DANILO PETTE

La Bestia Rara

marzo 2018

When I think of something jungly, I think of Salgari.
Basically, here's how it works: you take one thing, anything, and then you "salgarize" it, and it immediately turns jungly. You hear the roar of burnished tigers,
tree fronds become congested with birds and primates, sunny beaches, thundering
drums, vines and ambushes.
And then a bright green that drips everywhere and swallows everything.
Hence my amazement in having learned that Bato has disappeared right in the jungle!
But what the hell is Bato doing? In the last episode he laying low,
among claws and wings, the creeping snares and the improbable escapes, the pointed horns and the opposable fingers, and all that intricate and infesting green?
Does he wish to swap drinks?
From the brown coffee concoctions to those tea-based?
Just to start priming with a coat of green?
Bato, however, seems to laugh at what we expect from Bato; he takes a sleeping bag and a machete, and on the threshold of the forest he exclaims:
"I'm going back to the figure."
Kaboom.
Lenzi told me, desperate, over the phone:
"That's exactly what he said, go get him back, Frà!!"
"Is there a bounty?"
"Fifteen guineas".
Good, I could dig that…
So first I'll take a nice ride around, then I'll call Sciarelli a couple of times,
then I'll hear what the latest is in the darkest alleys of filthy Rome.
I wake up the umpteenth morning and I'm still in Pietralata, and the more time
I spend here, the more I grow weak, while Bato becomes stronger every minute
he spends crouched in the jungle.
I could see him, among the vines and the beasts and all the other creatures.
I would have found him, he or some rare, unspeakable, mysterious beast.
I finally hitch a ride with a motorized raft that goes upstream
the Aniene and along the Tiber river; and I finally get to Ponte Sisto, and reach
via delle Zoccolette, where he was seen the last time.
I set foot inside, and two wild beasts cast in iron warn me to carefully watch my step, once I'm in.
Among all the beasts, the most implacable and exceptional are a tiger and a lion.
The tiger is a gurgling C, with its slim back made of wrought and welded iron leaf.
She just landed and is ready to strike.
The lion is a large carnivorous plant corolla on a powerful curving back.

Nobody, not even at night, would dare to challenge him.
And that was just the threshold of the jungle…
I push aside the wide leaf of a giant plant that alone was blocking my view,
as if it were a diaphanous and photosynthetic curtain.
And then: kaboom.
Bato's Jungle as far as the eye can see.
Everything speaks of his passage, as with Kurtz; however, he passed through as merrily as Mowgli, as well-adjusted as Tarzan.
But what am I saying? Rather: he's an Adam, authorized to give shape to things, instead of names! And this is really a comeback to the figure, gentlemen!
Everything in the intricate forest is a figure, but a figure that refers to Bato.
To his curves, his ripples, those colors of his and his charcoal marks.
Bato gave it, the jungle, the shapes that refer to him the most, to the point of modeling it on him.
And he had lots of fun, believe me…
Just to make it clear that this is not a joke at all, he has split himself into three:
Paintings, sketches and sculptures.
A trinity, with a triple effect, like god and certain toothpastes.
One yet triune…but what did he set his mind on?
Bato has become like those deltas that flow, enormous, at the surrender of the Congo, he put himself to the test, he is a Bato being a Ganges.
He reiterates the concept of shapes, which, also in different styles,
resonate with each other.
There is no Voodoo here.
There's Technicolor!!
There's a tiger jumping fiercely in black and brown triangles, and its long jump is tinged with the color of the plants it moves, and it slowly turns into a beautiful
green. And the tiger has the same expression of a nervous C that the one at
the entrance has.
A caiman with graphite teeth and gold Egyptian armor emerges from the water, and emerges from the supreme lands of foamed color, to which Bato has already accustomed us. And the same caiman is sketched as in four moments of the day, and while it always reappears, it's as if it's always on its way back.
Marabous rise in black spots that become wings and tails in the explosion, and red are the carrions' beaks. And then a severe din, a
Rumble into the Jungle, the meeting at the top of two gorillas that kick and
bite, painted by a confident Bato, with superb stains that, surely, will provide
the shapes, but also add something else. And along the back of one of them, the charcoal draws a spinal tract, then triangular, which ends up resembling those leaves hatched between the Sketches of plants and flowers, Bato's Flora.
Again incarnated, in toothed mouths, inflamed mucous membranes and trees like mountains.
And in the meantime, the Parade of the Vigorous Mandrills; triptych of Scarlet Ibis;
snakes in cahoots against a Hornbeard, who quickly wanders away; an emerald boa that

swallows the monkey; a fishing bear; a handsome babirusa resting near a tree (it's like a super wild-boar, and therefore also 'boar resting near a tree' is fine); a stick insect peeling from the green blanket of a military moss; a lion colliding with a boa, and at the end they mix together, such was the impetus of excelling.
And the sketches are the ingredients of the paintings, scattered along the paving
by the thousands, they still outline those elusive, round and watered down shapes,
half mixed together, partly broken up and then packed down.
The game of Bato.
The Kingdom of Cong.
There is no Voodoo here, just the fun of enclosing everything in a few precise and definitive shapes.
Bato is behind this jungle, he concocted everything himself.
Basically, he pops up everywhere.
He has made a vegetable cathedral out of himself and a self-referential faun.
To him his gorilla statues with arms of bridges, poignant lions blooming in April and roaring, bronzes, resins, and waxes; the pencils, the Indian ink and the mixed techniques.
It's all an intricate chaos of heads shaped like "C"s (as in life, don't you think?):
tigers, snakes, bears, lions; and then all the bodies in strong colors, which are rendered with quick gestures that resize them to leaves and light steps.
When I returned, I realized that there was no need to look for Bato, because I had been with him in the last hours.
Lost in there, among his solutions and his conclusions.
Eventually I entered the jungle and found a rare beast.
It's the Bato.
(needless to say, I haven't seen the fifteen guineas yet, right?)

— Danilo Pette, La Bestia Rara, marzo 2018