

## Past Carnival and New Year's Eve Drama in Malta<sup>1</sup>

*George Mifsud-Chircop*

The aim of this paper is to describe and analyse the two seasonal drama practices in Malta and Gozo within certain restrictive parameters. I'm fully aware that the old dramatic text I shall be presenting to you for the first dramatic event is but a small part of the performance. Today it is impossible to decipher the extent of its existence as a provisional text. Or is it possible to speak of the other parts of the dramatic form beyond the text, namely: improvisation and the development of the performance affected by the spontaneous decisions of the actors, movement, music, the simultaneity of production and communication, the ephemeral and unrepeatable nature of the work understood as event and action, and the amount of non-dramatic activity alongside the drama per se.

With reference to carnival celebrations in contemporary Xaghra-Gozo, Vicki Ann Cremona comments: "Carnival in [Nazarene Church] square revolved around one main event, the *kummittiva*, consisting of a highly structured series of folk dances, and a farce."<sup>2</sup> This last word is qualified in an interesting footnote:

The subject matter of the farce is usually either about marriage or cuckoldry, with mock trials or notarial deeds drawn up to the wife's disadvantage. Another common theme is surgical operations, and animal intestines, liver or heart are 'extracted' from the patient. In Italy, these farces usually mark the death of Carnival...<sup>3</sup>

In spite of giant steps in technology as well as development in modern Maltese drama, live farcical folk drama is still popular entertainment in Malta with the lower classes, though not as vastly popular as in past times. Adopting Steve Tillis's definition of folk drama, I would say that the Maltese rituals *Il-Qarçilla* [il'ar'tfilla] and *Il-Qarinža* [il'a'riŋža] have "separate but present performers and audience, enactment over time and space using practices of design, movement, and speech, and, most important of all, a dramatic frame of make-believe action."<sup>4</sup> Here, make-believe means pretending the performance is real, and not just accepting the reality of the performance. The occasions of their performances are limited to noteworthy events and the impromptu situations and venues are not regulated – venues for *Il-Qarçilla* are outside in the street, and for *Il-Qarinža* in private houses. Their core audiences are found in the villages.

Due to cultural myopia, folk drama in Malta has received sporadic discussion over the years in the scholarship of Maltese folklore and drama.<sup>5</sup> The only notable exception is veteran Maltese folklorist Joseph Cassar-Pullicino. The same themes are to be found till the late 1960s and thereafter in various areas in Malta, including my native village Qormi and its outlying villages, including Żebbuġ, Siggiewi and Marsa.<sup>6</sup>

Since mediaeval times Carnival has always been accompanied by parades, masquerades, pageants, and other forms of revelry recalling pre-Christian pagan rites, particularly fertility rites. In Malta Carnival has been celebrated since at least the 15th

century, coinciding with Europe's carnivals which reached their peak during the 14th and 15th centuries.<sup>7</sup> Later centuries also evince the popularity of a rustic Carnival folk drama, known as “*Il-Qarçilla*” with the lower classes.

“*Il-Qarinza*” was another magic-ritual drama celebrated on New Year's Eve, still popular in fragmentation within living memory in Malta and Gozo. Here one discovers the grotesque representation of the death of the old year and the beginning of the new one. Both rituals are defined as the earliest known fragments of comic drama on the island. Bad weather conditions might have restricted *Qarinza*'s performers to put on their act indoors.

Unfortunately we have no visual or audio documentary of either of the two dramatic rituals grounded in the Maltese reality to define the appropriate context of any performance situation, texts-in-action, the extent the text served as a guide for the performance, practices of design, movement, speech, music, and other practices associated with them that take place within a frame of make-believe action shared by the performers and audience in the more general context of Maltese culture. One must not sweep away contextualism and the performer-audience relationship in relation to the concept of framing.<sup>8</sup>

With one fragmentary exception,<sup>9</sup> no thick, incisive description is made of troupe/s of village amateurs as the primary audience for their performance, parading through village streets with an intentional communicative action, calling attention to the mounting of the impersonation and performance that was soon to take place, and no doubt gathering a substantial audience in its wake, audience participation and its loud repartee to every crude comment. Impersonation<sup>10</sup> is common to our two folk drama events. Actors appear before members of their own community, creating a constant juxtaposition of their fictitious and mundane role.

## **Il-Qarçilla**

The word “*Qarçilla*” refers to the whole folk drama celebration of a knockabout farce, including the pastry bride within the same ritual during Carnival and the person masked to represent the bride - consider that female actors participated in Maltese folk drama only since the first half of the 20th century, and in some villages since the beginning of the sixties. This masking as a representation is the essence of drama once it includes dramatic performance. We do not know, however, if conventional semiotic device or direct imitation of women's overt gender markings such as sexual characteristics, voice patterns, characteristic movement, and gesture, were used.

Action and its interlocking events, mime and mask play their functional part in *Il-Qarçilla*. There is an old description, dating to the second half of the eighteenth century, recorded in an unpublished dictionary *Damma tal Kliem Kartaginis mscerred fel fom tal Maltin u Ghaucin* written by Gozitan Canon Giovanni Francesco Agius de Soldanis (1712-70). The manuscript is to be found in the Malta Public Library in Valletta.

This game by country people takes place during Carnival, similar to that of the Gentiles .... A sweet pastry bride doll is made to the height of three or four palms, beautifully adorned with fine clothes. It is placed in a small basket and poised on the head of a masked man carrying a round cake (M. *kollura*) in his hand and accompanied by the rabble. Of these some play rustic instruments, others dance or sing; then, when they have gone round the village, they stop at street corners and it is customary for one of them to mimic the manners of a notary, reading in a public

burlesque marriage contract set in Maltese rhyme, in favour of the pastry bride .... After much wandering, idle talk and nonsense characteristic of Carnival, the pastry bride is eaten and the *Qarçilla* comes to an end with the people getting drunk with wine.<sup>11</sup>

Here the burlesque Carnival play includes the arrangement of overlapping multiple texts over the performance: verbal and/or musical and/or mimic and/or movement texts are invoked simultaneously, taking the mock-wedding plot from everyday life. It is satirical, imitating the peculiarities of individuals or groups, of funny and strange behaviour. It is a mixture of obscenities and satirical dialogues. The foreknown resolution - devouring the sweet pastry bride and general drunkenness - also sets a role for the audience.

According to Cassar Pullicino writing in 1945, "by the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century ... [this drama] was probably in disuse and foreign writers on Malta of a century ago make no allusion whatsoever to this Carnival pastime."<sup>12</sup> Nine years later the same author remarks that the ritual had reached its apex in Malta by mid-eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Yet oral tradition makes various references to this "notarial drama," as it is sometimes termed. Cassar-Pullicino himself in the same article concludes:

... [O]f the old rustic ceremonies nothing remains but a few faint survivals ... the burlesque figure of a man dressed up in a notary's clothes that is still seen about in the streets representing King Carnival.<sup>14</sup>

In 1976 Cassar-Pullicino recalls the *Qarçilla* folk drama in post-war Malta:

A man dressed up as a Notary Public could be seen every year in Merchants Street, and in Kingsway (now Republic Street), purporting to read a register with which he occasionally shielded his face from all sorts of objects thrown at him by the bystanders or by his retinue of children and adult merrymakers.<sup>15</sup>

From mid-eighteenth century down to 1798 when Malta was under the rule of the Knights of the Order of St John, revelry was part of daily life<sup>16</sup> much as it was in other European countries. We can produce excerpts by reliable eighteenth century Maltese writers documenting that feasts were purposely celebrated during the time, on direct orders by the Grand Masters,<sup>17</sup> lasting throughout the whole night!<sup>18</sup>

Parallel to this folk drama and contemporary with it, there was a processional marriage ritual, where another "*Qarçilla*" featured. In Count Giovanni Antonio Ciantar's edition of Abela's history which he entitled *Malta Illustrata* (1772), he recalls that:

[o]n the wedding day the most respectable relatives or guests of the wedding couple would place a flimsy and transparent veil on the face of a richly dressed and bejewelled bride. It was then the custom to make cuts in the women's dresses, however new and costly, to attach in each cut a tiny gold seashell. They also used to wear certain dresses of embroidered velvet in floral designs, arabesque, almost like ecclesiastical cloaks, and we have seen several of them. The most used materials were gold or silver brocade which they called *lamé*. So outfitted, the veiled bride left the house accompanied by her retinue and guests, in Maltese known as *haddara*. Together with the bridegroom they set out to church under a canopy held by four of the closest guests called *Compari del baldacchino*. This was a canopy kept on purpose for use by new couples

.... The bridal couple was preceded by violinists and guitarists who stopped regularly to sing a rhymed quatrain in Maltese in praise of the bride or bridegroom. They were also preceded by three other men, one of whom carried a bowl full of well-made sweets, attractively displayed and decorated with ribbons or with a round flat cake called *qarçilla*, with two figures on top representing the bride and bridegroom, which bowl was made of clay with white glaze with yellow arabesques. Another who carried it held a large *ciambella* (here called *collura*, in Sicily *buccalato*), held by a sash slung over his left shoulder down to his right side, which then belonged to him. The other carried a tray with the nuptial handkerchief in the form of a tower or a pyramid or dome with the figure of St Joseph, or Baby Jesus, or Our Lady on top.<sup>19</sup>

Would one suggest that through ecclesiastical influence the same term was used to refer to the two small sweet figurines placed on the wedding cake or to the cake itself? Or was it a transference of meaning from the former primitive improvised dramatic ritual to the passive, church dominated ritual procession, known to locals as *g'ilwa*, which was condemned and stopped by church orders in mid-19th century?<sup>20</sup>

According to Cassar-Pullicino, the *Qarçilla* folk drama has three elements typical of the genre:

the scenic act represented at each street corner, some rudimentary action - the man carrying the bride, the Notary reading out the contract, etc., and the cutting up, i.e. the sacrifice, of the bride... There was also a ritual element..<sup>21</sup>

What is fascinating in the history of the *Qarçilla* folk drama in Malta is that the humorous, burlesque, irreverent lines - Cassar-Pullicino censors substantially long excerpts of the text in his 1954 study and later reprints with additions!<sup>22</sup> - which were so popular in De Soldanis' times and the nineteenth century, were written around 1713<sup>23</sup> by Feliç Demarco, a priest born in Bormla, Malta. We are not informed whether Demarco played some part in the direction of any folk actors performing his script. To date we can only speak of his controlling presence - in the widest of meanings - through the text of a literate outsider amid the performing group. It seems safe to assume that the audience was constantly shifting, according to the place chosen by the wandering troupe. Dramatic action was conveyed by means of a combination of narrative, indirect and direct dialogue, and descriptions. Textual evidence of the 'notary's' inventory of the dowry suggests that the drama has always had significant comic elements, inspiring improvised dramatic action by the performers. But we do not know about any improvisational interaction with the audience, although Thomas A. Green contends that "audiences at folk performances are rarely truly inactive."<sup>24</sup> Many variants were later prepared or improvised by the different 'notaries', to such an extent that a contemporary remarks:

... the carnivalesque notary reads the matrimonial contract in favour of the bride, there in everybody's presence, in burlesque Maltese rhyme, *as it variously makes the round with these Carnival notaries ...*<sup>25</sup>

The *Qarçilla* as folk drama aims at more than entertainment. It is a sociological play, presented expressly with instrumental aims: it has effective connection and deals with the daily lives of the actors and audience. It is Carnival and the context accounts for the community's right to eliminate temporarily all differences and hierarchical barriers among individuals, abolishing taboos that prevail in real life and creating a

particular type of communication impossible in everyday life being situated at a symbolic level. It expresses its concerns about and attitudes to life in a way that escapes censorship. The repetitive use of symbolic inversion, deviations from and transgression of normal patterns of behaviour, double meaning, crude, blunt vulgarity, overturning of sexual taboos and references to the lower bodily stratum,<sup>26</sup> symbolic equivalence between carnival devices (e.g., cucumber/pig's phallus), and meta-dramatic pointed barbs as direct offence to the audience with various boisterous sexual connotations and rounds of insults - these are all examples of a community observing, chastising, and laughing at itself. The verse structure is simple, generally in rhyming couplets, allowing for the most straightforward conveyance of meaning.

It seems also safe to conclude that the sudden involvement of the audience excited much raucous laughter at the bucolic fantasy of some of the performers' lines written in declamatory style, as well as substantial embarrassment for the upper classes, represented by the "notary," at the ludic representation of the community's institutions, including the parody of them aiming at social criticism and transformation. The most hilarious laughter comes closest to the point where the joke is indeed taken too far. It draws upon comic, figurative material already in a long-standing tradition in mid-eighteenth century and a good number of examples are still popular in contemporary Malta, including bombastic idioms, butts of humorous expressions, and proverbs. The various legal terms in the text betray Demarco's considerably learned hand, though his text is nothing less than a distillation of how the Maltese at the time viewed the world around them.

The significance of names in the text is that they are functional descriptions. Notary Pierotti Agrighentino "*quello che non beve puoco vino*" [he who drinks no small amount of wine] is the presenter who literally "presents" annually the performance and occasionally engages in dialogue with his audience. The opening frame is separated from the drama proper by the employment of this meta-theatrical figure, promising "*Copia di un Contratto di matrimonio in lingua maltese, burlesco, che si recita dalle maschere nel Carnevale*"<sup>27</sup> [Copy of a Marriage Contract in burlesque Maltese, which is recited by the masks in Carnival]. The folk play was held outdoors during Carnival in popular locales to work up decent audiences. The performers were all men and understandably so because of the closed society at the time and the instances of obscenity, and off-colour remarks: they laughed at their own world, with all its foolishness and foibles comically exaggerated. Contemporary comments on this folk drama imply the existence of various troupes on the island and they were led by particular individuals.

Here are some relevant examples from the extant text of the original. Semiosis is at its best here, implying a subterranean current of human interaction using the Maltese sign system to accomplish communication. The play-text is extremely difficult to decipher, Ignazio Saverio Mifsud, the copier, has a horrible and inconsistent handwriting. The problem is greater if one remembers that Maltese orthography was only standardized in 1934. In attempting to decipher the text as accurately as possible, Standard Maltese orthography is used, words followed by [?] to show doubtful transcription; and parts where the mss is illegible are marked [...]. Punctuation marks in square brackets identify punctuation marks inserted or changed by the author of this paper for editorial reasons.

## Symbolic Inversion of Taboo

### 1. Woman's Physical Description

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| 1.1 “Inweza ... habet naturam phal tal Bacra...” (p.1)                                   | 1.1 “Inweza ... has a physique like a cow's...”   |
| 1.2 “... l-għarusa tixbah/L ommha minn wara, / U minn quddiem fiha x'wiehed jara.” (p.9) | 1.2 “... the bride takes after her mother in her behind. / and from the front she is worth a second glance” |

### 2. Heightened Phallic References

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| 2.1 ass's penis: “zobb ta' hmar” (p.12)  | 2.1 “donkey's penis”   |
| 2.2 cucumber:: pig's penis: “... U tinkaram wisq għall-hjar / Għaliex tmut għal nebula tal-majjal...” ( <i>ibid.</i> ) | 2.2 “... And she is very fond of cucumbers / because she would die for a pig's penis...” |
| 2.3 human penis :: needle, vagina :: eye: “għerq illi min-nu/Thit bħal għajn donnha raġel.” ( <i>ibid.</i> )           | 2.3 “a needle/penis with which/ she sews an eye/vagina like a man”                       |

### 3. Specific Sexual References, Including Sexual Intercourse

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| 3.1 sexual intercourse :: fresh sausages: “... ukill tagħmillu patt/Illi tagħmel trabi bir-riżq / Għaliex thobb tibia' z-zazett frisk.” (p.12)   | 3.1 “... she promises him also / to give him many children [be a prolific childbearer] because she guzzles on fresh sausages [she enjoys sexual intercourse too much].”  |
| 3.2 penis for sexual intercourse and pissing: “U għandu siequ l-quddemniya / Fiha n-nemmi-lija, u tanofs bewwelija...” (p.4)   | 3.2 “And he has the front leg/penis erect / To reach orgasm, and then to pass water ...”   |
| 3.3 sexual act and conception: “... fuqha mitraħ tas-suf ta' l-għelieqi / Biex fuqu l-għarus jagħmel il-kerċieħi.” (p.8), “... id-dukkar tagħha tridu minn dak il-kbir / Għaliex taqtgħu minnha filgħaxija mal-lejl jarga' jsir.” ( <i>ibid.</i> , see also n.4 below) | 3.3 “... a mattress of wool used in villages / so that on it the bridegroom helps the bride conceive;” “... she wants his tool to be of the biggest / to be able to make love a second time during the night.” |

### 4. Infertility of Animals with Transference of Meaning to Humans

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| 4.1 “...tagħtih żewġ hanziriet[,] / Il-waħda ħawlija u l-oħra qatt ma għamlet ulied.” (p.6) | 4.1 “... she gives him two sows./one infertile and the other had never borne young.” |
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### 5. *Offensive Barbs Directed to the Audience*

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| 5.1 audience described as illegitimate or beasts: “Bghula ta' 1-ibliet” (p.11), “intom ilkoll bhejjem” (p.14)   | 5.1 “Bastard townsfolk,” “You're all beasts”  |
| 5.2 victims of actor's vulgar actions (specifically defecating) or illicit sexual relations and solicited to reciprocate: “... fuqkom Sinjuri appena nahra” ( <i>ibid.</i> ), “Stennnewni naqra sa ma mmur / Jiena f' wiċċkom nahra” (p.15), “U nippromettikom li nargħa' magħkom / Tridu thallu tieghi f' tagħkom” ( <i>ibid.</i> ), issiġilata bil-ħara / Li kellu jiċċappas fuq kull min semagħna” ( <i>ibid.</i> ), “... kull min semagħni jidhol ġewwa sormi” (p.14) | 5.2 “... I'll just shit on you, gentlemen”, “Wait for me a while till I'll go / [and] shit in your face”, “And I promise you to return / You must leave mine [my shit] in yours”, “... sealed with shit / that soiled our audiences”, “... may whoever heard me penetrate my arse”. |
| 5.3 capital punishment: “Kk Alla jamar narakom imdendlin 'il barra 1-bieb” ( <i>ibid.</i> ), “... jekk jiena narah imdendel / Ma mmurx inhollu” (p.15)  | 5.3 “May God order that I see you hanged outside the door”, “... if I see him hanged / I won't go and cut him loose.”   |

### 6. *Breaking Wind Noisily*

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| 6.1 “Thallux xi wahda tiskappalkom.” (p.1) | 6.1 “Be careful not to fart.” |
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### 7. *Arse Wiping*

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| 7.1 “... ma tiswiex għall-imsiħ ...” (p.13) | 7.1 “... not worth wiping your arse with...” |
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### 8. *Snot*

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| 8.1 “W el-maħta kerha tibqa' bir-riħa.” (p.2) | 8.1 “And the ugly snot leaves a bad smell.” |
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### 9. *Disease*

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| 9.1 “Jekk tobogħduna tagħtikom skaranzija.” (p.2) | 9.1 “If you hate us may you suffer inflammation of the throat.” |
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### 10. *Medicaments*

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| 10.1 “Il-hwejjeg tas-servizzjali” (p.4) | 10.1 “suppositories” |
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### 11. *Chamberpot*

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| 11.1 “kantru” (p.7) | 11.1 “chamber pot” |
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One may also identify woman's denigration, ill-treatment by men, in contrast to very few negative comments on latter's behaviour (n. 6), and an implied pervasive subordination of women:

### Anti-Femminist Comments

#### 1. Physical Appearance

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| 1.1 hunchbacked: "... 1-gharusa hija tewmija /U minn wara ftira hotbija..." (p.12)           | 1.1 "... the bride is a twin and has rounded prominent buttocks ..." |
| 1.2 squint-eyed: "... Minn wahda ghamja werca / U mill-ohra ma taraxejn..." ( <i>ibid.</i> ) | 1.2 "... She squints in one eye/and is blind in the other ..."       |
| 1.3 large ears: "... Widnejha naqra kbar/Jixbhu lil tal-hmar..." ( <i>ibid.</i> )            | 1.3 "... Her ears are somewhat large/like a donkey's ..."            |
| 1.4 large mouth: "... U halqha nitfa kbir..." ( <i>ibid.</i> )                               | 1.4 "... Her mouth is a little large ..."                            |
| 1.5 large chin: "... Geddumha bhal tal-hanzir..." ( <i>ibid.</i> )                           | 1.5 "... Her chin is like a pig's ..."                               |
| 1.6 large nose: "Imnehirha daqs 1-Imdina..." ( <i>ibid.</i> ), (see also, 1 above)           | 1.6 "A nose as large as Mdina ..."                                   |

#### 2. Sexual Avidity

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| 2.1 "... thobb tikolhom wisq il-kavati/Ghaliex minn taghha ftira taghti" (p.12)   | 2.1 "... she likes eating pastry sweets covered with honey [penises]/Because she offers [her] rounded buttocks"   |
| 2.2 "...taghmel it-trabi taghha bir rizq/Ghaliex thobb tibra z-zalzett frisk," ( <i>ibid.</i> ), "... U tinkaram wisq ghall-hjar / Ghaliex tmut ghal nebula tal-majjal..." ( <i>ibid.</i> ) | 2.2 "... to give him many children because she guzzles on fresh sausages [enjoys sexual intercourse too much]", "...And she is very fond of cucumbers / because she would die for a pig's penis..." |

#### 3. Pregnant Women Pulling at the Plough (sexual intercourse implied)

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| 3.1 "... taghmillu patt / Illi f'dak iz-zmien illi tkun hebla. / Il-gharus ma jistax jahrat biha..." (p.9) | 3.1 "... she'll make him a condition / that during her pregnancy / he cannot use her at the ploughshare ..." |
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#### 4. Disrespect to Pregnant Women

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| 4.1 "... f'dak iz-zmien illi tkun hebla/Ma jistax isuqha biex il-gharus jista' jitia' fuqha." (p.9) | 4.1 "... During pregnancy / He cannot drive her or ride on her back" |
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#### Negative Comments on Men

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| 1. debauchery: "nebula tal-majjal" (p.9)                                  | 1. "a pig's penis"   |
| 2. excessive sexual pleasures in marriage with family running into dismal | 2. "... she gives him this mattress / for sexual intercourse and to enjoy sexual |



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|---|---|
| <p>poverty: "... dana 1-mitraħ tagħtihulu / Biex fuqu jifraħ u jittieraħ. / U biex iġibilha f'dan il-ghera [?]" (p. 8)</p> <p>3. immature adults: "... Għadu ma nfatamx mill-bizzula" (p.14)</p> <p>4. dirty arse: "... F'sormu għandu l-għanqbut" (p.1)</p> <p>5. swearing habit: "Ma jeħilx f'xi ħajt [?] 1-iswed / U jidgħi jista'[?]..." (p.4)</p> <p>6. indebtedness (pp.5,11)</p> <p>7. publicly punished by lashing (p.14)</p> | <p>orgasm. / And bring her in this utter destitution [?]"</p> <p>3. "... He is still given to suckle ..."</p> <p>4. "... He has cobwebs in his arse [a venereal disease / haemor- rhoids] ..."</p> <p>5. "May he penetrate a black wall [?] / And he can [?] swear ..."</p> |
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Umberto Eco's remarks are more than appropriate here: the comic effect is realized when a rule is violated by "an ignoble, inferior, and repulsive ... character ... [We feel] superior to his misbehaviour and to his sorrow for having broken the rule [but we] in some way welcome the violation; we are, so to speak, revenged by the comic character who has challenged the repressive power of the rule."<sup>28</sup>

## II-Qarinza

This mock-death-and-life drama is more than just a perfunctory piece of ritual that precedes the collection of a reward (e.g., food, drink, and money) for the performance. It is partly a rite of seasonal passage, part of year cycle festivals, emphasizing death and the darker side of life and resurrection reflecting the transition from the old to the New Year. A graphically dramatized death takes place in this improvised play where mime is a prominent characteristic.

An old burlesque game still exists in Malta, a remnant of its ancient inhabitants and the ancient [?] scenes, for the last day of the year, eve of the New Year, or the Feast of Goddess Strena, know as *collurella* in Calabria. It was an ancient custom of those Gentiles who celebrated this day by dusting the main doorstep of each house and dwelling with quick lime. This use of lime would continue from year to year by private individuals, nearly always a stranger, and takes place on the last night of the year by those who make up this act in the following way. A group of idle but good-humoured fellows, some with rustic musical instruments, others are responsible for leading a man who feigns dead and lies prostrate on the ground, which "corpse" after much playing and singing, the leader of the company lifts up the arm of the supposed corpse and makes as if to give it to Titius; he takes the leg and gives it to Sempronius, and other parts of the body to others. This scene takes place inside the home of friends for their amusement, and from whom they always get something good to eat and drink, this last night while they visit households and walk around the villages, but not in towns of Malta.<sup>29</sup>

In the last decade of the 18th century Maltese lexicographer and grammarian Mikiel Anton Vassalli gives further details on the dramatic, improvisatory and abusive aspects

of the ritual, remarking that it was widespread in Malta but at the time of his writing it had already been dead by twenty years:

This kind of serenade or night time concert is common in many villages of Malta on New Year's Eve, but nowadays it is rarely seen. This consisted of a large troupe of commoners who late at night set off together singing in front of the house of well-off persons to wish them a Happy New Year and in their song they used to mention the good points of the family and their relatives; those who gave considerable gifts the troupe would praise to high heavens. However, those who gave them nothing would be shamed and abusively spoken of. For the former they would leave white lime on their doorstep as a sign of good wishes for the New Year; whereas, for the latter they would leave black dust or charcoal denoting bad luck and avarice. Families who had not been generous would check their front doors early in the morning to remove the charcoal, if there was any, so as not to attract attention. May be that these have stopped twenty years ago because of the disturbance these troupes used to cause.<sup>30</sup>

In his encyclopedic book *Malta Cananea* (1904) Annibale Preca records that the group of singers and players carried “two enormous puppets, dressed up as a male and a female, but presenting a grotesque aspect.”<sup>31</sup> For me this folk drama associated with the end of the year celebrations is intriguing. It is difficult to imagine the meaning of time in the series of household-to-household visits. One of the *Qarinza* troupe, personifying the old year, pretended to be dead during the performance. His companions would turn to the prosperous household and ask for money, implying that through unconditional generosity, a new substitute would be found, personifying the New Year.

As the years rolled by, I would say by the first quarter of the twentieth century, the leader of the group played the comic part of a quack doctor, reflecting the presence of ambivalent feelings towards doctors in Maltese culture.<sup>32</sup> Here is an out-and-out quack as evident from the nonsensical list of cures and absurd medical procedures. The drama is a visual joke. There is also mention of grotesque images representing a male and a female, substituting real persons taking part in olden times. The various small communities involved come to terms with their fear of the impending future by laughing at the play. It is a joint venture between performers and audience.

By the second quarter of the twentieth century, or so, this folk drama was relegated to folk ritual. Cassar-Pullicino, writing in 1976, recalls that

[i]n Gozo, up to some years ago, groups of street musicians went from house to house on the morning of the New Year and played popular pieces until they received some money as a gift. In 1941 I saw lime being sprinkled on the floor of the Valletta Market stalls on New Year's Eve and up to 1939 it was customary at Luqa for the village sexton to throw some lime on the doorstep of the villagers' houses before daybreak. Professor J. Aquilina quotes the late Mr A. Cremona as telling him that he remembered how, when he was still a boy, a man called *Is-Sultan* used to carry a sack of lime which he smeared on the thresholds of the houses in Rabat, Gozo, while he asked for some goodwill offer on the occasion of the New Year. The *Sultan* used to start his round early in the morning. Aquilina comments as follows on the whitewashing: 'The white

colour of the lime is pleasant to the eyes; it suggests happiness and joy to come.<sup>33</sup>

The *Qarinza* people intrude upon the privacy of others with their knock on the door and entrance. The throwing of the lime is an allegoric motif of prosperity. Their visit is the harbinger of good luck and the *quête* is the celebration of the community that has shared in the birth of the New Year. Food and drink are more than a simple matter of payment for the services rendered. They are also a ray of hope for challenging the mysterious future.

In recent times *Qarinza* has verged on the personal and idiosyncratic. My informants<sup>34</sup> have confirmed with me that this folk ritual was also popular in Marsa,<sup>35</sup> and Floriana. Other informants from Żejtun, Hamrun, and Rabat- and Xewkija-Gozo recall the event.<sup>36</sup>

*Maltese*

*English*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1. L-għatba mbajda<br/>Bajjadhieiek is-Sultan;<br/>Tih xi haġa karità.<br/>Halli jitma' 'l dawk it-tfal.<br/>Flok tiġieġa tih dundjan.<sup>37</sup></p> <p>1.1 Ġejna tal-Qarinza wara biebek,<br/>Aġhtina minn dak li għandek;<br/>Is-Sena t-Tajba u l-għatba mbajda!<br/>Bajjadhieiek is-Sultan,<br/>Issa hu jrid xi haġa<br/>Imur itiha 'l dawk it-tfal.<sup>38</sup></p> <p>2. Qarinż! Qarinż! Qarinż!<br/>Gejt nitlobok wara biebek!<br/>Ara titfixkel fl-immnara.<br/>Tagħmeldisa' habbiet ħsara ...<sup>39</sup></p> <p>3. ... Jien ... niftakru lil dak li jiġi jbajjad<br/>l- għetiebi. ... Il-Furjana ... Iz-zija<br/>kienet bil-hanut tal-ħwejjeġ u kien<br/>għodni narah ... kellu barmil f' idu,<br/>hekk, minn dawk li jbajdu fih, pero<br/>kien ikun xott, il- ... il-ġir, jixħtilha<br/>hekk, ftit fit-targa u kien jgħidilha: "L-<br/>għatba mbajda u s-sena t-tajba!" ... Hi<br/>kienet ... ittihi ... xi tliet soldi tal- ... tal-<br/>fidda jew xi sikspenz .... Ma nafx ... xi<br/>haġa żgħira tal-fidda .... Fid-'39 jew it-<br/>'38 żgur, mhux iżjed qabel.... Qabel il-<br/>gwerri, kont tifla .... Min hu. le, .... ma<br/>niftakarx. Naf li kien raġel twil, irqiq,<br/>hekk għadni narah il-komma daqsxejn</p> | <p>1. The threshold is whitewashed,<br/>The <i>Sultan</i> whitewashed it for you;<br/>Give him something for charity,<br/>So that he may feed his children<br/>Instead of a hen give him a turkey.</p> <p>1.1 We of the <i>Qarinza</i> have come at your<br/>door,<br/>Give us of what you have;<br/>A Happy New Year and the threshold<br/>is whitewashed!<br/>The <i>Sultan</i> has whitewashed it for you,<br/>Now he wants money<br/>To give it to those children.</p> <p>2. Here are the <i>Qarinza</i> people;<br/>I have come to ask for alms at your<br/>door!<br/>Watch out lest you trip in the lamp,<br/>And thus cause three farthings worth<br/>of damage.</p> <p>3. ... I ... remember the man who used to<br/>whitewash doorsteps ... in Floriana ....<br/>My aunt had a draper's shop and I can<br/>still see him ... he had a bucket in his<br/>hand, like this, the sort they use for<br/>whitewashing but it used to be dry, the<br/>lime, he would throw it thus, a little on<br/>the doorstep and tell her: "The<br/>doorstep is whitewashed and a<br/>prosperous New Year." She used to ...<br/>give him ... a silver threepence or<br/>sixpence .... I don't know ... a little<br/>silver coin .... Not earlier than 1939 or<br/>1938 .... Before the war, I was still a<br/>young girl Who he was, no, I can't</p> |
|---|--|

imxammra, hekk sa nofs ... idu.... U  
anki 'l ommi, allavolja kienet ... ma ...  
mara armla u mezzanin żgħir, kien jġi  
u, miskina, dik sold kienet ittih, hu ...  
għax ma kinitx tista' tagħtih iżjed ...<sup>40</sup>

4. ... Dik niftakarha fil-*fifties* ... Il-Marsa.  
Kellna wahda jisimha Gerit, kienet  
xiha u ... kienu jgħidulha Tal-Loqqu,  
niftakar. Kienet wahda xiha għakka.  
Kienet tiġi bil-barmil filgħodu, tibda  
minn filgħodu kmieni ... bil-barmil tal-  
għir u tagħmel mq 1-għatiebi .... Kien  
hemm min idahhalha tiehu xi grokk,  
perezempju ... Kienet toqgħod  
*Azzopardi Street*, niftakar... Mill-  
Marsa kienet .... Ma nafx x'kienet  
tghid .... Ma niftakarx .... imma  
niftakarha bil-barmil f' idha u ... u .... u  
tagħmel hekk fuq 1- għatiebi .... Lilha  
kellna ... kienet xiha mdaħħla fiż-  
żmien .... Kienet tgeżwer ... tgeżwer xi  
haġa biex kienu jtuha ...<sup>41</sup>

5. ... Jiena niftakar lil missieri, missieri  
Għawdxu mir-Rabat ... u kien jgħid it-  
tqabbila...metajkun qed ibajjadlek it-  
targa ... kien jgħidha differenti ...  
naturalment kien jgħidha bl-  
Għawdxu.u.-Il- pa kien jgħid ... emm  
...:

L-għatba mbajda,  
Bajjadhieiek is-Sultan,  
Tih xi haġa karità,  
Halli jmantni 'l dawk it-tfal.

... [Missieri] ilu mejjet tlettax-il sena u  
kieku għadu haġ għandu erbgħa u  
disgħin ... u ommi ... jġigifieri ... għadha  
... għandha disgħa u tmenin ... u ...  
hekk tghidha .... Ommha Għawdxija ...  
Tiftakarha bhala tifla, eħe .... u r-  
Rabat-Għawdex .... Emm ... missieri  
kien joqgħod in-naħa ... ta' ... 1-  
Oratorju, ta' Santu Wistin ... Ommi

remember. I know he was a tall man,  
thin, I can still see him in my mind's  
eye, with his sleeve slightly rolled up  
like this, half way up his arm. And  
even my mother, although she was a  
widow and lived in a small  
maisonnette, he used to come but, poor  
woman, she could only give him a  
penny because she couldn't afford to  
give him more ...

4. I remember this in the fifties ... in  
Marsa. We knew an old woman called  
Gerit ... I remember she was  
nicknamed *Tal-Loqqu*. She was very  
old. She used to come in the morning  
carrying a bucket. She used to star  
early in the morning with the bucket of  
lime and put the lime on the doorsteps  
.... Some used to let her in for a drink  
for example .... She used to live in  
*Azzopardi Street*, I remember ... she  
was from Marsa ... I don't know what  
she used to say .... I don't remember ...  
but I remember her holding the bucket  
in her hand and ... doing thus on the  
doorsteps .... We had her ... she was  
very old .... She used to mumble ...  
mumble something to ask for charity...

5. I remember my father, my father is a  
Gozitan from Rabat... and he used to  
say this rhyme ... whilst he [the  
*Qarinħa* man] used to whitewash your  
doorstep ... he used to recite it  
differently ... naturally he used to say it  
in the Gozitan dialect, and ... father  
used to say ... em ...:

The threshold is whitewashed,  
The *Sultan* whitewashed it for you;  
Give him something for charity,  
So that he supports those children.

...My father has been dead for  
thirteen years and if he were still alive  
he would be 94 years old - and my  
mother - that is - is still alive - and she  
is 89 ... and ... she remembers it as a  
child, yes ... and in Kabat-Gozo ...  
emm ... my father used to live in the  
area ... of ... the Oratory of St  
Augustine .... My mother is Maltese

minn hawn, minn Birkirkara ....  
Ommha Għawdxija u ... jġifieri l-  
istess bħal missieri tghidha ... mir-  
Rabat ukoll .. .<sup>42</sup>

from Birkirkara .... Her mother is  
Gozitan and - that means that she used  
to recite it as my father did ... from  
Rabat as well ...

To conclude, *Qarçilla* and *Qarinza* are folk drama because, as Tillis remarks, “folk drama is theatrical performance, within a frame of make-believe action shared by performers and audience, that is not fixed by authority but is based in living tradition and displays greater or lesser variation in its repetition of this tradition; its performance, enacted over time and space with practices of design, movement, speech, and/or music, engenders and/or enhances a sense of communal identity among those who participate in its delivery and reception.”<sup>43</sup> Ironically it was only last February that a satirical float participated in the Valletta Carnival after having been dormant for forty years. One must consider that symbolic inversion, deviations from and transgression of normal patterns of behaviour, and double meaning, overturning of sexual taboos in a Carnavalesque celebration are all prohibited by Maltese law and this more than two hundred and ninety years after Demarco's text.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Cremona, V. "Carnival in Gozo: Waning Traditions and Thriving Celebrations," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1995, pp. 76, 78-79. See also, Anna Borg-Cardona, *A Musical Legacy. Malta-Related Music Found in Foreign Libraries*, Malta, 2002, pp. 27-28.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91 n. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Tillis, Steve, *Rethinking Folk Drama*, Westport, 1999, p. 195.

<sup>5</sup> For this lack of interest in folk drama as a popular research area in folkloristics in general, see, Regina Bendix, "Acting and Play: Folkloristic Inroads to the World of Theatre," *Backstage Domains. Playing William Tell* in Two Swiss Communities, Bern, 1989, p. 147-149.

<sup>6</sup> Guido Lanfranco, *Drawwiet u Tradizzjonijiet Maltin* [Maltese Customs and Traditions], Malta, 2001, p. 207, confirms the existence of this folk drama, but does not specify locality: "Kienu jimitaw xi tabib qed idewwi, xi avukat jiddefendi Jew jakkuża lil xi hadd, xi mara Jew raġel jiġġieldu bil-kliem, jimitaw xi karattru maghruf til-post, Jew jilbsu ta' xi haga li hadd ma jaf x'kienet. Dan kollu minbarra li kienu joqogħdu jissuttaw b'kulma jsibu taħt idejhom. Hafna kienu jhorgu jdoqqu ż-zaqq u t-tanbur biex ikomplu jallegraw il-festa." [Trans. "They used to play the role of a doctor curing a patient or a lawyer defending a client or accusing an opponent, a man and woman parrying words, imitating some prominent local person, or putting on some unrecognisable garb. Besides, they used to pelt onlookers with whatever came to hand. Many folk musicians would play the [Maltese] bagpipe and drum to further enliven the atmosphere."]

<sup>7</sup> Cremona, *op. cit.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>8</sup> In his definition of the concept of framing, Tillis, *op. cit.*, p. 85 remarks: "... the dramatic frame itself. in its broadest sense, is predicated simply on the establishment of a sense of otherness for the performance, of an elsewhere and an elsewhere." Theoretically he also separates "the framed drama (the action) from the framing of the drama (the communicated and accepted agreement to make-believe)." *Op. cit.*, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> See n. 11, below.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. impersonation in folktales by "a very small number of active bearers of tradition." See, Carl W. von Sydow, "Folktale Studies and Philology: Some Points of View," *The Study of Folklore*, Alan Dundes, ed., Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1965, p. 231.

<sup>11</sup> Agius de Soldanis, G. F., *Damma tal Kliem Kartaginis mscerred fel fom tal Maltin u Ghaucin maghmula mel Kanoniku Gianfrangesku Agius Sultana Ghauci*, R.M.L., ms. 143a, p. 287 r-v: "Giuoco di gente contadina che usasi in Camevale, ed è figura di un altro scenico degli antichi Gentili ... Si forma una sposa di pasta dell'altezza di tre o quattro palmi in circa, ben omata e vestita. Vi si pone dentro un cestello, il quale vien posto sul capo d'un mascherato con in mano una grande collura o cerchio di pasta pura; costui viene accompagnato da un popolaccio, tra questi chi suona, chi balla, chi canta, quindi dopo un gran giro fatto per le pubbliche vie, si ferma ne' cantoni delle stesse strade e chi la fa da notaio leggendo un giocoso ed inventive atto matrimoniale a favore della sposa ivi collocata di pasta a vista di tutti formato in rima maltese, burlesco e ridicolo, e chi prende altro giocoso uffizio, dopo vari giri, molte ciarle, più cicalate camivalesche, si mangia la stessa sposa di pasta, indi ubbriacati col vino, si da fine al giuoco della Karcilla."

<sup>12</sup> Cassar-Pullicino, J., "Two Ancient Maltese Customs: 'Il-Qarcilla' and 'Il-Kuccija'," *Teacher's Magazine*, vol. 3, no. 8, August, 1945, p. 303.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*, "Il-Qarcilla. Bejn Drawwa u Drama f Malta" [The *Qarcilla*. From Custom to Drama in Malta], *Il-Malti*, Malta, 1954, p. 100.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*, "Two Ancient Maltese Customs," p. 303.

<sup>15</sup> Cassar-Pullicino, J., *Studies in Maltese Folklore*, Malta, 2nd edition, 1992, p. 50.

<sup>16</sup> See, Cassar-Pullicino, *Il-Folklore Malti* [Maltese Folklore], 2nd enlarged ed., Malta, 1975, p. 138: “Irrid ngħid għall-festi li kienu jagħmlu l-Kavallieri sa mill-bidu nett li ġew Malta. Il-Kavallieri kienu nies li jistgħu, u kellhom mnejn ihallsu l-ispejjeż. Kienu fuq kolloxx nies li jhobbu juru ruhhom u jafu jorganizzaw spettakoli sbieh f’kull okkażjoni li kienet tinqala’ - daqqa għax intgħazel Gran Mastru ġdid, oħra għax is-Sultan tela’ l-Imdina biex jiehju ċ-ċwieviet tal-Belt u hemm jahlef li jżomm id- drittijiet tal-Maltin, issa għax ir-Re ta’ Franza twelditlu tarbija, daqqa għax ġiet il-festa ta’ San Gwann, patrūn tagħhom, u oħra għax habat ċentinarju ta’ l-Assedju l-Kbir. U kull darba kienet okkażjoni ta’ festa, armar, loġhob tan-nar u mixegħla.” [Trans.: “I’m referring to the feasts the Knights used to celebrate from the very beginning of their arrival in Malta. The knights could afford to pay the expenses incurred by feasts which they celebrated since they first set foot in the Maltese islands. They were ostentatious and able organizers of such celebrations, not missing any opportunity for such feasts - the election of the Grand Master, taking possession of the keys of Mdina, the birth of a child to the French king, the feast of St John, their patron, and the centenary of the Great Siege. Every time it was an occasion for celebrations, decorations, fireworks, and illuminations.”]

<sup>17</sup> See, Pietru Pawl Castagna, *Il-Mużika fil-Knejjes Tagħna* [Music in Our Churches], Malta, ??, vol. 3, p. 238: “Il-Banda ... fil-proċessjoni bdiet fis-sena ... 1777, bl-impenn tal-Gran Mastru De Rohan, allurmeta pproġetta u ordna illi l-festi tal-knejjes għandhom isiru bl-akbar pompa tant ġewwa kemm barra, sabiex il-poplu jallegra ruħu u jkollu flex jedha u hekk ma joqghodx jippilla u jehodha mal-Gvem u ma’ l-impjegati tiegħu.” [Trans. “Bands ... during processions began in 1777, Grand Master De Rohan taking it upon himself to order church feasts to be celebrated with great pomp internally and externally, to keep the people happy and alienated from fault picking with the Government and its employees.”]

<sup>18</sup> See, Cassar-Pullicino, *Il-Folklore Malti*, *ibid.*: “Fl-1752 il-Konti Ciantar isemmi li għall-festa ta’ San Lawrenz [il-Birgu] kienu ngabru hafna nies fejn l-imħażen ta’ Pinto, li kienu għadhom kif tlestew, biex jaraw il-mixegħia tal-faccata tagħhom; u kien hemm daqq helu li baqa’ sejjer il-lejl kollu, waqt li l-għonja u nies oħra resqu fuq id-dgħajjes mal-moll biex jaraw u jgawdu dik id-dehra sabiha.” [Trans. “In 1752 Count Ciantar mentions that on the occasion of the feast of St Laurence [in Birgu] crowds of people gathered at Pinto Wharf which had just been completed to watch the illumination on the opposite side and there was sweet music throughout the night while the rich people and others were rowed to the opposite bank to watch and enjoy the beautiful scene.”]

<sup>19</sup> Abela-Ciantar's *Malta Illustrata*, Malta, 1772, vol. 1, pp. 771-73: “Giunto il giorno, e l'ora dello spozalizio, il piùrispettabile tra congiunti degli sposi, o tra gl'invitati alle nozze, poneva un velo sottile, e trasparente sul volto della sposa, riccamente vestita, e adorna di gioje, ed ori. Allora usavasi dale persone di condizione di frappare le vesti donnesche, quantunque nuove, e preziosi, ed ad ogni taglio collocarvi una piccolo conchiglia d'oro. Si usavano pure certe vesti, o sottanini di velluto lavorato a minuti fiori, e rabeschi, simili quasi alle zimarre degli Ecclesiastici; e noi ne abbiamo veduto qualcheduna. Tra i drappi i più usati erano le tele d'oro, o d'argento, da loro chiamate *lame*. In tal guisa adomata, e vellata la sposa sen *għsich* usciva di casa accompagnata da congiunti suoi, e delle persone invitate a quella funzione, dette in lingua Maltese *Haddàra*, ed insieme collo sposo si conducea alia Chiesa sotto un baldacchino, portato da quattro de' più ragguardevoli fra gl'invitati, detti *Compari del baldacchino*. Era questo baldacchino fatto apposta per uso degli sposi novella .... Avanti a loro givano (*sic*) alcuni suonatori di violino, e di chitarra, che ad ogni passo si fermavano, e cantavano una canzoncina in lingua Maltese colle rime in lode or della sposa, ed or dello sposo. Vi precedevano pure tre altri uomini: uno de' quali portava un bacino pieno di pagnotte delicate, e ben fatte, con buon ordine disposte, e adorne di varie banderuole, o con una focaccia, da loro detta *carcilla* con due figurine di sopra, rappresentanti lo sposo, e la sposa: il qual bacino era di creta con vernice bianca con arabeschi di color giallo. Colui, che lo portava, teneva appesa con una fascia dalla spalla sinistra al fianco destro una gran ciambella, qui detta *collora*, ed in Sicilia *buccalato*, che toccava a lui. L'altro portava un canestro col fazzoletto nozziale disposto in forma di torre, o di piramide, o cupola colla figura in cima di S. Giuseppe, o del S. Bambino, o della Vergine Madre.”

<sup>20</sup> According to Joseph Cassar-Pullicino, “Two Ancient Customs,” p. 303, Luigi Bonelli, who took to some fieldwork research in Malta in 1894, remarks in his “Il dialetto maltese,” *Archivio Glogotologico Italiano*, Torino, 1897, Dispensa IV, Vi, VII, VIII, “. . il costume ... è cessato da una cinquantina d'anni, per divieto dell'autorità ecclesiastica.”

<sup>21</sup> Cassar-Pullicino, *Studies in Maltese Folklore*, p. 50.

<sup>22</sup> Cassar-Pullicino repeatedly and cursorily observes unreservedly: “... il-versi huma mimlija ċajt goff, u hafna minnhom m'humix xierqa li jidhru stampati ...” [Trans.: ‘... the lines are full of abusive words and most of them are not worthy of publication ...’]. See, Cassar-Pullicino, “Il-Qarċilla. Bejn Drawwa u



Drama f Malta,” p. 102 and “Żwieg la Maltija fl-1760. Versi ta' Dun Felic Demarco għall-Ġranet tal-Kamival” [Wedding à la maltaise in 1760. Lines by Fr Felic Demarco for the Carnival Season], *Kitba u Kittieba tal-Malti* [Writing and Writers of Maltese], vol. 1, Malta, 1962, p. 93. Cf. *id.*, “Il-Bidu tal-Palk Malti. Mid-Dramm Primitiv sa Luigi Rosato [The Beginning of Maltese Drama. From Primitive Drama to Luigi Rosato], *Analizi* [Analysis], Gorg Mifsud-Chircop, ed., vol. 2/1, October, 1988, pp. 3-5, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Cassar-Pullicino, “Il-Qarcilla. Bejn Drawwa u Drama fMalta,” p. 101, *Studies in Maltese Folklore*.p.50.

<sup>24</sup> Green, Thomas A., “Toward a Definition of Folk Drama,” *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 91, 1978, p.846.

<sup>25</sup> RML ms. 143D, f. 237, r.: “[il] notaio camevalesco legge l'atto matrimoniale a favore della sposa ivi collocata a vista di tutti, formato in rima maltese, burlesco e ridicolo, *che in più maniere gira per la mano di questi notai di Carnevale ...*” (my emphasis) For other details on this mss., see, Cassar-Pullicino, “Il-Qarcilla. Bejn Drawwa u Drama f Malta,” p.101 n.3.

<sup>26</sup> According to Peter Tokofsky, “Interpreting Carnival: The Case of the *Streckschere*,” *Folklore Interpreted. Essays in Honour of Alan Dundes*, Regina Bendix and Rosemary Lévy Zumwalt, eds. New York and London, 1995, p. 459, “Bakhtin instructs us that the lower bodily stratum plays a central role in carnivalesque imagery and should thus be subject to manipulation.”

<sup>27</sup> “Stromatum Melitensium,” Liber XVII, Collect. Ignatio Xaverio Mifsud, MDCCLXI, RML ms.3, pp.412-26.

<sup>28</sup> Eco, Umberto, as quoted by T. G. A. Nelson, *Comedy. The Theory of Comedy in Literature, Drama and Cinema*, Oxford, 1990, p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> M Agius de Soldanis, *ibid.*, ms. 143A, fol. 288r.: “Antico giuoco burlesco continuato in Malta, reliquia degli antichi abitatori e delle antiche esrofane [*sic*] scene, fissato all'ultimo di dell'anno, vigilia del nuovo anno future, ossia della festivitàdello Dea Strena, in Calavria cosnosciuto colla voce *collurella*. Fu costume antichissimo presso quei Gentili che festeggiavano questo gionio, di spargervi nell'esteriore scala di ogni casa ed abitazione della calcina vergine per significare colla sua candidezza prosperi e felici avvenimenti nell'anno entrante. Quest'uso delle caice continua da anno in anno da ogni persona anche privata, quasi sempre sconosciuta, e si butta all'ultima notte dell'anno, per lo piu da coloro che formano questo giuoco e del modo seguente. Un [*sic*] stuolo di uomini oziosi, ma di umor allegro, alcuni con istrumenti contadini da suono, altri anno [*sic*] la cura di menare uno, il quale nell'atto si finge morto, prostrato in terra, quel cadavere, dopo aver molto sonato, giuocato, e parlato, il ceremoniere della brigata alza la mano del finto morto e la destina a Titio, vi prende un pie' lo regala a Sempronio, alter membre ad altri. Questa scena si fa in casa degli amici e per recare loro piacere, dai quali traggono sempre qualchecosa per mangiare e bere, dura la funzione per tutta la notte girando e camminando, cioè ne [*sic*] villaggi, e non nelle citta di Malta.”

<sup>30</sup> Vassalli, M. A. *Ktyb yl KLYm Malti. Lexicon Melitense-Latino-Italum*, Roma, 1796, pp. 406-407: “Questa specie di serenata o concerto notturno solita a farsi in moiti paesi di Malta nell'ultima notte dell'anno vecchio entrando il nuovo, al presente raramente si vede. Ella consisteva in una gran compagnia di persone plebe unite insieme, che a notte avanzata andavano cantando innanzi le porte delle case di perone civili e commode, alle quali auguravano buon capo d'anno, e narravano cantando le gesta e le azioni virtuose loro e del parentado; e chi gli dava ragguardevoli regali lo innalzavano alle stelle; ma all [*sic*] incontro svergognavano e raccontavano i fatti biasimevoli di quei che non regalavano. Ai primi poi si metteva sulla soglia della porta la caice Bianca ed il gesso in segno di buon anno, ove ai secondi si lasciava della polvere nera o carbone infranto per dinotare malanno ed avarizia. Le case per altro che non davano, facevano di buon mattino ricerca alia porta per levar il carbone, se mai ci fosse, e non farsi conoscere. Se da venti anni a questa parte non si fa più tal serenata a forse per dei disturbi che facevano nascere nei paesi tali comitive.”

<sup>31</sup> Preca, A., *Malta Cananea*, Malta, 1904, p. 355.

<sup>32</sup> See, Temi Zammit, “Mard, Duwa, Fejqan” [Diseases, Medicine and Recovery], *Stejjer u Kitba Oħra* [Stories and Other Writings], A. Cremona, ed., vol. 3, Malta, 1966, pp. 49-52. This short story, focusing on the sceptical feelings of the Maltese population towards doctors, was originally published in 1929.

<sup>33</sup> Cassar-Pullicino, *Studies in Maltese Folklore*, p. 46.

<sup>34</sup> Mifsud-Chircop, George, tape 89/12/1996.

<sup>35</sup> This was also confirmed by one of Guido Lanfranco's informants in 1994 (*op. cit.*, p. 168). *Drawwiet u Tradizzjonijiet Maltin* [Maltese Customs and Traditions], Malta. 2001, p. 168.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.168, 170

<sup>37</sup> 3(1 Magri, M., 1907, *Hrejjeġ Missirijietna* [Folktales of our Forefathers], Ġ. Mifsud-Chircop, ed., Critical edition, Malta, 1992, p. 584.

<sup>38</sup> Cassar-Pullicino, 1942, *Studies in Maltese Folklore*, p. 47 n. 24.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> Interviews during live radio programme “11-Malti bit-Telefon” [Maltese by Telephone], 31 December, 1996. Doris Dimech, 66 years old, Floriana, Malta.

<sup>41</sup> Maryanne Camilleri, 56 years old, Qormi, Malta.

<sup>42</sup> Marija Buttigieg, Birkirkara, Malta.

<sup>43</sup> Tillis, *op. cit.*, p. 140. (italics suppressed)