

THE BALLET

The restitution of *Le Ballet* (The Ballet), a play composed of four acts, is another recent discovery after that of *Monsieur Dudron*.

Bearing the date of 1965¹, the play appears in its second draft form, already corrected and ready for print, even though it was never actually printed. An incomplete first draft exists although the period of its execution is easy to discern through its content: a satire on modernity.

In both the first version, written shortly after the publication of *Commedia dell'Arte Moderna* (A Comedy of Modern Art), and the final version, we find elements that indicate further development of the antecedent facts and premises that had led de Chirico to write *Commedia dell'Arte Moderna*. On one hand he makes fun of Modern Art and the avant-garde, and on the other, he treats the Metaphysical side of things with greater attention: the ethical and theological content which represent the Painter's objective. Therefore there is a bifurcation: on one side the ridiculing of modern painting and modern art as a vulgar phenomena, and on the other, the exploration of the more profound seeds present in, and essential to, the activity of the true artist (which go together). This scheme is entrusted to a few readily recognizable characters, which, with further research, one can identify to a greater degree. One of these characters who is left open to interpretation is Anna. With her, we succeed in understanding that she effectively speaks with de Chirico's voice: it is the voice of de Chirico.

What is *The Ballet*, why is it called a "Ballet"?

First of all, it is a metaphor for solely spectacular activities, prevalingly spectacular, the kind of activity which are entrusted to the people of the art world. Also to be considered here is the inborn snobbism typical of these people who only do exterior-type activities, people who never look

¹Similarly to *The Comedy of Modern Art* (published by Abscondita, Milan 2002, edited by Jole de Sanna with a postscript written by her on p. 255), *The Ballet* is signed by Isabella Far. As shown in the document in the postscript of Giovanna Rasario's article *De Chirico pendant Bellini* in this periodical, de Chirico's intention was to have the play put on in 1945-1946 in Rome at the Teatro degli Alleati.

with depth, who only do a snobbish kind of activity, who do and believe only in that which is snobbish, for example, like music which is good only if it is by a certain composer, say Stravinskij, but not by Cajkovskij.

It will be interesting to verify, in respect to the first version, just what it is that has gradually enriched the manuscript when, in 1965, these musicians are recuperated, especially Cajkovskij, who, unlike the Verde nuance present in the first version, is closer to de Chirico's taste. We are well aware, for example, of de Chirico's fondness for *La Traviata* and *Il Trovatore*. Therefore we can assume it is possible that the evolution of his taste was linked to the performances he saw.

Let us consider the title *The Ballet* once more. We have recently had the fortune of discovering the inspirational theme, the true inspirational motive of *The Ballet* and of a few characters that take part in it, who, as actors, are the true voices of the play *The Ballet*. In reality they are the circus or circuit (the word circus is disparaging), of the world of the Russian ballet. The world that inspired *The Ballet* is the Russian ballet. The recent discovery of a number of letters in the Kochno Archive of the Paris Opera Museum provide information on the goings on that de Chirico was involved in during the ballet production. It tells us something of a world that, because he was part of it, de Chirico was fully acquainted with. It is a world he brought to light through his judgement of the snobbery of these congenial and pleasant mundane people - who are not necessarily motivated, or of any great depth - by revealing the true and concrete commerce that exists in the world of creation and production. We can understand this microcosmic world through the relationships documented in the letters. How is it that de Chirico is so well informed of the goings on concerning the production of a ballet? Regarding the connections, relationships and scenes etc? It was a world in which he dwelled. One of the characters is detestable. Signed, sealed and delivered. How can you not understand, how can you not see that the world he was expressing was the modernity relative to the ballet and the relationships between artists, musicians and choreographers, etc? And that de Chirico reports on that world in the first person because he was a part of it? Therefore his judgement is that of a person who experienced something and drew his own conclusions from it. What seems like an inventive work is yet again a piece of autobiography written by de Chirico in the form of art.

Jole de Sanna, interview 5/9/2003

Translated by Katherine Robinson