhonoured man, perhaps one of the greatest benefactors of Malta, Osbert Chadwick. Now I am perfectly aware that there are a number of Maltese who have also done remarkable work. It would be invidious to mention living savants of which the number is growing, but perhaps the greatest has been the late Sir. T. Zammit, eminent in two disciplines – archaeology and medicine.

It is of course true that in the past opportunities for equipping oneself for research were few. Compulsory education was enacted in 1946, less than twenty years ago, and the possibilities of studying abroad were remote, though it is useful to recall that teachers have been sent abroad to England for training in St. Mary's College since 1881. But today many of these disadvantages are disappearing. The Royal University has evening and postgraduate courses, there are quite good chances for the clever young man or woman to frequent European or American academies

of learning, and the population is in fact becoming completely literate. The Royal University has, in the past fifteen years, received more ample funds from overseas and its staff has been greatly augmented in quality and quantity. I can recall the days, comparatively recent, when there was only one University teacher in the Faculty of English and his salary was the princely sum of £420 per annum. To mention again those no longer with us, the Royal University owes a great debt to Professor Ifor Evans and Dame Lillian Penson who assisted in the obtaining of grants. There are also two Government Training Colleges, as well equipped as their English counterparts for ensuring the competency of our teachers, and with new technical schools, an expanded Lyceum and Girls' Secondary schools, as well as a Polytechnic, it is clear that centres of learning are being rapidly expanded.

I said above that much original work is waiting to be done. One of the most essential to my mind would be a study of the best methods of teaching English to Maltese children. Much effort has been expended on this work but much more research on methodology is needed. Each nation has to work out its own salvation here in the light of the structure of its own language. Methods of teaching English to Japanese students are by no means the same as teaching English to Dutch students. Without a serious knowledge of one of the five principal European languages – English, Spanish, French, Italian, German – a student in Malta is gravely handicapped.

In archaeology there are many problems awaiting solution. The temples have been studied but the area around them awaits investigation by a skilled archaeologist. Would University students be prepared to spend the major part of their summer holidays wielding pick and shovel without pay and in the interests of archaeology? Yet this precisely is what is done by many students in other lands. The Museums of Malta contain historical treasures, but there are large numbers of similar treasures in the more opulent private houses. No catalogue of these exists. Have we a brave and enterprising man who would undertake such a work? Not only would he have to be knowledgeable but also supremely tactful. It might be remarked, en passant, that works of historical interest in the houses of the ancient aristocracy in England have practically all been catalogued long ago.

Malta has had a number of historians from Abela downwards. Books on the Great Siege, perhaps the most important event in the island after the coming of St. Paul, are numerous. But where can we find an account of the part played by the Maltese? One of the most assiduous students of the Knights of St. John, Mlle Claire Engel in her latest book *L'Ordre de*

Malte en Méditerranée has this to say: 'Les archives sont d'une richesse extraordinaire, elles sont pratiquement vierges, mais elles sont à La Vallette' – 'The archives are wonderfully rich; they are practically untouched, but you have to seek them in Valletta.' Mr Roderick Cavaliero in his succesful *Last of the Crusaders* writes 'In the Royal Malta Library in Valletta are stored the thousands of manuscript volumes that compose the Archives of the Order, together with thousands more of related interest ... it is to be hoped that those students in search of a subject for their Ph.D. will begin to think of Malta with its complete collection of documents, its friendly people and its agreeable climate.' Mr Ryan, author of *Malta* and of *The House of the Temple* told the present writer that when he was working on the latter book in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, he had to untie the dossiers of a number of the Knights of St. John killed during the French Revolution and these dossiers had never been opened since that time. French and English experts therefore agree that there are many treasures in the Royal Library awaiting discovery.

Since the foundation of a Chair of Maltese in the Royal University, much has been done to further the study of the national language and the influence of the Chair has been considerable. Folklore too is being studied but on account of the mobility of the population and the growth of towns, much of the ancient wisdom will soon be lost unless these beliefs and customs, passed down by oral tradition only, are written down by the student who has the confidence of the country people.*

When I came to Malta, one of the first books I sought was a compendium which would give, between two covers a brief summary of general information about Malta, and all that a visitor or permanent resident might like to know. I was told that such a book did not exist, and that there was no demand for it either. I disagreed with the latter statement, so I sat down and edited the first number of the Malta Year Book and several of the successive numbers. Apparently it did fulfil a demand as it now appears regularly under the able editorship of the Rev. B. Hilary, one of my colleagues, and I understand that its circulation is still rising. Much of the first edition was written during the hot afternoons of July and August. Let no one think that it is impossible to work hard during the summer heats. This is what Dr. W.S. Ladell wrote in the *Unesco Courier*: 'Many in hot countries prefer to take life quietly, to move slowly, to take

* A scholarly journal *Maltese Folklore Review* entirely devoted to the study of Maltese folklore and customs has been edited by Mr. J. Cassar Pullicino formerly the editor of *Melita Historica* and the author of several books on Maltese folklore, since 1962. (The Editor).

no exercise, to sleep frequently, to avoid sweating. By suitable clothing, by keeping out the sun and being in a breeze, not putting up heat production, a man can avoid sweating, but for a productive life in a hot country a man must be willing to sweat.'

Intellectual work requires will power, perseverance and time. Maltese can do as well as any other nation. The fact is that in the past ten years, a number of young people from the island have gone abroad and distinguished themselves in hard and exacting mental toil and have attained high honours. It is especially to the men and women who have been able to profit by long years of study at the University that the demand goes forth: 'Fructify your talents, turn your minds to the work to be done at home.'

OUR NEW CONTRIBUTORS

Bevan, Mrs I.E., obtained a first class degree in English and Italian at the University of Edinburgh. Since taking her first degree she has been doing research at Cambridge on the relationship of English and Italian literatures in the Renaissance.

Curmi, G., *see* vol. II, No. 3.

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