

Franco Costa

I had solemnly sworn to write never more about Franco Costa. The reason was I had seen and followed him in his excursion, in his movement, in his evolution since the day when he put the first touch on the spotless cloth of his dreams and signed his destiny of artist. And it was not only painting! Not only: painting, music, scene painting, moving-pictures. And loves. And trips. And happenings. And I always was involved by his charming proposals, by his extravagant executions, by the surprise of his talent. And when other critics' increasing attention were added to his success I thought my loving task was ended, very happy to evade the extensive spiral of his activities. Which happened just when he had the lucky meeting with Valentina as whirling and frenzied as him. To stay by a frenzied painter, that's really difficult, but adding his wife, a woman kneaded with pepper and honey, who had backbone so that Catherine of Russia was little sister of charity in comparison with her, that's not humanly possible.

And just Valentina laid me the most underhand of the snares. "You haven't yet known Eleonora. And you are the oldest of the family friends! Shame on you!" Eleonora is walking with her four paws on the carpet, she has Franco's sweet eyes and Valentina's witty pretty little face. On the walls there are few pictures, because people buy them as soon as he painted them. There is no smell of turpentine. I flatter Eleonora, I dream some wine. We don't talk about painting when all of a sudden the trap goes off. If you help me to take them downstairs I present you a dozen bottles". And she explains me, when I already am on the threshold, he doesn't paint at home any more, he occupied a garret and he keeps there the bottles too. And the last pictures too. They are all around, in the light frames, a festival parade, a Spring-dance, a song colours. I am in on it, taken by the spell. Caught. My soul fills with butterflies. I glide on greens, I dip in reds, I fly on blues, I roll up in yellows. "This is Rome after Eleonora". Franco says. "Now I am going to Stockholm. I will see how this damned child has changed her". Of course, he goes to Stockholm to paint the city that was his love. He will take reindeer cloaks. Stockholm is his home. People contend for him. Crystal hotels and cottages among fir-trees, on the shore of the lake. The trouble is when then he runs away.

"And are you going to Stockholm without dropping a line who explains to the Swedish people why this city took all delight of fields and sky and flowers that seemed disappeared from the world?". There is something more". Costa says. Now he very serious, his eyes are shining, he is speaking like a poet, like the poet he is. "As well as colours, I put something that could seem a message. I would take to Stockholm not only pictures but also ideas of hope. The existence of the world, the life of men is becoming more and more cruel, cold, mechanical. There is only a place where soul is free, that's art. Art-life. An equation that balances accounts among soul and mechanical barbarises. The life that loses her daily armor and clothes with the tenderest and merriest and lightest veils, still breathes the essence of creation, still smiles. Yes, you could write something similar". "Oh no, you know I swore..".

"And I don't give you the bottles". He won. Vice is stronger than honour. He went packing. I remain here, having Eleonora on my knees and telling her how her father became painter.

UGO MORETTI