

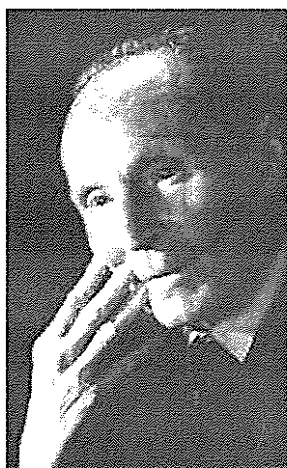
# Poetry As A Sublime Expression

George Pisani

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## POETRY AS A SUBLIME EXPRESSION

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My favourite milieu and means of expression is poetry. I have penned essays, novels, drama, folklore and history but poetry is where my heart beats fastest.

Poetry in its general meaning is the highest expression of human sentiment and feeling. Poetry is not only the means to express oneself but also the means to transmit one's feelings. This can also be seen at the dawn of civilization, namely when the highest development of the intellectual and civil elements took place. Poetry was born with the release of the first shout of joy or disappointment of the first human being and became a literary form with the evolution of the language (Bresso: 1947). Poetry is therefore, today, an art by which the poet projects feeling and experience on an imaginative plane to stir the imagination and emotions (Funk & Wagnalls:1974). In fact Coleridge said that Poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language.

I have already highlighted my preference of poetry instead of prose. In fact, historically, poetry preceded prose, in the same manner that sentiment preceeded reason and that art preceded science. In time reason also reached a certain degree of development and from a spontaneous thing became a matter of reflection. But a lot of water had to flow under the bridges until all this could take place.

The duty of the poet according to a famous dictum by Mallarme' in his Tombeau de E.A. Poe reads: donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu' which Eliot translated as: to purify the dialect of the tribe, tribe hereby meaning his people.

Perhaps, to my mind, a more correct intepretation of this dictum would put the poet as interpreter and mouthpiece of the wishes, sentiments and feelings of his tribe. He lives in his tribe and thus forms part and parcel of this family. I have already expressed this feeling in my poem Fuga (Pisani:1953) wherein I am addressed by the Spirit of Life:

"Poeta hemdieni,  
illum inti tieghi,  
f'saltnati tal-ghageb  
jehtieg tahrab mieghi.  
" \*\*\*\*\*

"Ta' Dan Il-Gmiel kollu  
ser nahtrek Sultan.

Minn issa fost hutek  
kbir daqsek zgur m'hemmx."

I was born in Victoria, Gozo on the 6th. May 1909. My father was Gozitan, Pawlu, and my mother, Theresa nee' Calleja, Maltese. I was educated at the Government Primary School and later on at the Gozo Lyceum. Later on as I chose an ecclesiastical career, I made advanced studies in Classical Literature, Philosophy and Theology. After leaving my ecclesiastical career, I starting contributing in local papers. I collaborated with E.B. Vella in the compilation of the Maltese textbooks Gabra ta' Ward (Vella:1930). I was the first teacher of Maltese at the Gozo Lyceum (1935-1940), taught Maltese at the Gozo Seminary and gave lectures to primary school teachers attending a post certificate course, and joined the staff of the Malta Information Service in Valletta (1940) as a translator and later as co-editor of the Information Service Bulletin. At the time I was away from my family and was risking my life continuously in the often blitzed Valletta offices of the paper. Reference to this hectic and risky period of my life can be found in Francis Gerard's Malta Magnificent (Gerard:1947).

In May 1942 I was appointed the first Assistent Information Officer for Gozo. I opened a central office in the Banca Giuratale in Victoria, Gozo and several small bureaus in the villages. These bureaus served as the first places where people could read and acquire information about the progress of the war. I was also instrumental in the war time collection of grain from Gozo to be sent over to Malta. I retired from the civil service in 1972 and henceforth occupied myself by writing, acting as a tourist guide on Gozo as well as by preparing weekly programmes on radio and later on T.V. about Gozo.

I have written four books of poetry (Pisani:1945); (Pisani:1951); (Pisani:1953); and (Pisani:1984) and have at least another volume of poetry ready for printing. Besides I have written a book of short stories (Pisani:1946); two novels (Pisani:1976 and Pisani:1982); two collections of Gozitan legends (Pisani:1980); and (Pisani:1995); a collection of essays (Pisani:1963); and five books of drama (Pisani:1945); (Pisani:1945); (Pisani:1947); (Pisani:1949); (Pisani:1978); (Pisani:1978). Besides I have also published numerous articles on various topics in several papers and periodicals.

My contacts with my fellow Gozitans have led me to make the following assesment of the Gozitans and Gozitan life:-

Isolated on a small yet pretty island, the Gozitan was ignored and forgotten by almost everybody. His story is in fact a long tale of inattention and neglect...a fact that has left its mark on the character of the people.

Through the centuries, the Gozitan has developed a strong and independent character; he became a conservative person with staunch, clear thoughts; a person who can think for himself, unaffected by what others think about him; a person who carefully deliberates every single action to determine its compatibility with his thoughts and his interests. He also became a hard-working and diligent person. With the passing of time the Gozitan became known as an able farmer, an honest and sought for emigrant and a courageous sailor in the merchantile navy. Though neglected also in the educational field, Gozo nurtured the most distinguished minds that ever appeared on these Islands....However deficiency in education, want of contact with other people and scarcity of means to while away the

time and increase his knowledge.....created problems, caused havoc and somewhat slowed the progress of the Island. (Pisani:1976) quoted and translated in (Bezzina:1985).

I honestly believe that I have to the best of my knowledge tried to be a faithful interpreter of the emotions, feelings and thoughts of my tribe, and thank God for the opportunity he has given me to sing the praises of my mother land and its people:

Ghawdex ta' qalbi mhux ghax art twelidi,  
Mhux ghax b'halibek sawret ommi 'l demmi,  
L-inqas ghax t'ismek il-grajjiet u l-hlewwa  
B'qima 'l missieri dejjem smajt isemmi;

Imma nghidhielek ghax go sidri l-ghajta  
Tibqa' tnehida ma' rrid qatt u lsira,  
Iva nghidhielek: fil-qasmiet tad-dinja  
M'hemmx ohla minnek ja daqxejn ta' gzira.

(Pisani:1945)

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**Postscript**

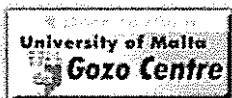
In 1992 the Maltese Government awarded Pisani the Midalja Għall-Qadi tar-Repubblika, while Victoria Local Council awarded Pisani the Gieħ il-Belt Victoria in 1997. Throughout his literary career, Pisani was awarded several awards. Probably the first modest literary prizes awarded to Pisani were the annual literary competition organized by the now defunct Pronostku Malti and by Lehen il-Malti. In 1977 and in 982 Pisani was awarded the Malta Literary Award for his two novels Beraq u Qawsalli and Zerniq fuq 1-Għoljiet respectively. In 1983 he was also awarded the international prize Città' di Valletta.

Pisani passed away on the 24th February 1999 and his funeral was attended by the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the House of Representatives and several other authorities. The next day the Maltese Parliament saluted Pisani's memory and tributes poured in the local papers and on the other media.

Two posthumous publications are Poeziji, an anthology of Pisani's poetry selected and introduced by Professor Oliver Friggieri and Id-Duwa tal-Madalena, a collection of folk remedies, with an introduction by his son, Dr. Paul George Pisani. Both works were published in the year 2000.

A monument to his memory was unveiled by HE the President of the Republic Professor De Marco in Victoria, Gozo on June 23rd, 2001 and a public foundation with the aim of publishing his collected published and unpublished works is expected to be set up soon.

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