

HANNAH HÖCH “The Painter” (1920)

Once upon a time there was a painter. He wasn't called Dribble, or anything like that, as he might have been in earlier times. It was around 1920—the painter was a modern painter—so his name was Heavenlykingdom. Unlike the real painters of earlier times, he was not asked to work only with brush anti palette. This was his wife's fault: she thwarted the boundless flight of his genius. At least four times in four years, he was forced to wash dishes - the kitchen dishes. The first time, actually, there had been a pressing reason. She was giving birth to the baby Heavenlykingdom. The other three times had not seemed absolutely necessary to Heavenlykingdom, Sr. But he wanted to keep the peace—because after all God had created the male to do just that and so had no choice but to obey her Xanthippian demand. Yet the matter continued to weigh on him. He felt degraded as a man and as a painter under its dark shadow. On the days of crisis he would suffer nightmares. He kept seeing Michelangelo washing up the cups. He knew enough about psychoanalysis to confront the woman with the truth that such demands always arise out of the desire to dominate, no matter what other reasons there might be. As a modern person he felt that in theory he had to agree with the equality of the sexes—still, if one looked closely at the situation one could not—and then, especially in your own house—her demand seemed to him comparable to an enslavement of his soul ...

Now one day he began to paint a picture. A dark force moved him, because he was full of dark forces. He wanted to represent, to cube really, the essential likeness between the nature of chives and the female soul. In theory the whole problem was solved. He saw the emptiness that fills both these objects precisely and with total intellectual clarity. There is more to genius than intellect, however, and, when he connected the herb's snake-like form with the previously mentioned soul, his unusually developed instinct gave him mystical knowledge. No genius would deny a certain complement of mysticism.

Our Heavenlykingdom was deeply wounded by something he had also heard about from his fellow men: although these little women are often really tiny, they can still not be shaped and modeled into the form one needs for physical and psychic comfort. Had he been a writer, he would have been compelled to enrich literature with a ponderous work on the theme, “When you go to Woman, do not forget the whip.” But under the circumstances that you know about now, his painting was to be called, “The Chive and the Female Soul: A Comparison.” I think it was already announced for exhibition, while the canvas still shone blankly, spotlessly receptive. One has to do everything in good time. Gotthold—that was Heavenly kingdom's first name—suffered under the female soul in the totality of his manhood. And we all need to confront what makes us suffer. No wonder, then, that Heavenlykingdom (secretly) began to think of himself as on a level with a redeemer—let's admit it, with Christ—because of the likeness he has discovered.

But you have to imagine the painting properly—as it were, a scientifically dissected representation—the female soul, totally clear in a segmented cubist painting—so that everyone able to adopt an abstract point of view could read, there she is, that's her innermost being. And next to that the analogy and parallel: chives. Wouldn't everyone see it as clear as day? We also know that when we recognize what ails us, we are cured. So what perspectives would open up with the creation of this painting? Wouldn't the most burning question of our time be solved? Yet we have had to admit too often that theory and practice don't coincide. He had worked on his picture for two years and two days already. He labored and labored mightily, unable to advance

beyond the chives. In the first place, the painting remained green. As soon as he used a different color, the disturbance that resulted was so great that he covered it with green again. For a while he thought that the treacherous female soul (treachery no doubt its most important element alongside emptiness) could appear as a cubist lemon-yellow spiral among the green—a shape more or less like one of those sofa-springs that winds crookedly upward. But alas, painting is color as well as form. The yellow refused to meld with the massive green of his chive allegory. He had no choice but to remove the winding spiral. A painter must remain enough of an aesthete to refuse to paint badly for the sake of his idea. The same thing happened with the composition. He tried and tried, even falling into trances, but nothing beyond the dull repetitive up-and-down of the chive motif would develop. Over and over again he hoped to fix the damnable female soul in a fluted doughnut-shape. But his eye remained objective and told him the truth without pity: this fretwork muddies the powerful melody of the chive movement. His most intimate friend, looking at the painting, remarked that it had the kind of power that liberated itself in an overwhelming sense of bore ... No, that's not what he said. He said, liberates itself in sameness. Then he decided with a heavy heart to abandon the female soul and to devote himself only to chives from now on.

A month later, and the President, who has just opened the exhibition, is propelling his presidential belly around the myriad chambers that display the works of all the painters of the realm. Suddenly he stops. His face displays emotion. His entourage observes closely. He begins to speak. “A masterpiece,” he stammers. “Has my administration ever produced anything better?” He questioned everyone around him. All that green - what can it remind me of? His adjutant (unless an assistant goes by another name in a Republic) suggested helpfully, “Of the revolution? Of the revolution, my President?”

“Absolutely right. The revolution.”

They say the State bought the painting for the National Gallery. They say that when its creator was asked for the title, he omitted mention of the chives and proudly called it “The Female Soul.” They say Gotthold Heavenlykingdom will be the next candidate for a Nobel Prize.