

'What's the latest on the eruption?' Victor asked.

'Everything is following on schedule. The world is going to pieces bit by bit – a little here, a little there; a chip gets broken in the south, a spark goes off in the north.'

'What's everything doing?' Flora asked.

'They like to blab out what they feel like waiting for the big bang, or they just complain. Why should their life be cut short because of these bloody volcanoes? They have no one to blame, so they blame the good God. We shouldn't have been born in the first place, if we had to end up this way – that's what they say. Or they just don't care, because they don't realize it's inevitable. Man is a big mistake or a joke. That's what I say.'

'What are you going to do?' Flora asked.

'I don't give a damn, either way. I didn't care to be born. I don't mind dying; but I can't stand the waiting. Hell, you make me think and I don't want to think. I get scared of my thinking.'

'What are the odds that our volcano blows up first? Victor asked.

'Fifty-fifty.'

'It might never blow up,' Victor suggested.

'It will blow up; but nobody can tell when. If you don't mind, I'm going to lie down and drink myself to sleep.'

'It's your funeral, mister,' Flora said.

'It's your funeral too. You'd better get ready.'

'All our life is one long dress rehearsal for our funeral,' Victor replied.

The tramp lay down and began to snore. Flora and Victor embraced and made love as they had never before; the people down in the valley went on talking and laughing, so they wouldn't have to think, while the volcano rumbled and thundered.

Next morning the sun rose again, and everybody went about his business, but Flora and Victor still heard the volcano rumble; so even in their old age, they still made love as best as they could, for they were not sure whether that day would be their last.

LA BEAUTE

La Beauté – notre beauté – c'est une vie secrète,
 c'est une chose spéciale,
 c'est un autre moment,
 une autre personne,
 cent autres personnes;
 mille petites choses
 pour chacun de nous –
 pour tout le monde –
 ou quelquefois toute autre chose
 mêlée aux sentiments...
 mais rarement
 la même personne,
 le même amour,
 quelquefois heureux –
 mais pas toujours,
 quelquefois sentimental
 avec une douleur indéfinie
 ou une petite mélodie –
 Chopin, Bartok ou Debussy –
 Quelques mots, quelques vers
 de Verlaine ou de Baudelaire...
 petit jeu de rythme,
 musique de mots
 triste – mais si belle;
 un rêve, un ange de Picasso,
 un arbre ou un oiseau...
 Goya, van Gogh...
 Epoques différentes...
 Ou une fleur jaune
 de notre printemps,
 un papillon de jour ou de nuit,
 notre enfant – quelquefois du bruit,
 une seconde tranquille –
 très loin de la ville –

de notre vie,
très loin d'ici...
une impression,
une seconde, un rayon
d'or du soleil entre les arbres,
dans tes cheveux –
cent nostalgies,
un amour passé,
un petit cadeau...
richesse unique
sans argent,
sans rien, sans or...
un petit secret
dans notre coeur
sans l'acheter –
C'est la Beauté –
un mot, un rythme,
un monde passé –
un monde retrouvé –
c'est la Beauté.

E. SZIRMAI

CHUCHOTER....

... avec les enfants,
avec l'amour....
Avec les femmes
et les oiseaux;
avec la mort;
devant une tombe,
en téléphonant,
en confiant un secret,
pour demander de l'aide;
auprès de celui qui dort,
auprès du blessé,
en cas d'accident –
Quand on se confesse,
quand on baisse la tête,
quand on prie,

quand on demande,
quand on prononce
des mots d'une grande beauté –
et plus encore
quand arrive notre dernière heure –
quand notre mort approche –
et plus encore –
quand elle ou il sont morts....
quand on est mort.

E. SZIRMAI

SPURLOSES VERSCHWINDEN

(Erinnerung an Kipling's weise Kobra)

Nur eine Stunde lebte die ganze verschwundene Welt,
und sie war in eine Stunde zusammengedrängt.
Wer hört die Menschen aus ihren Türmen der Traurigkeit
irzendeinmal? Wie oft haben sie die Riesensteine der Qual
hineingeworfen in die verschwundenen Meere,
wo die uralten Muschel-Uhren alles zusammengemischt haben,
die Stille und die aussereinanderfallenden menschlichen
Worte der Hilferufe?
Ja, wirklich nur eine Stunde
lebte die ganze verschwundene Welt,
und ich habe meine weise Kobra – mein Schicksal –
tausendmal verdammt;
aber trotz allem bewache ich in der Tiefe des eingemauerten
Kellers die königliche Krone
und schätze alles Wertvolle,
so wie wenn da oben noch die einmaligen königlichen Paläste
und Völker beten würden an die uralten Götter
und wie wenn der Urwald noch wachsen würde – oben –
über einstige Städte, über mich,
der schon lange weint –
seit wann – wie lange – seit wann?

K. SZIRMAI

TO BE A MAN

Who is so brave to be a man,
 to stay a man,
 one cannot be paid
 to become a man.
 Too high the price
 who is such fool?
 may be I am?
 Perhaps you are?
 But no one else would,
 nobody will
 pay this high price
 to be a man,
 to stay a man,
 to day a man,
 May be I can
 May be you can.
 Who else would done
 to be a man
 to stay a man
 today a man?
 Nobody will
 pay the highest price,
 to be proud,
 to be a man,
 to stay a man.

E. SZIRMAI

BANG, BANG

One more funny mortal, suddenly kicked out of this planet,
 Hurlled with a high ha-ha into the dark unknown –
 Bang, bang, then flash of a crumpling comet;
 Body and Mind torn apart – Self, scared alone.

21.ix.73

J. AQUILINA

QAMAR FUQ RUMA

Lil Illustri Prof. S. Satta

Illum fuq Ruma tela' qamar mimli,
 abjad, sabih.
 F'dil-Belt fejn qisu l-ewwel darba
 l'ghannewh sabih,
 in-nies ghaddiet bla harsset
 medhija b'mitt elf hsieb,
 min vojtt, min ta' kulljum, min gholi.

U fis inheba
 wara nitfa ta' hajbura
 li qisha ddenst minn biebb ewlieni tal-qdumijiet.
 Li kellu mohh, kont tghid,
 "stahba miblugh, qabel jaqbduh!"

LUNA SU ROMA*

Al ill. e Chiar.mo Prof. S. Satta

Oggi su Roma si è ascisa la luna piena,
 bianca, bella.
 In questa città ove ormai per la prima volta
 l'inneggiavan armoniosamente,
 la gente passa senza guardar,
 alienata dai suoi folli pensieri,
 vuoti, pratici, nobili.

E presto si è nascosta
 dietro un velo di nuvola
 che sembra sfuggita d'una porta principale delle rovine.
 Se avesse mente, direi
 "s'è nascosta attonita, prima d'esser rapita!"

Ruma – l.v.69

WALLACE PH. GULIA

*Author's translation.

DIARY NOTES

as soon as I enter the front room
of my studio I stop work:
that is the norm
that is necessity
that is a foregone conclusion
a life-style, manner
a livelihood

not to appear ridiculous
I go through the door
through the motions
then at half-past five
I leave for home
and paint the inconceivable
(leaving nothing to certainty)
in the back room
of my head

PHILIP WARD

LABOUR PARTICIPATION AND SOCIAL SECURITY IN THE MALTESE ISLANDS, 1967*

by ROBIN G. MILNE

ABSTRACT

Information from the 1967 population census is analysed to test the influence of a variety of factors on the decision to join the labour market and on unemployment. The characteristics of the unemployed are also examined.

Among the more important conclusions, we found that labour participation was significantly lower in the Islands than in other countries.

We also conclude that low earnings were not an important cause of family poverty as defined by the income guaranteed by social security in 1967. Its corollary is that the benefits paid were very low in relation to earnings. Introducing a retirement condition for men, raising National Insurance contributions, and providing more finance from general taxation led to an unprecedented increase in the level of benefits for all contingencies.

Finally we found that economic factors dominated the decision to join the labour force and unemployment, but those not gainfully employed usually had some alternative means of support. Typically the unemployed were young and unmarried, and they relied on their family for support since few are eligible for social security.

1. INTRODUCTION

The reports of the 1967 population census provide a rich source of economic data on the Maltese Islands. These are analysed to identify the factors affecting labour force participation and unemployment, and to describe the characteristics of the unemployed. These facts are then related to the provision of social security in 1967 in order to indicate how far the latter has succeeded in its objectives to maintain income levels and alleviate poverty. We

* I am very grateful to Professor L.C. Hunter and Mr. L.D. Smith for detailed comments on earlier drafts and to Mrs. B. Craig for computational assistance.