

men, into puppets, or automata, the next animating and personifying railway signals into strange beings doing monstrous things in a surrealist way.

There is in Dickens, as there was in Hoffmann, who created the famous figure of the dancing doll Olympia, as there is in Kafka and Thomas Mann, a strong sense of the possible perversion of the relation between human beings and dead things. This perversion of the established natural order is both comic and terrifying, it is 'grotesque'.

The late Professor Wolfgang Kayser of Göttingen has left us a book entitled *Das Grotteske* ('The Grotesque') in which he tries to establish the term 'grotesque' as a valid literary aesthetic category, tracing the development from the early grotto ornaments in Italian catacombs through literature and the fine arts. In this connection he mentions what he calls the quality of 'mechanical dynamism' in Dickens:

'Dickens' characters,' Kayser writes, 'are throughout flatter than those of Raabe, they are more mechanical, but in so being, are thus more dynamic, always 'running down' (like a clock), always in action. The energy with which they are activated is no personal quality of their character, but works rather like a spring of an impersonal force that propels them. The narrator has a peculiar gift of observation for the driving and exaggerating force (das Treibende und Ubertreibende), of this elementary power, otherwise quite unbroken, that moves his universe.' (Wolfgang Kayser, *Das Grotteske*, Oldenburg & Hamburg 1957, p. 133)

Kayser calls this grotesque world 'the self-alienated world' ('die entfremdete Welt') (op.cit. p. 198). Surely, this is the fashionable, Brecht-born slogan and jargon, but Kayser's diagnosis seems to me remarkably poignant and suitable for the emotional elements that constitute a relationship between Dickens and some German writers: 'Mechanical things alienate themselves, or: lose their nature and identity, *gaining life*; human beings, lose their identity, *losing life*. Bodies stiffened into puppets, automata, marionettes, and faces hardened into larvae and masks, are recurrent motifs.' (op.cit., *ibid.*) This is the third result of our comparative experiment.

This inversion of men and things is not only, I think, an expression of anxiety in our age of growing technology, bureaucracy and general mechanisation; it is, rather, the ever possible perversion of the natural order of things, of which Dickens, like his 'German relatives', was so strongly aware.

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#### MORIENDUM EST

When I shall come to die as die we must  
 (We are in transit here on longer journey  
 Trainloads of exiles travelling through dark tunnels)  
 I know I'll fear loneliness more than death  
 Being alone to undertake a journey  
 By night, not knowing where it starts or ends.  
 If you, for old time's sake, will sit beside me  
 To watch the parting, lay your hands on mine,  
 Dear beloved friend, wife, son and daughters;  
 And I shall feel less lonely, less cut off  
 Being remembered by those whom I have loved.  
 Such contact for a while will soothe the fears  
 Of renunciations; painful separations  
 From those we cherish; from the daily tasks  
 Of 'lectures' and 'research' performed with zest  
 Expressing a deep urge to live through work.  
 Shed no idle tears. Remember me gently,  
 Forgive my brusqueness and recall instead  
 The love that bound us tight as one large family,  
 Your dear faces will haunt me after death  
 As I shall long for your sweet company,  
 Remember, friends, our fight for 'a square deal'  
 Such little things as meals in the canteen,  
 The jokes, the conversation of the day,  
 The laughter in the hours of relaxation  
 Between one Council harangue and another.  
 Remember and forget; remember only  
 The many kindnesses we showed each other,  
 The years of comradeship in our Alma Mater.  
 Forgive the frailties of human flesh and blood;  
 Remember me by what was best in me  
 (Are we not all part Shadow and part Light?)  
 Then look around you who are still alive  
 And have more years before you to enjoy  
 The comradeship of work before you die.  
 Allow one farewell wish before I go:  
 I wish you the sweet comfort of a hand

Laid on your own before your last goodbye;  
 The parting kiss that will dispel the darkness  
 Of the Unknown and will reveal in part  
 The Mystery of that Love our Father, God  
 And His Son, Jesus and the Holy Ghost  
 Reserve for mortals at their journey's end.  
 I travelled by this Light through life's dark tunnel  
 God help you find your road by your own Lamp.

11th April, 1969.

J. AQUILINA

## MALTESE SOCIETY

If you give a cocktail party, all the guests will be there  
 Including the very ornate pillars of Maltese society.  
 If 'tis instead a talk you give, most are busy elsewhere  
 Including the paladins of Social Propriety  
 Unless the Speaker is a 'big gun' from the Establishment  
 Whose favours are bought with salaams and blandishment.

March 1969

J. AQUILINA

## SMILE

*You need not smile  
 For I will not smile back  
 Unless it were a nice girl smiling  
 When due return is courteous  
 Or irresistible  
 Smiles are a luxury  
 Their price gone high through further super-taxes  
 You are not on the list on whom  
 My sun may smile  
 And so I switch it off.*

*And may I ask you please to dim your light  
 Your glare sears my complexion  
 Cracks my flash  
 The last that I am saving.*

13.ii.68.

BERNARD MALLIA, S.J.

## PIETRO ARETINO

By GIOVANNI CURMI

NON dobbiamo meravigliarci nè scandalizzarci se la letteratura che comincia con San Francesco, se la letteratura che ci ha dato Dante e il Manzoni, abbia pure prodotto, durante i suoi sette secoli di gloriosa esistenza, alcune figure di scrittori bizzarri e strampalati. Una di queste figure è, senza dubbio, quella di Pietro Aretino, che visse in pieno Rinascimento, in quel periodo d'oro della Letteratura Italiana in cui fiorirono tanti geni universali, come Michelangelo Buonarroti, tanti pittori illustri, come il Tiziano e il Correggio, tanti sommi poeti, come l'Ariosto e il Tasso.

Nessun altro scrittore, in tutta la storia della Letteratura Italiana, fu tanto esaltato e tanto vituperato, tanto odiato e tanto temuto quanto Pietro Aretino. L'odio gli procurò terribili inimicizie e due colpi di pugnale, ma il timore gli procurò la ricchezza e la fama, la stima dei principi, la lode degli scrittori, le blandizie dei due più potenti sovrani di allora, Carlo V e Francesco I, e il titolo di 'divino' dal più grande poeta dei suoi tempi, l'Ariosto.

Nato ad Arezzo da un calzolaio nel 1492, l'Aretino passò una vita avventurosa e burrascosa, maledicendo chi non lo pagava e adulando che gli dava quattrini. Per queste sue bravure, si meritò, quando era ancora in vita, la reputazione di largitore di glorie, di bollatore d'infamie e di flagellatore di principi. È un fatto innegabile che da origini umilissime, col solo mezzo della penna, egli diventò, in breve tempo, potentissimo, e riuscì a carpire ai suoi contemporanei iperboliche lodi e fantastici onori. Gli furono coniate medaglie, erette statue, elargite pensioni; piazze, strade, fiumi e cristalli di murano furono battezzati col suo nome; l'effigie gli fu murata nelle facciate dei palazzi e improntata nelle casse dei pettini, negli ornamenti degli specchi e nei piatti di maiolica; ma poi, quando morì a Venezia, nel 1556, non fu compianto da nessuno, come ne fa fede la notizia della sua morte conservata nell'Archivio di Firenze: 'Il mortal Pietro Aretino, mercoledì a hore 3 di notte fu portato all'altra vita da una cannonata di apoplexia, senza haver lassato desiderio nè dolor a nissuno huomo da bene.'

Contrariamente a quanto credevano i dotti della sua epoca, l'Aretino non aveva molto profonda cultura, e non era troppo entusiasta degli studi