A TALE OF FOURTEEN AND ONE CAST

EINE ERZAEHLUNG AUS VIERZEHN UND EINEM GUSS

That winter, half way up the mountain above St. Moritz, in the Engadin, you could see over a dozen giant figures on the terrace of the ice-rink beside the large building that was once the Chantarella Hotel. They stood there, day and night, in sun, fog and blizzards, and looked as if they had just been rolled into the circle like giant dice. They told silently, each in its own manner, through its own form, an unfolding tale. (One of the giants appeared to have toppled over, and each time you looked it seemed to roll noisily a bit farther. Another wasn't standing but leaning to tell its story, and a third 'spoke' from an almost upright position). The tale told by these bronze figures standing on concrete plinths and shielded from behind by concrete blocks, could not be translated into any language made of words. And as the spectator, a guest invited to hear these tales of giants that made him acutely aware of his human dimension, wandered among them, paused, breathed, absorbed on the snow-covered field, time became stronger than joy, and he felt a kind of liberation. For once he didn't have to be told a story little by little. With the help of these powerfully silent forms that left him in peace, he made up his own. An overwhelming story: instead of being made up of sentences and images, it was made of Matter plus Motion =Form, and it took place neither in your past nor mine (and that was what was so incredible about those statues perched on the mountainside), but in a distant and anonymous past, and it happened as well today as during those moments between now and then when one of those creatures, so to speak, engendered another in the group. The spectator notices that, almost like a disturbance in the rhythm of this silent and nameless tale oscillating high up in the alpine valley, these figures have titles like 'Lady Macbeth' or 'Cromwell' or subtitles like 'Si tacuisses...' ('Had you kept quiet...') and that the bronze palm tree that is like a prelude to the main tale, bore a message in type like that of a street sign: "I went to Tangiers and had dinner with Paul Bowles". Almost a disturbance, but not really, because don't such secondary anecdotes add lightness to the whole game? Nothing could compare with this tale told by age-old giants except maybe this: in mountain streams there are boulders that rise out of patches of water that are smooth and clear rather than roaring and foamy, -and they can, if you listen carefully, actually turn into sound and be heard above the basic roar and clatter of the background noise. Human voices can also similarly be heard above the rushing waters like those musical boulders, not just garglings, mumblings or guttural tongue-clacking sounds, but constantly renewed

murmurs rising into a threnody, a vibrato, a polyphonous chant. Thus, with time, as if the rocks and the water are doomed to stand forever side by side and are both involved in chanting a silent and forgotten story, stammering enthusiastically, forever comprehensible and incomprehensible recounting the untranslatable... : a legend from the bygone times of fairy stories when wishes could still work wonders. So those bronze giants of various shapes, in the high place above the oval terrace of the Chantarella, were telling similar stories, except that in theirs the element of air replaced the element of water. And just by seeing the interrelationships of these giant forms, one hallucinated that they were silently stammering out their story, enthusiastically but, at the same time, with calm deliberation. (This vision was maybe fostered by the fact that those forms, like the boulders in the water, didn't look like sculptures, and, in fact, what was so carefully sculptured looked natural, or like something nature had helped to carve. So, as the voices of the story-telling stones in the middle of the stream seemed to tell a story that contained no particular event, but was like a 'self-event' —an everlasting beginning, a perpetual entrance on stage, going on and on, moment after moment, yet never changing. Telling what? The visitor was inspired by the rhythm emanating from both the diversity and uniformity of those sculpted figures and, above all, from the spacing, the passageways and openings through which he (the visitor) could easily, on this oval above the valley, pleasantly walk or remain pleasantly still. In a way, the statues allowed him to amble among them in straight lines, in zigzags or spirals, making the resulting labyrinth a thing of beauty. Soon, those quiet potentates will leave the place where they are poised beside the Chantarella and each one, probably separately, will disappear in various directions and markets around the world. They will no longer tell together the story with its everlasting beginning that was so wonderful to try to guess, as they did during that winter 1990/1991, in their snowy enclave, far from money and history. But at this very instant, the air is changing the colors of the different casts of bronze that are playing together under the dark sky, ranging from brown to yellowish to blue. The forms are shrinking under the sun, the fog providing them with shoulders. Whatever they're saying together — especially in the empty spaces between the fifteen (or fourteen) figures, in every light, from Föhn or moon — they crackle and crack and resonate under the flakes, in the midday heat and from the breath of the visitors who have climbed up to them. A young man, after strolling among them

for quite a while, turned again and again toward the Piz Nair peak above him and the frozen lake further down and shouted as loud as he could in the emptiness, to the conductor (or inventor) of this tale, against the decaying houses on the mountain: “Julian Schnabel! Julian, where are you? Schnabel! Julian!” And how did all this sound with the highly personal motto of the man he was calling: “Follow the enthusiasm”? Up there in the Alps, the wind started to rise and suddenly, out of a lone shiny, brown pine tree that looked as if it had no snow left on it, it blew a white, powdery plume that floated, sparkling, through the blue air.

for Hubert, the occasionally wise - from Peter

Peter Handke
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