

EXPLORING NEW HYPOTHESES OF BEAUTY

Chromy's inexhausted references to the literary and musical dimensions (theatre and dance, in particular, both practiced in the past) as term of comparison for her visual images are a discourse on their own, a recit rather than another image (or a whole series of images) taken from iconographic tradition. The fact is that her anachronism is primarily based on the weave of various texts which transforms elements of literary and figurative culture in boundaries where to look for her bearings to overheat emotional temperature. Chromy retains Dali's feverishly fabulous narrative capacity, personally reworking it, together with a stroke (recalling the Spanish artist's capriciousness in his works of the 40s) that carves the shapes, emptying them, steeping them in a sort of drapery: in fact, she seems to use her tormented draping to visually represent the dialectic processes or the antinomies that structure her characters' emotional and psychological inwardness. However, the relationship between the literary source and the work of art is not to be found in mere illustration, nor in undetermined suggestiveness, which is even narrower, but rather in re-creation: Chromy gives life to her characters (Mozart's Don Giovanni, Dante's Ulysses) in a reflected reality, neither mythical nor immanent in the present, that is instead entwined in the same dimension where arise the elusive, ghostly or, even more radically, "liminal" figures of the "model reader" and the "model author". In this rather uncertain limbo, marked by mutual expectations and respective satisfactions, Chromy sets out her personal considerations on the precariousness of being, as she explains in her book Anna Chromy Sculptures (1995, unnumbered pages). Is Chromy's work a model then? An answer to this question could well be found in her ability to transpose her thoughts on the concept of precariousness from the ontological to the aesthetic level. The extraordinary series dedicated to the chastised Seducer, Mozart's Don Giovanni of 1787 (cf. the quoted book dedicated to him), containing Donna Elvira (captured at the moment of the revelation of her beloved traitor's tragic fate who, during a banquet, is plunged into an abyss of flames that blind and illuminate Elvira at the same time in more than one way), hypostatizes the neo-Baroque drama: the instability of the Baroque form (which, according to Wolfing, is marked by breadth, picturesqueness, depth, unity, uncertainty, or relativity of vision), deifies in a lush, Roman, mobile image, somewhat à la Bernini, the protagonist's ontological immaturity (as well as the other characters' imperfect awareness) and the unfinished state he will remain in forever due to the "Stony guest" (it's notorious, in fact, that the opera by Mozart and Daponte is the exact opposite of a Bildungsroman, or early novel in which the main character reaches a fully-formed consciousness). Chromy stresses the evanescent motility of the shapes of the statues thanks to patinas and Gianbologna postures or disguises à la Buontalenti (Leporello, Don Ottavio) whose body axes become a need of rotation. The entire series of statues thus lives in a state of shady forms made up of feeble deixis and reciprocal focusing to borrow still other terms from literary and narratological criticism. As sustained by Argan à propos of the Baroque, form is no longer rational and absolute but is translated in debatable and relative images. This sort of displaced Beauty, endlessly in embryo, full of procrastinations, yet almost unseizable, reveals itself in Donna Elvira's body in steely drapery (instrument of both revelation and obstacle to revelation) that literally explodes into light revealing Tragedy which, thus relativized, however remains deliberately within the sphere of beauty without attaining the Sublime.

Then there is Ulysses in an unusual version: the cunningly ingenious man, in daring equilibrium on the thrust axis, is blindfolded, blind like Eros, roaming by sea and brandishing a rudder that to us, who are not blind, soon appears as an unreliable "wheel of fortune". Does it refer to the Odyssey, the story of wandering Ulysses or, to be more precise, to Dante's words the loud call of the ancient flame (lo maggior corno della fiamma antica), to the journey without return, the mad flight (folle volo), in the open sea on a solitary sail and with . . . few companions (per l'alto mare aperto, sol con un legno e con (la) compagna picciola), to accomplish the experience, beyond the sea, in unpeopled lands? (Inferno, XXVI; 85-142). Ulysses' blindness is represented negatively by the bandage (as is always the case in Chromy's works, the drapery evokes the state of the character's awareness, playing the same narrative role as the focussing on his inwardness), the allusion to fortune/chance (take one's chance/wander about), the sense of contact-abandon in space that marks the figure, the clearly opposed limbs thrusting forward: Chromy corroborates these signs concerning the vanity of search with a form that seems to cause the subtle putrefaction of beauty. If the 1924 self-portrait of Ulysses by De Chirico outlines the dissatisfaction leading to suffering, to aimless roaming in the infinite void, Chromy's Odysseus seems to explore a new concept of Beauty pursuing virtue and knowledge (vertute e conoscenza), fully aware of his own undoing beneath the blows of fate that he nonetheless longs for stubbornly and deliberately. Chromy's Ulysses is a metalinguistic work in some ways similar to Michelangelo and Bernini's David which are primarily reflections on the hardships of sculpting (according to Irvin Lavin's interpretation, the former measures the space between himself and the enemy typical of sculptors who, as Michelangelo said, must have sextants in their eyes, i.e. the compass; Bernini's precariously balanced self-portrait attains an apparently impossible static achievement rather like the defeat of Goliath). Her Ulysses is a transparent metamorphosis of the uncertainty of experiments in sculpture which, forced by necessity to adhere to reality, does not cease to investigate new hypotheses of beauty (much more than painting) without deviating from classical tradition and yet capable to renew itself through critical self-reflection.

MARCO GALLO