

Re-clues and Myth Again

In 1518, Chiara Signorini was accused of witchcraft, this after being thrown out of a small land she was renting with her husband from Margherita Pazzani, one of the many lords of the Northern Italian feudal countryside. More specifically, Lady Chiara was accused of having paralyzed the arms and legs of the latter. She was then readmitted to the aforementioned land with the condition of bringing Margherita Pazzani back to normal. In his account of the three trials which in the end will have Chiara Signorini imprisoned in a hospital for life, Carlo Ginzburg brings to the reader's attention, large extracts of the notary's records. He uses them to show how the judges had manipulated through their questioning and torturing, Lady Chiara to finally admit that it was the devil and not the Blessed Virgin she has invoked to take avange on her landowner. This historical method of recovering from archives past evidences can be seen as a re-evaluation of a past which historians might have already settled. It is a re-interpretation of minor historical events, not the trail of a king but of a poor lady trying to regain a piece of land, a similar approach of Ginzburg's previous successful book, *The Cheese and the Worms*, were it is possible to find a similar character in Menocchio, a miller and low philosopher.

However, leaving the inquisition aside, in latter chapters of the book, *Clues Myths and the Historical Method*, Ginzburg can be seen as a first rate hermeneutic, particularly where he analyzes how biblical motifs has changed in meaning over history, and hermeneutics, classically speaking was in fact the art of interpreting the holy scriptures. In this respect we have Ginzburg analyzing St. Paul dictum, "noli alta sapere" which has been utilized during the Renaissance as a way to restrain intellectuals to get on high knowledge and content themselves with what the Bible and the authority provides them. Ginzburg further shows how this dictum has been later revolutionized by the new sciences starting the 17th century and finally culminating with the "Sapere aude!" of the enlightenment, a daring to know which is also somehow refrained by for instance Immanuel Kant with a following ammunition... dare to know, but obey! In this respect Ginzburg highlights the revolutionary danger implicit in the knowledge of what is pertinent of the high authorities who attempt, on their side, to keep their paradigm under control. He does not, in this respect, take himself a stand whether to prevent the knowledge of the high or whether to refrain it.

Further in the book, the reader finds Ginzburg again digging in "forgotten" texts, this time less ancient, one of which is Giovanni Morelli's view on art works. The latter Italian writer, a physiologist and politician, kept in disguise until the end of his days with a

Russian pseudonym, and made quite a break through with his method of analyzing art works through their details (hands, earrings, eyes, ears etc.) rather than through the core subject they represent. In this way, Morelli was able to provide the right authorship to paintings the origins of which were to that time uncertain. The Sherlock Holmes like method, had been criticized as rather mechanical but here Ginzburg proves that it was a fundamental milestone in the development of psychoanalysis. By analyzing certain conversations and personal letters, he is able to prove that Sigmund Freud himself had been deeply affected by Morelli's art theory, before the latter even started thinking about psychoanalysis which is in fact also a way of analyzing the psychological status of a patient by looking at irrelevant details in his everyday life.

In his relating on the importance of details, Ginzburg dares to go a step further, he literally "sapere aude" by envisioning how these details, hints, clues are at the base of narrative constructions inherited from the times in which humans had to read natural clues in the natural environment, in their proceeding into the unfamiliar world, whether for hunting or orienting themselves in their nomadic and precarious existences. This later analogy can be also then compared against Michel de Certeau who sees the writer as a sedentary farmer accumulating and imposing his intellectual property. In Ginzburg, the writer, and particularly the one actively searching for clues, is rather a nomadic hunter. The author is then who dares to venture in the unknown and make use of the clues he finds to undertake a journey. It is possibly this journey, this adventure, what the author brings back to us, a journey he could easily reconstruct with all the clues he has crossed through the adventure, as in an art of memory technique, clues that particularly stroke his psyche, a technique which has been recently re-enacted by psycho geographers and neo-realist film makers in the city context.

Under this Ginzburgian way of thinking then, it could be possible to see the present psychological symptoms affecting modern men, as a result of a journey, a narrative, that cannot take place, that is hindered by for instance the lack of clues in a too sterile artificial environment, or that is interrupted by unnatural barriers which suddenly stop the maturation of our narrative being, or more over disturbed by other unrelated narratives that are projected onto us at the time of our journey. The Proppian folktale then, the hero leaving home and so forth, is rather much of a fragmented experience and as this experience gets increasingly fragmented with the progression of technology, a possible narration might then only start from the gathering and archiving of the very clues per se, as adopted by modern writers like George Perec and even artists like Sophie Calle, works where the actual interpretation, divinization of the clues, is brought back to the realm of the spectators, offering them a possibility to become once more

hunters in an environment where this form of intuitive primitivism has been otherwise removed.

Viewers of a Sophie Calle's exhibition, as the one in Rotterdam where she uses the contemporary art museum space to exhibit the entire cosmos of her personal belongings, are then required to interpret such an act of displacement. They might from the beginning just take it as a provocation, or go a bit deeper in seeing it as an aphorism. We may, for the latter case rephrase Ginzburg and his distinction of high and low form of intuition. The art connoisseur might then try to interpret the high significance of such act per se, while the more rudimentary viewer, with yet an innate sense of intuition, instinct and insight, might be so audacious as to bring forward evidences that are actually correspondent to the identity of the artist. Under this perspective we can also review the historical trajectory presented to us by Ginzburg, in which the art of identifying becomes more and more connected to social control, or to better put it surveillance. It then becomes an art with an apparently bad connotation, that of tracking the individuals and thus maintain a state of security for the sake of the bourgeoisie capitalism and their material appropriations.

The Ginzburgian trajectory views a slow, but drastic evolution then from the Biblical figure of Abel, the nomadic shepherd, and that of Cain, the sedentary farmer, the one seeking for material establishment and murdering out of jealousy his aforementioned brother (we here substitute the hunter with the shepherd as a second brother analogy would have been needed between Esau and Jacob). This analogy is here interesting to decipher again the death of such persons attempting such existences of precarious interpretations by a system of control imposed by the sedentary kind to maintain their worldly establishment. In the case of social surveillance then, we might see an enforced type of identification like finger printing, an established method, while in the case of the more nomadic, divinatory and spiritual interpreters we can envision a lighter and less methodic approach of interpretation which has yet, to reconnect to the aforementioned thoughts, been abolished by the former for a stricter control (e.g. straight roads, artificially illuminated forests etc.). In this respect again, the strategy for the "urban" shepherd, the nomadic type, seems once more that of sousveillance, or counter-surveillance, as visible in some of later trends in less "high" forms of culture, meaning more spontaneous cultural manifestations of the last decades.