

TIME AND THE TEXT

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Twists and Turns in Text and Translation¹

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The novel *Requiem for a Malta Fascist* by Francis Ebejer, a leading literary figure in Malta, was published in 1980 but over three quarters of it was written between 1968 and 1969 and then taken up again and concluded in 1976. The novel was written in English and set in the tiny Mediterranean island of Malta between the 1920s and 1970s. Its translation into Maltese was undertaken by Charles Briffa between 1991 and 1992 and published in 2004 with the title *Requiem Għal Sieħbi Faxxista*.

Background

The Maltese Islands are an archipelago in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea and their strategic location at the crossroads between East and West, Continental Europe and North Africa, together with one of the world's largest natural harbours, have ensured them a succession of colonial masters over the millennia. They achieved independence from Britain in 1964 and became a republic with a Maltese president as Head of State in 1974. The two official languages are English and Maltese. Maltese is a derivative of Arabic written in Roman script (the only Semitic language written thus), with a strong overlay of Romance vocabulary, further enriched in more recent decades with English words and expressions especially in the commercial and technological fields. A strong bastion of the Roman Catholic religion, the indigenous culture owes much to Italian mores and customs, Italy being the closest neighbour and for a long time the mainland power to whom the islands had belonged.

The so-called Language Question overshadowed the political scene throughout much of Britain's imperial presence here because Italian was the language of culture and

commerce, of education and administration, and had been so for centuries. As ex-President Ċensu Tabone reminisces to Henry Frendo (2000:37):

Italian had developed...in Malta at about the same time that it was doing so in Italy, in Dante Alighieri's time...In that sense, Italian was not to be regarded as a foreign language in Malta because "it was born here".

The British found it an uphill struggle to impose English in order to supplant Italian. Indeed, as Adrianus Koster describes (1984:55), the language question 'paralysed much of Maltese political (and religious) life for many decades' [Koster's parenthesis]. The tug-of-war played out between these two languages to gain or retain pre-eminence had resorted to various ploys and stratagems since the nineteenth century but was to gain a new twist in the inter-war years. Dominic Fenech (2005:63) remarks:

As long as the language question stayed on the cultural-political plane, it remained primarily an issue that engaged the traditional political schools, even if its effects were felt all the way down the social ladder. Nowhere was the failure to resolve this question one way or the other more damaging than in the sphere of education, where the price of prevarication was a compromise system (the *pari passu* [law passed in 1923]) that had children studying both languages and usually learning neither. [Fenech's parenthesis and italics].

Eventually the British promoted Maltese as an official language, hitherto considered hardly more than a backward dialect, not spoken in 'polite' society but only informally at home or, depending on one's social status, to a socially inferior class of persons like domestics and tradesmen. It was only after Italy aligned itself with Nazi Germany and actually dropped bombs on Malta that the Maltese educated classes were ready to give up Italian as an official language. As Jeremy Boissevain puts it (1993:12), 'the first Italian bombs of the war finally killed the language dispute.' However, Italian is still also widely known and spoken by the Maltese people.

Francis Ebejer (1925-1993) dominated the local literary scene, especially in the 60s and 70s in his role of playwright, and several of his plays in translation won him recognition and acclaim beyond these shores. A notable bilingual in Maltese and English, Ebejer was

also proficient in Italian and during the war he served as an interpreter with the British Forces in North Africa while still in his late teens. He later married an English girl and settled for some time in England.

The twists and turns in the narrative manifest themselves on three levels: the context, the form and the content.

The Context

In his discussion on context, Roger Fowler (1996:112-4) distinguished between three types: context of utterance; context of culture; and context of reference. He describes them as follows:

Context of utterance	the situation within which discourse is conducted
Context of culture	the whole network of social and economic conventions, all the institutions and the familiar settings and relationships, constituting the culture at large
Context of reference	the topic or subject-matter of a text

Ebejer's novel belongs to that genre of social and psychological fiction that began appearing on the local scene after 1964.² As Charles Briffa notes (2001:294) Maltese literature started experimenting with characterisation and mind style where 'individual experience often depicted the region of the self to be in conflict with the outer world.' The protagonist is usually an anti-hero, a misfit who is a stranger in his own land. The Islands were still slowly recovering from the devastation brought about in the Second World War when they had become the most heavily bombed theatre of war in the world. Poverty was still rife and economic activities had taken a slump due to the withdrawal of British troops and leaned-down naval presence, towards which the economy had mostly been geared. The post-war era brought about an enormous social upheaval further accelerated in the post-Independence years which literally pitched the Maltese people headlong into the twentieth century. The political change of climate which had promised much was proving disappointing and disillusionment set in. For with the removal of colonial domination, these Islands were suddenly thrust onto the world's stage as a sovereign nation with all its attendant responsibilities and liabilities, not merely its freedoms. Of course, the socio-

cultural-political conditions influenced the indigenous artistic output and as Peter Serracino Inglott writes (1973:7):

The glass-house within which Maltese artists had insulated themselves for centuries from outside influences was shattered and the four winds let in, blowing from the four corners of the world.

As a result, the *Moviment Qawmien Letterarju* [Movement for a Literary Revival] (MQL) was born in 1967 when a host of young writers banded together to reject the obsolete romantic traditions and to explore new directions and mediums of expression. In his monograph about the MQL, Charles Briffa remarks (2007:20):

The young creative writers, found certain issues – like apathy towards literature, an outdated censorship, conservatism, insufficient critical activity, and irrelevant literary output – intolerably disturbing...and the cry was for updating Maltese Literature, bringing it in line with the literary expression of contemporary Europe.

Commenting on the main trends in Maltese literature, Prof. Oliver Friggieri, the foremost Maltese literary scholar, poet and novelist, himself a founding member of the MQL, reflects (1996:481):

In the late sixties a radical change took place in Maltese Literature...Political independence from Britain, attained in the midst of sharp partisan controversy in 1964, could not fail to create a profound stir in intellectual circles. Awareness of what was happening in the outer world gave its share as well. Everything was set for a thorough critique of tradition and for the real rediscovery of the truest sense of independence as applied to individual and collective life.

The 1970s brought a change in government. The introduction of the welfare state, together with increasing economic activity, brought about a more optimistic but also more materialistic outlook to these shores, as well as greater secularisation. 1974 saw Malta becoming a republic with a Maltese president as Head of State. Though the Maltese Islands remained part of the Commonwealth, the last constitutional tie with Britain was severed when Queen Elizabeth II relinquished her titular headship. The last official tie with Britain

occurred in 1979 when the rent agreement of military and naval installations between Malta and the United Kingdom (and in part NATO) came to an end.

In his overview of this period, Prof. Oliver Friggieri notes (1996:482):

Since the sixties, new trends have been developed and then substituted by others...Political and religious life, customs, attitudes and taboos were radically reviewed in search of an authentic inspiration. By the mid-seventies, this outward-looking view gradually lost ground to make room for a much more subtle approach towards the underlying preoccupation: being Maltese...The time had come again for introversion to creep in...an essentially emotive metaphorical nucleus became again the real core of the new output.

The mimetic techniques in Ebejer's novel depend heavily on recreating the socio-cultural-political context of the real Malta in successive decades. *Requiem for a Malta Fascist* has four temporal divisions. The 1920s form the background for Lorenz's, the protagonist's, childhood. His youth is clearly unfolding in the late 1930s. The various crises, personal, political, social, linguistic, national, come to a head during the war-torn years of the early 40s. A direct reference to Malta becoming a Republic³ in the last and fourth section entitled *Postscript Now* portrays a preternaturally-aged man looking back on his past having resolved his identity crisis, clearly paralleling the national situation.

In each of the time-frames being portrayed, there is almost a fanatical attention to detail. This facilitates the reader's travels between the real and unreal, the actual reality and the illusion of reality. The success of a novel depends heavily on the semblance of reality that the writer imbues his work with. Even in fantasy or science fiction genres this holds true though of course the writer of such genres must juggle to a greater degree with the known and the unknown to create a fictional world.⁴ And therefore one of the most important resources a writer has at his disposal is the naming device⁵ since we are unable to assign any meaning to anything unless we have given it a name, be it object, place or something intangible like a feeling or something abstract like knowledge. Our recognition and acceptance of familiarity is therefore anchored by the referents we use and share.⁶ In Ebejer's novel, the constant authentic representation of the surroundings (actual streets, localities

towns), the people (with typical names, characters and livelihoods) inhabiting them and the kind of actions taking place, delineate very graphically a Maltese ambience and situations we can accept. To give an example of such minute attention to detail, when the countryside is being described in the first section we come across the phrase ‘When the sun grew hot, then you could hear the grass crackling’. Ebejer’s choice of words utilises the onomatopoeic verb ‘crackling’ which corresponds to the dry twiggy grass that crackles in the local environment rather than the soft fleshy grass that rustles in a more temperate climate than Malta’s.

In the mock reality being built up, detail by painstaking detail, it is not only the prevailing socio-cultural-political conditions that envelop our illusion of reality but also actual events. It is evident that Ebejer lived through these different epochs. He blends the narrative with real events as they happened chronologically such as the first Italian bombing mission over Malta (p.133); the deportation of the pro-fascist sympathisers (pp. 139-42); the pitiful state of the air defence (p.144) and many others. The aura of authenticity that Ebejer evokes, owes much to his descriptions: of places and things, of people’s feelings and reactions, of sounds and smells even, as in the following passage (pp. 210-1):

I saw Elena as far as Saqqajja. It was late afternoon and the planes had gone but the alert was still on. People were queuing at a mobile Victory Kitchen. A man with thick-lensed glasses and uncollared shirt stood on one of the stone benches reciting the rosary at the top of his voice. A little crowd had gathered around him – women in dark shawls, young children and a few men. The prayer was taken up by people queuing for food. A heavy sonorous rhythm of human sounds that seemed to send echoes down the length and breadth of the beleaguered island...Then I turned back, passed more people, some taking down clothing acrid with the smell of the damp shelters off lines in the street...

Beyond a faithful representation of authentic conditions and events, *Requiem For a Malta Fascist* explores the themes of the successive eras being delineated. Indeed, Ebejer’s novel faithfully follows the slow and quiet pace of life in the poverty-stricken rural areas in the twenties; the political and economic agitation during the thirties in the bustling, noisy towns where nevertheless, thrift was the order of the day and life was eked out in a frugal manner by most of the population and which was in stark contrast to the opulence enjoyed by

the few; the hardships and privations shared by the whole population during the almost constant bombardment from the skies during the War which had social and class barriers come tumbling down, not merely the buildings; and finally the period of truce reflecting the mid-seventies when there was increased affluence in all sectors of Maltese society and the dilemmas and soul-searching for a national language and identity seemed to have been resolved.

And at this juncture we come face to face with a further twist - the realisation that though it is the themes of the successive eras that are being portrayed, the motivation for their depiction lies in the pre-occupations of the author at the time of writing – the late sixties. These pre-occupations revolved around issues presented not only by the general cultural, political and economic situation but also by the new challenges facing Malta due to its geographical situation – a small island state in the Mediterranean. Oliver Friggieri declared (1995:94):

Ma jista' qatt jintesa l-fatt li Malta hi gżira, u gżira ċkejna, u gżira ċkejna mediterranja. L-insularità, iċ-ċokon u r-reġjonalità huma (fatturi) li fi hđanhom tiżvolġi ruhha l-esperjenza spiritwali u teknika kollha tal-letterat.

[One can never forget the fact that Malta is an island, a small island, a small Mediterranean island. Insularity, small size and regionality are all (aspects) within which the entire spiritual experience and technique of the literary person unfolds.]

These features of insularity, small size and regionality manifested themselves into themes of isolation, alienation, marginalisation, claustrophobia, emigration, ambivalence, nostalgia and culture shock, many of which can be discerned in *Requiem*.

As has been demonstrated above, there is a unity of approach to context in Ebejer's novel. In this way, the characters and action are solidly grounded in demonstrable factual reality and can therefore straddle the divide between the real Malta and the novel's mock reality. In *Requiem* this unity makes time and the text mesh together.

The Form

The novel's four divisions reflect a progressive temporal setting but they also mirror a spatial change. This works well as a way of unfolding Lorenz's story but it also reinforces the archetypal image of the four ages of man⁷ where the young Lorenz goes through childhood on the receiving end of whatever life throws at him; youth, where he questions as he experiences life, though still in a passive manner; manhood, when he begins to assert himself and take control of his destiny; and finally old age where he reflects on his life and reconciles himself to his past, finally resolving his fragmented self and achieving a whole identity of being.

The juxtaposition between the unsophisticated rural existence when nothing much ever happens and the buzzing lifestyle of a University student in town earning his keep and getting involved with all sorts of characters, ideologies and activities, is reversed when after the momentous war-torn years and post-war struggles Lorenz experiences, he seeks solace in his childhood environment. The turn of events in the protagonist's life is neatly underscored by the novel's four divisions.

The form of the novel is that of a memoir-novel with an I-narrator which, as Peter Serracino-Inglott (1973, 2007:ix) comments⁸, shows the protagonist obsessed with his identity and therefore the chosen form is a good mirror of his egocentricity. The central theme of the novel is an identity crisis and the protagonist's *angst* and inner turmoil is constantly paralleled by real events overtaking the islands and shaping its existence. The reality being portrayed in the novel is rooted in the reality of actual characters, places and events which Ebejer himself experienced, growing up in a rural backwater in the late 1920s and moving to a more cosmopolitan urban milieu to complete his schooling. *Requiem for a Malta Fascist* holds a wealth of autobiographical details which reinforce the mock reality that is a novel and these give a powerful impetus to the unfolding tale and a poignant edge to the conflicts, both external and internal, that are laid bare before the reader. For the entire novel is an interrogation and a confession. Indeed, Ebejer gave his novel a sub-title – *The Interrogation*.

The multilayered anaphoric and cataphoric references serve to render the narrative an exercise in the defamiliarisation of relationships and it is only through the interrogations, either of outsiders or of himself that Lorenz finally learns to place his relationships in context and resolve his tangled feelings. These twists and turns in the narrative alternate between having Lorenz as the interrogator or as the one being subjected to it. The process of self-interrogation parallels the constant interrogations Lorenz undergoes as to his motives, his actions, his betrayals and his loyalties. Ironically, his actions seem to contradict his motives and his betrayals are prompted by his loyalties. When Lorenz finally comes to terms with himself, so do these Islands it seems, with their new status as a Republic and widespread recognition of Maltese as a fully developed language in its own right with a solid body of literary output under its belt.

Commenting on his novel, Francis Ebejer wrote (1989:16-17):

I made certain that the personal narrative retained its priority throughout over the political and War features...It is a trip down memory lane, but accompanied by a sub-text of self-interrogation in which the reader is invited to participate...Through such an agency, the novel's actual span of a few decades of the 20th century becomes an immeasurable gradualism of awareness of self and of the destiny of one's country.

The way the form of the novel has taken shape, once more can be seen to be a tightly-knit weave between text and time.

The Content

Antithesis looms large in the novel, personified mostly in the characters of Kos, the mentally retarded cousin and Elena, the émigré Countess who exerts a powerful sexual fascination for Lorenz. Kos represents Lorenz's childhood and village existence when Lorenz is neglected in favour of his cousin by all and sundry, even by his own mother who appears to be totally indifferent to him, all her attention being focused on her second husband, Lorenz's step-father. Lorenz resents Kos and rejects him and the entire village and immerses himself in the bustling and exciting urban milieu and

university life. He wholeheartedly embraces his established friendship with Paul, as a reaction to his revilement of Kos which, however, continues to simmer in his subconscious. But the 1930s brought a resurgence of defiance amongst the Maltese italophiles and in the narrative Paul becomes distracted by the dreams and hopes beguilingly offered by Fascism, in the person of Count Matveich, Elena's husband, while Elena herself holds a fatal attraction for Lorenz. The friendship between Lorenz and Paul seems to become a casualty of this tension borne of two different directions. Another casualty in friendship seems to occur between Lorenz and Ester when Lorenz comes to realise that he loves Ester but she does not awaken any physical desire in him; that is Elena's exclusive domain. In the meantime, the advent of war precipitates events, feelings run high, both in the real Malta and in the novel, and friendships become only one kind of casualty.

Mirroring real events that took place, the novel is full of conflicts and tensions of an essentially existential nature. Lorenz is in turmoil both in mind and spirit as well as regards his behaviour within his experiences and relationships. The whole narrative revolves around Lorenz's suppressed or fragmented identity. Though he unreservedly rejects Fascism, he does his utmost to protect Paul and he is unable to break off his liaison with Elena. And though he rejects Kos and village life, it is the old traditional values that they represent which he defends at all costs and where he finally finds himself at peace with all tensions resolved. The novel is a series of rejections. Throughout the narrative, Lorenz fails to come to terms with his relationships and he keeps rejecting them, turning his back on his feelings, his experiences, his relationships. His love for Paul is the one constant thing in his life. In turn, he is rejected by all the people who have some meaning for him; one after another they all discard him and find what they are looking for in someone or something else.

Lorenz's actions detail the real Malta: confused and disunited, fragile and fragmented. Whereas economic prosperity depended utterly on British interests, culturally the educated classes looked to Italy even though they considered themselves Maltese patriots. Moreover the islands were staunchly Roman Catholic and the Pope

was Italian, residing in Italy. No Maltese was ever going to deny the one thing that had held them together through centuries of hardship and hard-won battles to curry favour with a Protestant power. Religion was the only common ground for the Maltese people. The language certainly was not.

Ebejer explores the language question in four ways in *Requiem*. First of all through the names he gives his characters; through their language of choice; through the changing street names; and through occasional outbursts about the subject. Predictably, in the first section portraying village life the names are informal Maltese variants: Niklaws (Nicholas) and Turu (Arthur) for example. Names become more cosmopolitan when the action moves to town and city dwelling and we therefore have the narrator's friends called Paul and Ester; we meet characters such as Superintendent Cefai, Constable Ċensu Azzopardi, Luca Agius and Yvette Bajada; we have the foreign residents Countess Elena and Count Lionel Matveich; and finally we meet the English ruling class in the person of Captain Jerry. The surnames of the Maltese characters are all typically Maltese but their Christian names relate directly to their political allegiance or affiliation. Paul prefers to be called 'Paolo' 'in the language of Dante' reports the narrator on page 37, in order to reinforce his pro-Italian stance. Similarly the boy Luca has an Italian name. The constable has a Maltese name and surname but Yvette Bajada, though having a Maltese surname is reported to prefer speaking in English, even to Lorenz (page 104). During a social event, Lorenz notes "In some groups English was exclusively spoken. In others Italian," (page 103).

The changing street names bear witness to successive epochs. On page 41, for example, Lorenz remarks:

He lived with his mother...in Strada Forni, so named after the vast bake-houses of the Knights. (As also in the case of most other streets and important landmarks, this street was named in Italian at a time when that language held a privileged position. Later, it was re-christened Old Bakery Street, when English had superseded Italian as the Islands' second language after Maltese; later still, Triq l-Ifran when the vernacular at last came into its own and its prestige mounted steadily.) [Ebejer's parenthesis]

The impassioned outburst by Lorenz on page 46 reflects many people's feeling of being torn in two: 'Italian I was studying at school. It was a language I loved as deeply as I would not love any other.' One has only to contrast this with his unemotional and factual way he describes Maltese (page 65): 'our linguistic roots and derivatives stand at the ratio of twenty-five per cent Latin to seventy-five Semitic' to appreciate the situation prevailing in Malta up to the Second World War. Yet towards the end of the novel the language question takes another twist and Lorenz looks at the Maltese language in a different way; he is immensely proud of it and one cannot help but feel that it is Ebejer himself speaking across the decades (page 241):

If, too, both the English and Italian languages occupy respected places in our culture, it is our own language, heir to other immemorial languages stemming from the very cradle of civilisation, and survivor of centuries of foreign domination, that holds its head up with pride and ever-increasing force, and continues to give us the stamp of nationhood.

The figure of Lorenz and some of the situations he finds himself in evoke parallels with Ebejer himself, as the novelist admitted, both in the paper he was invited to write (1989:20) and to the translator as reported in the Postscript to the Translation (C. Briffa 2004:277). In making the protagonist, Lorenz, an I-narrator, which as Leech and Short observe (1981:265) 'inevitably tends to bias the reader in favour of the narrator/character',⁹ Ebejer reinforces the feeling of intimacy between the narrator and the reader and makes the reality of the unfolding feelings and events even more immediate.

However, though the novel has an I-narrator, Ebejer rings the changes when it comes to perspective. This is because throughout the narrative Lorenz reports many conversations as they occurred. By using direct speech, the author gives the reader the opportunity to 'hear' the characters directly and be intuitive about their motivations. More than that however, in *Requiem* Lorenz remains rather distant when recounting past incidents and the progression of situations and this detachment and participation at one and the same time allow the reader to simultaneously grasp the narrator's perspective and that of the other characters. Indeed, in the case of Lorenz a double

perspective is revealed because as Katie Wales recounts (2001:306), what happens in memoir-novels is that we see experiences filtered through the eyes 'of the main character as maturer or wiser than the younger self whose adventures are related'. A multifaceted polyphonic narrative emerges as a result.

For much of the novel the elegiac tone matches the sombre mood, because the narrative is very much a sort of requiem. Indeed, one gathers the impression that in poetic form the novel would have read as an elegy and in song form it would have emerged as a dirge. Though Lorenz never wallows in self-pity, and neither do the other characters, a mournful air hangs over the whole narrative. The following passage illustrates this doleful tune:

I looked at the deeply wrinkled face before me. I thought of our first meeting...She had seemed more alert then. She had smiled while shaking my hand. It had been a nice smile. But she was aged now and quite dead. I remembered Paul's map of the Spanish Civil War, the rusty drawing pins on the door of the kitchen. She might have died at any time during one or other of the Republican or Nationalist occupations of Madrid.

She clinked the rosary beads in front of my face...Rattle of the skeleton's bones before it sank back once and for all into its tomb. She mouthed words she thought were coming out as sound but didn't. I nodded my head rapidly as if agreeing with her and wanting to make her long death easier. No one else would...

The sombre tone is felt in the rhythm which carries a good deal of the task of conveying the mood. It is sluggish and continuous, with each sentence plodding after the other like someone dragging his steps. The continuous juxtaposition of how Paul's mother had been before and how she appears now results in nostalgia which deepens the dire effect. The use of ellipses reinforces this rhythm and effect. Moreover the nostalgic references are heaped with more woe when all the imagery of the present, and therefore the vocabulary used, are drawn from ideas /images about death.

All in all, the different elements that constitute the novel seem to reinforce each other. Themes, characterization, narrative functions, mode of presentation, tone, mood

and rhythm all blend together to provide both the basis of the narrative as well as the means to flesh out the framework provided by the characters and the plot. Though distinct in themselves, the disparate strands of elements are drawn tightly together in one single lament and the text seems to be in tune with time.

When Context, Form and Content Fuse: The Translation

Kirsten Malmkjær (2004:15-6) sees the translator in the role of mediator and therefore translated texts as mediated texts. She identifies four crucial characteristics or parameters which affect such texts:

- a mediated text is affected by the mediator's interpretation of the original;
- mediation through translation always has a purpose;
- the purpose the translation is intended to serve may differ from the purpose the original text was intended to serve;
- the audience for the translation is almost always different from the audience for the original text.

This interpretation of a translation is highly pertinent to *Requiem Għal Sieħbi Faxxista*.

A quarter of a century separated the translator from Francis Ebejer, a whole world of experience. Charles Briffa did not experience at first-hand the grinding poverty, the devastation of war and the dearth of educational and cultural opportunities. However, traces of these lingered well into his present and his generation grew up in the shadow of those shattering events and a passing way of life. In a sense, the translator's intended readership did not differ so much from Ebejer's English-speaking audience because in the Maltese context, locals interested in literature would be bilingual (Maltese and English), or at the very least, competent in either language. But, of course, the translation was aimed exclusively at a Maltese audience. However, time had moved on and in the intervening years the readership had indeed changed, not so much in its profile perhaps as in its concerns. The preoccupations of the 80s and early 90s were different from those of the 60s and 70s.

Rapid industrialization and urbanization, together with the advent of mass tourism in the late 70s and early 80s, brought greater affluence to the Maltese Islands but also concomitant pressures on the infrastructure and the social fabric. There was a greater impetus to secularisation and attrition to traditional family life as well as increasing importance attached to entertainment and leisure activities. The corresponding material outlook to life was fostered by the prevailing political division which had fuelled mistrust to an unprecedented scale. When Charles Briffa started on the translation these Islands were emerging from a dark era when, depending where your political sympathies lay, you could get a telephone at home, a job or even a government-subsidised flat or plot of land. Conversely, being in the wrong camp could deny you the above and bring you some sort of harassment to boot. You could end up being transferred at your place of work or have your promotion held up or even suffer physical abuse. And you meant you and yours. It took a very special kind of courage to put friendship above politics. It is no exaggeration to say that Malta had been on the brink of civil war and therefore true solidarity and friendship were highly prized.

It was perhaps inevitable, given these circumstances that Briffa latched on to the theme of friendship, friendship above politics and above anyone or anything else. As the translator, Briffa read the novel as revolving around this theme¹⁰ whereas for Ebejer, as he himself put it (1989:30), *Requiem* ‘relate[s] by and large to identity and the limits and limitations of individualism, both past and present.’ This response to the novel on the translator’s part made for a momentous decision. Instead of translating the title literally into Maltese where it would have been rendered as *Requiem Għal Faxxist Malti*, Briffa re-christened the novel *Requiem Għal Sieħbi Faxxista (Requiem For My Mate The Fascist)*. In this way, the translation not only follows the twists and turns of the original narrative but provides a further twist of its own.

The title in English gives an impersonal synopsis of the novel; it gives a purely descriptive taste of what is in store for the reader. Here, the headword is ‘Fascist’ qualified by the nominator ‘Malta’. But in the translation the headword ‘Sieħbi’ becomes ‘my mate’ which is qualified by the epithet ‘fascist’¹¹. The ‘new’ title shifts

the emphasis onto friendship. More than that, the inversion and substitution of elements directs the reader's attention towards the essence of the novel: soul-mates not merely friends. The attached pronoun, the suffix 'i', also signals the fact that the story is going to be recounted in the first person.

The implications of the nominal group in Maltese are twofold and state the narrator's position: firstly, that though my friend is a fascist, I am not; and secondly, that even though my friend is a fascist and I am not, I still want him as my mate. The title in the translated text therefore captures the flavour of the whole story, not only points to the surface action as the title in English does. In Maltese the shift of emphasis and direction is made more dramatic by a grammatical implication, employing the attached pronoun and as Briffa himself observed,¹² 'the morphological attachment here is reflecting the semantic attachment'. In this remarkable reversal, Briffa has quite deliberately gone beyond the original for an enriched rather than an equivalent effect.

Indeed the whole translation resonates differently from the original.¹³ This is due in part to the fact that the mock reality being presented reflects Maltese reality which is inextricably bound to the Maltese language not to English. In many instances, the language of translation was able to reflect wholly and accurately the physical and socio-cultural environment which English was unable to do so. An example can be cited where in Maltese a 'gebuba' is found within the confines of a house and 'għarix' is used to refer to the same sort of thing but this time as a stand alone structure in the countryside. In English Ebejer was forced to use the word 'hut' both times, (pages 3 and 4).¹⁴ Such an occurrence was found to be the case even with perfect synonyms, for example the words 'house' and 'dar', because the reality bound up with an English house presupposes a slanting roof whereas that of a Maltese house possesses a flat roof¹⁵ which is regularly used as extra floor space for many activities such as to hang out clothes, for children to play, to hold barbeques and parties, to keep a rabbit hutch or pigeon coop, etc.

The translation was also able to perfectly portray the bilingual context which is Malta. So for example, at one point in the narrative, an English soldier and a Maltese constable both tell Lorenz to move away and in the English version all the dialogue is in English: “Hop it!” and “Scram!” (page 43). However, in the Maltese version the translator was able to keep the English soldier’s injunction in English “Hop it!”, and render what the Maltese constable exclaimed in Maltese “Aħrab ’l hemm!”, thereby giving a more authentic account of the reality.

Indeed, it is what I call ‘the authentication process’ that irrevocably distances the translated text from the original one. When Briffa chose to authenticate the text in Maltese he chose to make the translated text stand on its own. He drew on all the intrinsic resources of the Maltese language as well as the meta-linguistic features it is rooted in together with the cultural context that envelops it, to give it its own voice, to convey its own identity.

One of the most far-reaching decisions that the translator took was to introduce dialect in the villagers’ dialogue. In one bold stroke this authenticated the action within a quintessential Maltese setting. Not only did it make the conversations ring true but it also strategically signalled social status for those who spoke in dialect as against Standard Maltese. Consequently the Maltese text accurately reflects the context, the social reality which the English version was unable to portray.

Another strategy in authenticating the Maltese text was to exploit the phonological aspects of Maltese.¹⁶ What is pertinent to the discussion in this paper is when Briffa resorted to mirroring poetic rhythms and effects in his narrative. In parts, the text reads as a ballad, with the haunting rhythm and movement of the ‘novenarju’ ballad form which Oliver Friggieri (2000:105) reports as having been popularized by the poet Ruzar Briffa between the 20s and 40s, that is, the time-frame of the novel. To illustrate:

A punishing, tormenting exercise. (p. 129)

Tahriġ ta’ kastig u turment. (p. 141)

Pocked through with age. (p. 129)

Imkemma u mhaffra biż-żmien. (p. 141)

Poetic rhythms can enrich prose, especially if the writer is striving for an effect that closely resembles that of a poetic genre.¹⁷ Since the ballad is a narrative in poetic form, the borrowing of its form and rhythms here are apt and they elicit a deep-rooted response in the Maltese reader making a direct appeal to Maltese cultural memory.

Reading a novel becomes a shared experience between the writer and the reader. And if we believe, as Eugene Nida does (2001:149) that ‘the real location of language and culture is in the heads of participants’, it is a small step to appreciate the richly textured fabric that is the translated version, interwoven as it is with the strands of context, form and content.

Conclusion

Francis Ebejer wrote the novel *Requiem for a Malta Fascist* in English. However, in a sense this is already a translation because he was endeavouring to transpose the Maltese situation and anima into an English context, in the sense of presenting and exporting the local reality to an English-speaking audience. In turn, the translation into Maltese can be viewed as a reverse process, the local reality being brought back and reunited with its roots. The fact that the two versions are not perfectly congruent may be attributed in part to the vagaries of the two languages, one Teutonic and the other Semitic, and the different realities out of which they arose and keep pace. But there can be no doubt that the stamp of time is clearly marked on the two texts. The social upheavals that overtook Maltese society with every change in the cultural-political conditions and the concerns they generated in the literary field, can be clearly discerned in how the novel takes shape and substance and in each new twist the narrative takes.

By re-evaluating the past, seeing past events in the light of current knowledge and experiences, Lorenz/Ebejer can make sense of the present. In the novel, the progression of time was necessary in order to come to a resolution. When it comes to the translation, though on one level we can see it as Ebejer wrote it, we can also see it on another level or with an added twist as Briffa presents it, where there is a shift of

emphasis and direction, and consequently a shift in meaning. This final twist and turn represents the intervening years from when *Requiem for a Malta Fascist* was written and when *Requiem Għal Sieħbi Faxxista* was completed. It also represents a marvellous reintegration of context, form and content with the indigenous language and its inherent rhythms and nuances. One may even conclude that in the translation, time and the text are one.

¹ Though this paper was written specifically for the PALA 2008 annual conference, it draws on the research I undertook for my thesis, submitted in April 2007 for the degree M. Translation awarded by the University of Malta and published in December 2007 by Malta University Publishers Ltd. as a book, *Translating Reality*. It discusses literary strategies and translation techniques to depict reality.

² Francis Ebejer was the only Maltese novelist of this period to write for an English-speaking audience.

³ On page 241 of the novel Lorenz says ‘for the first time in their history, the Islands are independent and now, too, a Republic.’

⁴ Peter Stockwell (2003:195), in his article on science fiction and literary linguistics, comments: ‘the possible worlds that are dramatised in sf encompass all the events and inventory of our own actual world plus all the imaginary features of non-actual worlds.’

⁵ Naming is considered by Eugene Nida (2001:8) as one of the primary psychological functions of language which he believes are ‘the means by which people negotiate with reality.’

⁶ To communicate with others it is necessary to have a shared inventory of names, though one need not necessarily know all of them as Mark Ashcraft explains (2002:353): ‘Obviously, wherever it is you are sitting right now as you read this book, each object in the room has a name. Of course, in an unfamiliar or unusual place (an airport control tower or a car repair shop) you may not know the name of something, but it never occurs to you that the thing might have no name.’

⁷ Oliver Friggieri (1988:25) ‘It-Tfissir tal-Karattri’ [The Meaning of Characters] II.211-45, in his translation of Horace’s *De Arte Poetica*, Toni Cortis publication: Żebbuġ.

⁸ Peter Seracino-Inglott’s comments appear as a Foreword in an analytic study of the classic novel of this period, *Il-Gaġġa* by Frans Sammut, (1973, 2007).

⁹ This is not to say that such unswerving sympathy is always the case and Leech and Short (1981:265-6) detail this in citing the character of Alex in Anthony Burgess’s novel *A Clockwork Orange*. Ebejer tried this tack in a later novel which is closely related to *Requiem, The Maltese Baron...and I Lucian*.

¹⁰ This was confirmed in an interview with Charles Briffa by the present writer on 23/03/07.

¹¹ In Maltese the literal word for friend is *habib* but this may carry the connotation of an intimate relationship and since the novel’s intimations of homosexuality regard Paul and the Count, not Lorenz and Paul, the translator opted for the word that corresponds to ‘mate’ (Briffa 2004:276).

¹² This observation was made during the interview and discussion on 23/03/07 mentioned above.

¹³ This is the main contention in my thesis, referred to in Note 1 and many instances are discussed.

¹⁴ Of course he could have resorted to synonyms like ‘shed’ or ‘lean-to’ or ‘shelter’ to provide variety but the point is that these words are interchangeable in both contexts whereas in Maltese they cannot be used interchangeably. A *gebuba* can never be an *gharix* and vice-versa.

¹⁵ This explains the error in collocation by Ebejer when he wrote ‘the ground of the roof’ on page 149, something no native speaker of English would ever express. If anything, the phrase ‘the surface of the roof’ should have been used.

¹⁶ A detailed analysis of the phonological divergences noted between the English and Maltese versions of the novel can be read in *Translating Reality* on pages 69 to 72.

¹⁷ Jean Boase-Beier (2004:29) declares that ‘poetic effects make readers re-examine their knowledge of the world’.

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