

UT SCULPTURA POESIS: AN EXAMPLE FROM SCOTT HIGHTOWER'S POETRY*

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RESUMEN

La poesía siempre se ha sentido atraída por las artes visuales, y así lo ha manifestado, entre otras prácticas, a través de la écfrasis (esto es, la descripción verbal de una imagen). Sin embargo, son pocos, comparativamente, los poetas que optan por la descripción de escultura en lugar de pintura. En el presente trabajo se investigan los antecedentes de la écfrasis escultórica y se analizan en la poesía de un poeta americano contemporáneo, Scott Hightower. Aflora así, entre otros conceptos, la disparidad estética que surge de la contemplación de un monumento del pasado de excepcionales matices —la estatua del ángel caído— con los ojos de la postmodernidad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Écfrasis, *Ut Sculptura Poesis*, modernismo, postmodernismo, percepción estética.

ABSTRACT

Poetry has always been attracted by the visual arts, and it has been so manifested, among other practices, through ekphrasis (that is, the verbal description of an image). However, there are few poets, comparatively speaking, who opt for the description of a sculpture instead of a painting. In the present article, the origins of ekphrasis in sculpture are studied, and the poetry of the contemporary American author Scott Hightower is analyzed. Thus, the aesthetic disparity which rises from the contemplation of a past monument of exceptional nuances —the statue of the fallen angel— with the eyes of postmodernity emerges, among other concepts.

KEY WORDS: Ekphrasis, *Ut Sculptura Poesis*, modernism, postmodernism, aesthetic perception.

INTRODUCTION

The fruitful comparison between the visual and the verbal arts has been, and still is, the focus of innumerable academic studies. Within this general focus, the relation of poetry with painting constitutes a privileged field of aesthetic and epistemological reflection, and from different viewpoints. Among such viewpoints, we may highlight the following three: Leonardo's *paragone*, a concept which he takes from the



classical world in order to inaugurate a line of thought in which the superiority of the visual over the verbal perception is acknowledged¹; the Renaissance actualization of the *Ut pictura poesis* metaphor, derived from the classical poet Horace and translated at this time into endless experiments in artistic genres like the portrait —visual or verbal— or combinations of word and image like the emblems (Dundas 1993; Hulse 1990); and, in more recent times, the studies about ekphrasis and iconology which consciously challenge the limits between both artistic expressions, taking the poetry of the avant-garde and subsequent movements of experimental poetry as their most significant examples (Bohn 1986; Steiner 1982).

It is interesting to remark, however, that the origins of the visual-verbal relationship, whenever we specifically refer to poetry that speaks about images, should be sought in sculpture, rather than in painting. They can be found, in fact, in the ancient Greek *technopaegnia*. In principle, these were poem-objects, that is, real objects with a literary description, gloss or spell engraved on them. Gradually, though, they were transformed into poems which reproduced the shape of an absent object. In other words, they became poems with a sculpture-like display, thus anticipating Apollinaire's techniques in two millennia. Nevertheless, the *Ut sculptura poesis* metaphor, with notable exceptions, has met the favor of poets in a much lesser degree than in the case of painting. Only two recent periods of Western art history give ample evidence of this particular derivation of the visual-verbal relationship: eighteenth and nineteenth century Romanticism, on one hand, and the twentieth-century avant-garde, on the other.

We can actually trace, from the eighteenth century on, how poets turn their interest towards ancient Greek art in general and Greek statuary in particular, because in it they recognize the source of human civilization (Giannakopoulou 2007: 11). They write poems about sculptures but not in the way of the ancient poets like Simonides and Pindar, who follow the classical concept of *paragone* in order to emphasize the superiority of poetry over sculpture. Instead, «in the case of poets such as Goethe, Rilke, Yeats or Pound, an acquaintance with and study of sculpture has had a more pervasive and lasting effect than the composition of any particular ecphrastic poem» (Giannakopoulou 2007: 12). The public quality of classical monuments becomes, in the works of these poets, neither a mere starting point for building a panegyric of a battle or a character, nor a faithful description of the original, but a source of introspection into the poet's own identity in relation with the flow of civilization and culture.

Furthermore, during the nineteenth century, the interest of poets in sculpture finds its correlative in the massive erection of «literary» monuments by public autho-

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¹ Leonardo's *Treatise on Painting* was written around 1498, although it was first published in 1680. His comparison of the verbal and visual arts helps establish a tradition of clear-cut separation between them. This difference is later emphasized, among other well-known works, in Lessing's *Laocoon. An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766).

rities throughout Europe, arguably the most remarkable initiative of this kind since the Roman Empire. As Pingeot states, «The term «literary sculpture» may be used as a way of describing the sculpture of the nineteenth century. During this period literature appeared as the main inspiration for the development of sculpture, but also as the linchpin of a new culture that was more literate than ever before» (2000: 37). This phenomenon is particularly popular in France and has a clear influence, besides, on the sculptors' approach to literature: Rodin, for example, takes full passages of Dante's *Divina Commedia* as an inspiration for his own works while his poet-secretary, Rilke, writes eloquent descriptions of the sculptures created under such inspiration.

Already in the twentieth century, Cubist, Dadaist and Surrealist movements involve poets and sculptors no less than painters in their new creed, blurring the limits among genres as no other artistic period had done before. The influence of sculpture in Apollinaire's poems brings the concept of visual poetry to the forefront of the avant-garde, as such concept is approached «not from the perspective of literary tradition, but from that of artistic tradition» (Bohn 1986: 51). If poems become thus even more close to sculpture than in the previous century, sculpture becomes, in the hands of artists like Giacometti, Gaudier Brzeska or Marcel Duchamp, utterly poetic. Even some artistic notions, like vorticism (Pound 1916), are shared by both sculptures and poems. This common spirit stays alive for decades afterwards: a sculpture like *Le Poète*, by the artist Ossip Zadkine (1954), which constitutes an homage to the French poet Paul Eluard and can be seen at the Luxembourg Gardens in Paris, seems to be still indebted to the same spirit of mutual relationship between both artistic expressions (Sharrati 2000: 2), and it possibly constitutes one of the latest manifestations of the nature of this relationship as it was understood before and during the avant-garde.

Postmodernist aesthetics meets the disappearance of the prevailing idea of sculpture in the nineteenth century, when the main parks, squares and fountains of European cities bloomed with literary models made of stone or bronze. These monuments, as we know, had the double aim of creating beauty and providing instruction to the public (*aut prodesse aut delectare*). Although modernism and the avant-garde have been shown as the artistic currents which, in a way, continued the path of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century *Ut sculptura poesis* tradition, they are also responsible for a major change in regard to the role of the spectator of art and the very notion of art. The ultimate example of this change is, clearly, Marcel Duchamp's ready-made technique, which challenges the genuine foundations of what should be considered an art work. If the notions about art, therefore, are no longer certain, the nineteenth-century reliance on the capacity of public monuments to instruct the masses cannot endure. Public art appreciation ceases to be collective. It is no longer subjected to unalterable, unified criteria.

Consequently, modernism encourages the transition, culminated with postmodernism, from one mode of public perception, based on collective aesthetic experience, to a private one, in which common cultural references would no longer be summoned through urban icons: «The monolithic cultural assumptions implicit in Roman forum statuary or an altar triptych or even the typical town square equestrian statue are no longer viable. The supposition that a visual form, and anthem, or a text might express its deepest values or unify a coherent social group has become



a relic of romantic history» (Hein 1996: 2). Subjectivity is the term which, in fact, summarizes this major shift in aesthetic perception.

Subjectivity, however, is a minor feature in the appreciation of public art during the last decades in comparison with the real danger inherent to any street exhibition nowadays: the possibility that it becomes just another commodity in our market society². To avoid this danger, contemporary artists use varied techniques, many of which would have been unimaginable before the technological era. They avoid traditional forms of presentation —the pedestal, the museum—, they entirely defy the definition of their creation as a work of art, or they completely challenge what should be considered a cultural space (North 1990: 860-861). These new premises about public art must perforce influence the way contemporary poets deal with it in their poems, regardless of the fact that they may choose to speak about monuments of the past, when other aesthetic canons were at hand. In the same way as Romantic poets would approach classical Greek art from the individual attitude of their *Zeitgeist*, altogether different from the perception of the poets contemporary to those buildings and sculptures, a disparity must be assumed between twenty-first century poets who write about nineteenth-century sculptures and the sculptures themselves. If the monument has not changed, the individual eye has.

EL ÁNGEL CAÍDO, BY RICARDO BELLVER

In 1877, the Spanish sculptor Ricardo Bellver finished his most famous work, *El Ángel Caído*. It is a bronze statue mounted on top of a public monument formed by a granite fountain, a pedestal and the statue itself. It is located in the well-known *Parque del Retiro* in Madrid, a very centric, typical spot for Sunday walks, street music and all kinds of open-air activities. The statue gives evidence of three artistic influences: the Hellenic (mainly the sculpture group formed by Laocoön and His Sons), the Baroque (Bernini) and the Romantic one. As a curiosity, it must be added that it is one of the very few statues dedicated to the fallen angel, and popular wisdom, especially of esoteric nature, asserts that it pays homage to Lucifer or to the notion of the Evil. There is a similar monument in Turin, Italy, and a third one —of a more controversial nature, as it was erected during Franco's dictatorship— in the Spanish insular town of Santa Cruz de Tenerife.

Bellver's statue shares many of the aesthetic modes and assumptions of its era, both in the source of its composition and in the public condition that it was conferred by the local authorities. It won the First Class Medal at the *Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes* in Madrid in 1878. The catalogue of the exposition quotes

² NORTH (1990: 867) has also studied an unwanted side-effect of the aesthetic major change introduced by the avant-garde in public monuments: in the Nazi and Stalinist totalitarian governments, modernist aesthetics ironically converted the masses in urban sculptures who, unconsciously, reproduced the force of their leaders.



Figura 1. *El ángel caído*, by Ricardo Bellver.

a few verses from the first Canto of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, when Satan proclaims his *non serviam* furious statement. The literary influence of Milton in the construction of the statue is evident not only in the choice of the character, but also in its external appearance: the Retiro statue does not certainly show a monster-like figure but, rather, delivers the fallen angel to the spectators as a very attractive youth³. Some of the qualities attributed to Milton's Satan can be traced in this statuary version: «awesome energy and defiance, incredible fortitude, and, above all, magnificent rhetoric. For some readers, including Blake and Shelley, Satan has been the true hero of the poem» (Abrams 2000: 1816). The rhetoric of Milton's Satan is here replaced by the vigorous physicality of the falling —rather than fallen— statue, the open mouth and the full, tensed expression of the face.

In regard to the public exhibition of *El Ángel Caído*, it must be noticed that it was bought by the Spanish government and sent to the Universal Exhibition in Paris in 1878. Afterwards it was included in the collection of the National Museum,

³ The famous Spanish novelist Carmen MARTÍN GAITE, in her unfinished, posthumous novel *Los parentescos* (2001), writes the following eloquent description of the statue: «Y quien se figure feo al demonio es que no ha ido al Retiro de Madrid, donde tiene una estatua, subido en su pedestal, bien alto. Y allí se ve claramente, para el que no lo sepa, que se está cayendo del cielo. A ver. Como que primero era un ángel. Un poco a su aire, pero ángel. [...] Yo voy mucho a esa plaza y me fijo en todos los detalles de la estatua de don Ricardo, que sigue allí, tal como él la puso y con razón, mirando al cielo, por mucha serpiente que le quiera enredar los pies y se le suba al cuerpo. ¡Qué frente tan limpia la del ángel caído! Luego ya en lo que esté tramando detrás de esa frente no nos vamos a meter nadie. Es una cuenta que prefiere llevar él solo» (62-63).

but in 1879, his director, Benito Soriano Murillo, suggested its move to a place in the open air. He based his initiative on the following grounds:

... la estatua del Ángel Caído, por lo atrevido de su composición, por su original actitud y también por la materia en que ha sido fundida, tal vez no produzca todo el efecto apetecido, encerrada cual está en los estrechos límites de una sala, mientras que colocada en un sitio público, al aire libre con más espacio y horizonte, luciría ventajosamente el mérito de tan bella creación, sirviendo al mismo tiempo de ornato e iniciando de este modo al público en la contemplación de los buenos modelos del arte plástico que tan poderosamente contribuye a su cultura (quoted in Reyero 2002: 50).

The quotation is certainly paradigmatic of an understanding of public art which has remained almost unalterable from antiquity until the beginning of the twentieth century. The mere aesthetic reasons (the statue must find a wider location in order to be fully appreciated) seem inseparable from the didacticism attributed to any work of art. It is not the artist, but the public, considered in a collective sense, what is relevant here. In consonance with Greek, Latin or Christian art, and echoing Soriano Murillo's statement, it can be affirmed that these and other similar monuments prior to modernist aesthetics «do not exalt the private vision of individual artists so much as they bespeak the shared values and convictions of cultural communities, and are accordingly to be found in those edifices and open places where people regularly gather» (Hein 1996: 1). Such didactic, collective purpose is especially significant here, because of the scarcity of representations of the fallen angel in Western imagery.

However, the label of «public monument», conferred from those premises of nineteenth-century didacticism and common appreciation of art, reveals certain level of ambivalence in this particular case. This ambivalence is undoubtedly due to the unusual choice of the character —Satan or Lucifer— and the literary source —Milton—. The personality of Milton's angel, in effect, is transferred to the statue, and it can be appreciated as such by the character who speaks about it in Martín Gaité's mentioned novel: «Es una cuenta que prefiere llevar él solo». If this literary and statuary fallen angel seems so appealing to the observer, it is precisely owing to its emphasized individuality, to the incongruence it displays in regard to the common ground and expectations generated by tradition.

«JEFFERSON'S FAVORITE»

In his 2012 book *Self-evident*, the American poet Scott Hightower⁴ includes a poem about Ricardo Bellver's statue. Hightower is, arguably, one of the most ekphrastic American contemporary poets, thus continuing a tradition which has been fruitful, among others, in such authors like William Carlos Williams, Wallace

⁴ A native of Texas, Scott Hightower teaches at NYU, lives in Manhattan and sojourns in Spain. He is the author of four books of poetry and also works as a poetry reviewer for numerous

Stevens or, more recently, John Ashbery (Heffernan 1993: 135- 189). There is probably only one similar case of such a conscious and thorough exercise of ekphrasis in contemporary poetry in Spain: that of Luis Javier Moreno (Mudrovic 2012).

Hightower's poems on monuments, paintings and photographs throughout his books are countless, together with poems about opera, ballet or historical characters. This means that the cultural and historical manifestations in his writing have, for him, a purpose similar to Goethe's, Rilke's or Yeats' search for the individual voice within the flow of civilization: «to find my own way in; how can my voice inhabit the holy space the poem already occupies. It is not an issue of originality. It is an issue of inhabitation and authenticity» (Carbajosa 2009). As regards ekphrasis, Hightower's own notion of the issue is that, at a certain point in the elaboration of the poem, the poet should stop the narrative/descriptive strategies in order to «step out of» the moment celebrated by the «art that knows it is art»⁵. It is a notion also related, to a certain extent, with stepping out of mythic time (which is circular) and visiting historical time (which is linear) and vice versa.

Most of Hightower's ekphrastic poems deal with classical paintings and they are almost invariably focused on human characters (as if, it could properly be affirmed, he were describing sculptures). Hightower usually follows a characteristic technique: he describes the human figures in the paintings through rigorous attention to their position in relation to the whole, but he builds his descriptions starting from minute individual details like a part of the body, a garment, a precise gesture or the way light relates two differentiated parts. He describes, more than anything, what we could call active stance. In other words, he seeks for the moment —so often emphasized in ekphrastic literature— prior to movement that, for a second, overcomes the illusion of separation between the temporal and the spatial (Mitchell 1980: 297). The results are poems with a powerful insight which emerges primarily from the partial descriptions unified in the final composition, and only secondarily from personal reflection or interpretation of the pictures described —a kind of glossing that arises from deep contemplation, sometimes only hinted at, sometimes more explicit; an interesting contemporary counterpoint, anyway, for an image of the past—.

In one of these poems, «Jefferson's Favorite» (2001: 29-30), he describes the picture of Adriaen van der Werff *Sarah Presenting Hagar to Abraham* (1699) and actually provides sculpture-like descriptions of the three characters in the painting. The first stanza may well serve as an example:

Though, compositionally,
he is slightly higher, they face each other
almost eye-to-eye.
Their shoulders and palms provide a kind
of balance. At the end

publications. His translations of poems by the Spanish-Puerto Rican poet Aurora de Albornoz garnered him a prestigious Willis Barnstone Translation Prize.

⁵ Statements made by Hightower in an informal conversation.





Figura 2. *Sarah Presenting Hagar to Abraham*,
by Adriaen van der Werff.

of his extended forearm his right hand
opens and hovers;
his fingertips spread into the light.
Sarah's graceful left arm
arches downward, her floating hand and fingers
extend bright against
the darker den of fabric. As Abraham
turns toward Sarah, his face
is dark with shadow.

First of all, the compositional display of the stanza —repeated in the two following ones that form the poem— must be taken into account. It is subjected to a fixed schema which is repeated every four lines, and is based on different levels of indentation. Such schema advances in a kind of flow, a smoothness of rhythm, notwithstanding the presence of enjambments («a kind / of balance», «his right hand / opens and hovers»), which shows a clear correlation with the fluidity of opposing gestures in the picture (arms, hands, heads), eloquently named and described in the poem. Every single element in the stanza, the same as in the image, acquires full meaning only in relation to the whole (light, depth, color and figures in van der Werff's work; typographic display, alliteration, combination of terms indicating position and movement of parts of the body in Hightower's). The final impression is strongly visual and, more precisely, statue-like. Thus, the contemporary poet's glossing of this work of the past is conveyed mainly by mimesis —the reproduction

of the elements and their combinations in the picture through the poet's tools: words, sounds, rhythm, and typographic display on the page.

The poem, however, is open to more historical layers, provided both by the title and the two initial quotations. The title, «Jefferson's Favorite», makes reference to the first of these quotations, taken from a letter by Thomas Jefferson to Maria Cosway in 1788: «Above all things those of van der Werff affected me most. His picture of Sarah delivering Hagar to Abraham is delicious. I would have agreed to have been Abraham...» Jefferson's statement acquires a highly articulate resonance when we consider his role in the political issue of slavery in the late eighteenth-century United States, together with his personal relationship with an enslaved woman of his household, Sally Hemings. The second reference, «and dream of freedom in his slave's embrace», comes from the «Epistle VII, to Thomas Hume», written by the Irish poet Thomas Moore, contemporary of Jefferson. Moore wrote it during a journey through the United States and, there, he compares the slavery of the blacks with slaves in the ancient Rome. In both cases, the public and the private sides of the matter are inseparable.

The same occurs in the story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar, where a public duty (the forefather of the Israelite tribes must beget an heir) becomes a family affair (the legal wife presents the chosen slave to her husband). The poet describes the difficult moment with all the gracefulness and delicacy already present in the picture: the delicacy of gestures, textures, color and hands, arms, eyes and chests. The result is an intimate, almost voluptuous enumeration of body parts, partly subjected to voyeurism from the readers' side («Her fingers / rest on her inner thigh with a drape. From / our perspective, / it covers her modesty»). At the same time, the poem stays remote to the eminent action, that is, it does not trespass the boundaries of the beauty of the scene. It is this beauty, turned into *decorum*, what leads the poem towards the inevitable conclusion: «Her hair falls tenderly / down into the rich / voluminous cloth with cascades / over Abraham's legs / and lap, and across that brightly lit, / precarious bed». The object of future consummation, the bed, associated with the adjective «precarious», casts an idea of unwritten continuation after the final line, and leaves some questions unanswered: for whom is that bed precarious? For Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, or the three of them? And why precarious and not something else?

«ÁNGEL CAÍDO»

The previous commentary about «Jefferson's Favorite» should lead us to the analysis of «Ángel Caído» (2012: 60), the poem where Scott Hightower describes Bellver's statue at El Retiro:

«Ángel Caído»
(Ricardo Bellver, El Retiro, Madrid, 1878).

Stunning to look at!
One bronze wing juts up



like the blade of a broken windmill fan.
Not Caravaggio's Saul, but a youth,
bound, crashing onto a stump:
a knee, an elbow, one hand raised.
Here, each Retiro sun, each full—
or nearly full—Retiro moon,
all the stars stand in
for the blinding, deafening,
clearly threatening might
that has forced the angel down.

*

The only statue of Lucifer in all of Europe.
In a little more than half
a century, the notion
of the fallen
and the notion of a sole voice
resonate in new ways.

The poem is shorter than «Jefferson's Favorite» and it may seem, at first sight, more direct, less subtle in its descriptions. It is fairly enlightening, however, in regard to the dialogic oppositions which have been previously discussed in reference to the *Ut sculptura poesis* metaphor: the public/collective (a monument exhibited in the open air, carrying its own cultural connotations and values of past centuries) and the private (the contemporary, individual look of the poet). Furthermore, the ambivalent symbolism of *El Ángel Caído* by Bellver—it is Satan, a figure hardly ever represented in art and, moreover, surprisingly attractive— permeates the poem and provides it with a wider range for meanings and speculations.

The first line determines the attitude of the poet/spectator towards the statue: according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, «stunning» means «astounding» or «dazing»; but in a more colloquial sense, it also means «excellent, splendid, extremely attractive or impressive». Thus, the poet reflects the ambiguity which derives from the contemplation of the statue, at the same time that he avoids solemnity in the description (in his poems, Hightower usually adopts a colloquial tone which serves for different purposes, mainly irony and detachment; a landmark, on the other hand, of most American poetry). Then, the rising elements of the body are singled out from the whole composition, in a similar way to the characters in «Jefferson's Favorite»: one wing, a knee, an elbow, one hand. It is through these rising parts that we see, as if in an oxymoronic image, the falling angel «bound, crashing onto a stump». There is an explicit tension between those two impulses, the upward movement that the body of the angel enacts, and the downward movement which comes down from the mighty forces of heaven.

In addition, the terms of comparison which Hightower introduces in this description of the parts of the body relate such description to other topics which are very recurrent in his poetry: «the blade of a broken windmill fan», for example,





Figura 3. Detail from *The Conversion of St. Paul*, by Caravaggio.

is a significant presence in the poems about his childhood in a ranch in Texas, a world already lost or in decay. As for the reference to Caravaggio's *The Conversion of Saul*—or Saint Paul—which he painted in 1601, through it the poem serves at least a double purpose: on one hand, and as it happened in the previous poem with Jefferson's and Moore's quotations, the reference enhances the historical resonances of the ekphrastic exercise, which ceases to be unidirectional, and it purposefully links the fallen angel with another fallen character, Saul—that is, the gentile who would later become St. Paul—. On the other hand, it relates the attractive youth of the statue with another handsome young man who was not by chance painted by a painter of genius and evil, a *maudit*. The homosexual implications of this association should also be taken into account.

At the same time that Hightower establishes his own, utterly personal attachment with the statue, he depicts it within its context: the name of the Retiro park is mentioned in two consecutive lines, apart from the exact reference immediately below the title. The place, however, is associated with the sun, the moon and the stars. The material *locus* becomes, consequently, a metaphor of a higher, cosmic order, an order that punishes the disobedient angel («the blinding, deafening, / clearly threatening might»). These -ing forms of doom and paralysis of the senses offer a great contrast with that early term, «stunning», which worked as praise of what was contemplated.

This first stanza reveals the insertion of the poet's judgment and personal associations within the apparent objectivity of the public monument. Nevertheless, the whole description remains ekphrastic in its purpose of describing the main elements of the statue and the place where it is located. In contrast, the second stanza becomes the proper glossing of the ekphrastic commentary. It shows the qualities



of postmodern, contemporary appreciation of public art which belongs to former periods, when monuments were bound to be instructive in an unambiguous way. As it has been argued so far, though, neither Milton's nor Bellver's fallen angel is exempt from ambiguity. And just twelve lines have been enough for Scott Hightower to explore the derivations of such unclear depiction of Evil, such traces of past epochs through which the individual stance of postmodernity would start to unfold. The alignment of Caravaggio's Saul with the fallen angel, furthermore, is unequivocal in its nuance: Caravaggio was constantly getting into trouble with religious authorities, due to the excessive realism of the human figures in his paintings—in other words, because he detached himself from the archetypal didactic models available and became too openly personal in his characterizations (Lambert 2007: 66).

The second stanza of «Ángel Caído» starts with a strong assertion—it does not really matter if what is said there is not exact—which underlies the exceptionality of the monument described. Finally, the five following lines, the most colloquial ones of the poem, are probably addressed to the contemporary reader. This reader, who has seen the statue through the poet's eyes and voice, is expected to think as the poet believes him/her to think. However, the apparently direct final commentary, which seems to admit no objections, remains as ambiguous as the rest of the composition: were the notion of the fallen and the notion of a voice really a single one «in a little more than half / a century»?⁶ Apparently, it was meant to be so in a public monument dedicated to Satan. But, as we know, artists like Bellver, taking Milton as his model, would defy such expectation. Furthermore, when the poet asserts that those past notions «resonate in new ways», what does he really mean? Which are those new ways and for whom? For the poet/spectator only, for the readers? Again, as in the case of «Jefferson's Favorite», the poem leaves unanswered questions after the final line. This option is utterly ekphrastic because it reproduces the openness of interpretation which has been identified not only in Bellver's statue but also in Milton's poem. Did they mean, by any chance, that evil is attractive or that it teaches better, as in Yeats's lines «The half-wisdom of daemonic images / Suffice the ageing man as once the growing boy?»

CONCLUSION

At the initial stages of this article, the disparity between the poet's approach to a public monument of the past and the monument itself was discussed. The time lapse, together with the indefiniteness about where the public domain finishes and where the private one starts, make it a stimulating ekphrastic exercise beyond mere

⁶ The period evoked by the lines «more than half / a century» corresponds to Franco's dictatorship in Spain. In an open, postmodern approach to the interpretation of the poem, «the notion of a sole voice» recalls, however indirectly, both Franco's and God's monolithic, unquestionable discourse, being «sole» a fully charged term here.

semiotic considerations, like the means of transference from a visual to a verbal code. As North affirms about Yeats' poems on sculpture, «Sculpture is so common a metaphor in Yeats's work precisely because of its ambiguous nature, because it is the art of public memorials and at the same time the one whose subject matter is almost entirely composed on isolated, musing individuals» (1983: 379). Because of their lack of reliance on eternal values, contemporary poets are perhaps better equipped than their predecessors for the identification of this disparity, which lies at the core of the *Ut Sculptura Poesis* metaphor. Their path towards sculpture follows the inverse track of the ancient *technopaegnia*: object and language are fully separated and, within their own strangeness, they must find the common ground, neither utterly public nor entirely individual, neither present nor past—that third space, or *metaxu*, of reality—for convergence. The focus on such isolated individual as Satan seems to be, in spite of the archetypal evil nature which tradition attributes to him, and thanks to the unresolved ambivalence he transmits both in literature and in sculpture, constitutes a compelling example.

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