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Ten Years Without Manlio Sgalambro

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ABSTRACT

The article commemorates the tenth anniversary of the death of Manlio Sgalambro (1924–2014), one of the most original and radical voices of contemporary Italian thought. Philosopher, poet, aphorist, and lyricist, Sgalambro developed a lucidly pessimistic and anti-conformist worldview that challenged both academic philosophy and social conventions. His collaboration with Franco Battiato gave birth to an extraordinary fusion of philosophical reflection and musical expression, where irony and metaphysical tension coexist. The study highlights Sgalambro's aristocratic conception of thought, his critique of egalitarian mediocrity, and his defense of intellectual freedom and individuality against the mass. It also explores the dialogue between Sgalambro's nihilistic philosophy and Battiato's esoteric vision, showing how their collaboration produced a rare form of cultural syncretism that brought together Nietzschean lucidity, Cioranian pessimism, and Gurdjieffian metaphysics. The author emphasizes the continuing relevance of Sgalambro's ideas as a voice of dissent and lucidity in an age increasingly dominated by superficiality and moral conformism.

Keywords: Manlio Sgalambro; Franco Battiato; Italian philosophy; cultural syncretism; nihilism; aesthetics; esotericism; intellectual freedom

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ОРИГИНАЛЬНАЯ СТАТЬЯ

Десять лет без Манлио Сгаламбро

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Статья посвящена десятилетию со дня смерти Манлио Сгаламбро (1924–2014) – одной из самых оригинальных и радикальных фигур современной итальянской мысли. Философ, поэт, афорист и автор песенных текстов, Сгаламбро создал предельно ясное, пессимистическое и антиконформистское мировоззрение, бросившее вызов как академической философии, так и социальным нормам. Его сотрудничество с Франко Баттиато привело к уникальному синтезу философской рефлексии и музыкального выражения, где соединяются ирония и метафизическое напряжение. В статье подчеркивается аристократическое понимание философии у Сгаламбро, его критика эгалитарного мещанства и защита интеллектуальной свободы и индивидуальности перед лицом массы. Отдельное внимание уделено диалогу между нигилистической философией Сгаламбро и эзотерическим мировоззрением Баттиато, в результате которого возникла редкая форма культурного синкретизма, объединяющая ницшеанскую ясность, чорановский пессимизм и гурджиевскую метафизику. Автор акцентирует современную актуальность идей Сгаламбро как голоса несогласия и ясности в эпоху поверхностности и морального конформизма.

Ключевые слова: Манлио Сгаламбро; Франко Баттиато; итальянская философия; культурный синкретизм; нигилизм; эстетика; эзотеризм; интеллектуальная свобода

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INTRODUCTION

“An idea does not seem truly credible to me unless it also satisfies my senses” [1, p. 48].

Manlio Sgalambro is indeed (as stated on the back cover of *La piccola verità*): “The only true great ‘phenomenon’ in Italian philosophy in the second half of the 20th century” [2].

Maurizio Cosentino, in *Caro misantropo. Scritti e testimonianze per Manlio Sgalambro*, asserts that the Sicilian thinker was “a man who was able to make philosophy a way of life,”¹ and not only that:

“In doing so, he neither realized any ideal nor paid homage to any transcendent, metaphysical, or religious value. He was simply and profoundly himself, identical to his thought [...].

Sgalambro was a *unicum*. His philosophizing does not require filters or archetypes. This uniqueness of his must be considered and evaluated both within the history of philosophy, with which he engaged, and beyond the same history of philosophy, to which he already belonged, perhaps without realizing it and maybe even without wanting it. It may also be necessary to take into due account the philosophical trends (common sense or mediocrity) that he saw equally spreading and disguising themselves, pompous and self-assured, under the guise of an ‘aligned’ philosophy that leads an instrumental life, serving the species.”²

Indeed, the philosopher himself, in *La morte del sole*, states:

“Philosophers align themselves. It will suffice to have one more idea than another. The rest is craftsmanship. Ugly and shapeless, today’s philosophies lead an instrumental life. They fulfill subordinate tasks; they serve the species” [3, p. 13–14].

And further:

“Between one philosophy and another, there is no real connection; the links that history finds between them are like the chains that bind a prisoner, but his spirit is far away. The transition from one to another, which the historian executes with a snap of the fingers, is nothing but the illusion of movement that he himself projects onto it. It is he who moves, busy and zealous. Every philosophy stands alone.”³

La morte del sole is Sgalambro’s very first book, published in 1982 by the far-sighted Adelphi publishing house. On the book’s dust jacket, we read:

“In this book, a philosopher speaks whose school of thought will remain unknown to us until the very end.

But we immediately perceive his tone: it is a thought that offers us its style even before its concepts.”⁴

PHILOSOPHY AS POETRY AND SENSITIVITY

Calasso immediately recognized the quality of a thinker whose elegant perspective placed him beyond any possible classification.⁵

It is the perspective of one who has absorbed the collapse of philosophical thought and has seen the 20th century vanish silently from his shoulders, bidding farewell through syllogisms of bitterness and ‘pats on the soul’.

Philosophy is teetering on the edge of an abyss, Sgalambro whispers while shouting. And he reprimands us with the most deafening sincerity, that of one who has always been beyond philosophy, while nonetheless plunging fully into it. From the blessed island of the non-academic world, the Sicilian thinker can assert:

“The fragility of a philosophy is inversely proportional to the weight it can bear. Transparent, even spectral, can be those philosophies that take on death or being head-on. Meanwhile, a philosophy that struggles to grasp the creak of a door slowly opening, or the sound of a footstep in the night, makes superhuman efforts. These themes have the structure of a hair; they belong to the world of the small. One must take them in hand and bring them close to the eye to see them, and to the ear to hear them” [4, p. 76].

His attention often shifts to those four-dimensional gaps, as Florensky would call them, through which one can glimpse reality. It is there, precisely there, that reality unfurls in its full macrocosmic entirety.⁶ And it is in

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Also, and above all, an academic interpretation from which he remained rigorously distant throughout his life, as the profoundly free man and thinker that he was: “Precisely because of this, because of this elusiveness, Sgalambro’s works, it can be said, did not find the approval of the ‘right-thinking’ culture (culture in the very sense in which he understood it!) nor did they gain access to the academy.” M. Cosentino, op. cit., p. 56.

⁶ The Russian philosopher had a daily and privileged relationship with mystery. He speaks of it in the poignant letters written from the gulag to his children, where he recounts how, during his childhood, he saw wonders and mysteries at every corner of reality: simple pierced stones were, for him, an irresistible invitation to journey: “In them, I intuited the forces of primordial darkness from which every being was born, and what I desired was to penetrate them and settle within. [...] How I felt them respond to my childish thoughts, and how I recognized in those ‘gods’ my mysterious stones.” P. Florenskij, *Ai miei figli*, edited by N. Valentini, Milano: Mondadori; 2003, p. 81. And again, in another letter: “Determining were the searches for those places where the heartbeat of the world was perceived more clearly, where the otherworldly voices of nature spoke more distinctly. [...] My attention, however, was irresistibly fixed on everything that revealed an evident proto-phenomenality. The unusual, the unseen, the strange in terms of forms, colors, smells, and sounds, everything that was very large or very small, that was distant, that violated the closed boundaries of the ordinary, that broke into the already seen, was a magnet — not, I would say, for my mind, as it was something deeper, but for my entire being.” Ivi, p. 207.

¹ M. Cosentino, op. cit. p. 52.

² Ibidem.

³ Ivi, p. 17.

such moments that philosophy becomes poetry, for it no longer requires understanding, explanation, or even being “fitted” into dialectical, theoretical, or analytical frameworks. Sensitivity and the disenchantment of the perceiver take over. Just as in the famous *A Season in Hell*:

“I became accustomed to simple hallucination: I could see, very clearly, a mosque in place of a workshop, a school of drums run by angels, carriages in the streets of the sky, a salon at the bottom of a lake; monsters, mysteries; a vaudeville title evoked terrors before me.

Then I explained my magical sophisms through the hallucination of words!

I ended up finding sacred the disorder of my mind” [5, p. 59].

PARALLELE PERSPECTIVES: GURDJIEFF AND SGALAMBRO

The knowledge unfurling from such noumenal gaps was, in fact, inexpressible — and inexpressibility is a trait common to all traditional philosophies, a hallmark of esotericism itself. On this matter, Gurdjieff notes:

“Pure knowledge can be transmitted; but, being expressed in symbols, it is veiled by them. For those who wish to see it, and know how to look, the veil becomes transparent.”⁷

What, then, is the task of philosophy?

“To illuminate the head of a pin. Not the grand systems, the ambition of the great and perverse 20th-century philosophies that sought to produce a complete *Weltanschauung*. I believe that we must now proceed differently, that we must wander at random.”⁸

Without the horse, in fact, letting go of the reins.

It is interesting to observe how Battiato feels at ease between the philosophy of a masterful, strict, and impeccable coachman (Gurdjieff) and that of a coachman who delights in the complete absence of horses, directions, or *philosophies*.

“What do I care about philosophy? What matters to me is what lies beyond” [6, p. 54].

“Today, philosophizing no longer has the possibility of following a straight, perfect, precise line; otherwise, it becomes geo-metry — and there are no geometric philosophies now. This early part of the 21st century has no philosophies or only purely academic ones. Thus, all that remains is to accentuate whimsy, to emphasize

variation, and to refer back to the Joycean epiphany. I engaged in a sort of small duel with this other type of philosophizing, favoring non-sense, non-meaning. It is as if, suddenly, the horse had broken free, lost its reins — deliberately — and galloped about, seeking to enter and exit here and there... A ‘freed’ thought.”⁹

For Gurdjieff, it was essential that the master made his voice heard by the horse; for him, a horse without reins was equivalent to a man not only asleep but lost in the depths of his dark unawareness. For Sgalambro, however, deliberately losing the reins is desirable.¹⁰ It is likely that the philosopher had Gurdjieff’s metaphor in mind when he uttered these words.¹¹ And why? Because, as noted in the introduction, the goal is not to seek the system or the truth; rather, it is to avoid them in favour of a gain that finds its champion in freedom of expression and contradiction, cultivating attitudes aimed at safeguarding the individual. For the initiate, philosophy is not academic or systematic but chamber music.

AN ARISTOCRATIC PHILOSOPHY: THE INITIATE AND THE MASSES

“A philosophical work must remain an enigma for the masses and be like chamber music for the initiate” [7, p. 106].

The term “initiate” is particularly interesting here, as it fully connects the three great figures in question. Clearly, the philosopher attributes an intellectual meaning to the term but also, *in some way*, an esoteric one: thought is for the few, as Sgalambro reiterates throughout his work — or rather, for the very few, as Nietzsche would say. And these very few must be absolutely safeguarded.

As for everyone else, we refer to *La torre*, where Battiato “cast down the poorly made ones”: salvation is, in fact, for “the well-made ones”, at the expense of the many, of the rest of the masses, who can (and must) make way.

“I used to say that, for Baudelaire to exist, many had to disappear. I believe that, in matters of the spirit, *status belli* is the normal state” [8, p. 54].

⁷ P.D. Ouspensky, Frammenti di un insegnamento sconosciuto, op. cit., p. 315. “Realizing the imperfection and weakness of ordinary language, men who possessed objective knowledge sought to express the idea of unity in the form of ‘myths,’ ‘symbols,’ and specific ‘aphorisms,’ which, transmitted without alteration, have passed this idea from one school to another, often from one era to another.” Ivi, p. 310.

⁸ M. Assalto, op. cit.

⁹ M. Assalto op. cit. He refers again to geometry in *Del delitto*, asserting: “(She had veneration for the spirit. She couldn’t understand, she said, how the laws of geometry were so revered while the laws of the spirit were continuously debated. With the former, I replied, buildings are constructed; with the latter, systems. Few of us know that only the latter are eternal.)” M. Sgalambro, *Del delitto*, Milano: Adelphi; 2009, p. 120.

¹⁰ Of course, even though the same images of the horse and the reins are used, the approach is clearly entirely different. For Gurdjieff, it rests on an essentially psychological plane and pertains to techniques of inner transformation that also include the use of the body. For Sgalambro, the issue relates exclusively to the noetic sphere, and the disorder he longs for is, in reality, an act of mockery directed at all those systematic, moral, or “merely religious” philosophies that, by keeping the horse in check, ultimately lull the mind itself to sleep, stifling the freedom of thought and the freedom to contradict that thought.

¹¹ Or perhaps the Myth of the Winged Chariot by Plato.

On this quasi-martial hierarchy, which imprints Sgalambro's *Weltanschauung*, Professor Carlo Sini remarked in an interview:

"Sgalambro is a fine example of non-academic philosophy, as Santayana would have liked — of a nobleman, so to speak, who took tradition and read it aristocratically. This, of course, is another concept for which one gets flayed alive... No, instead, philosophy is aristocratic in the highest sense of the word, meaning it is for great souls [...]. Sgalambro was like that. He certainly started from an ethical vision of life and the world, not from philosophical science. He started from the lived experience of his time, which he read as predominantly pessimistic, predominantly bitter, with good reason. Yet, through philosophy, he drew the conviction that a scale of values needed to be reconstituted. This goes against what we mostly think today — I don't, I agree. It must be said very clearly: philosophy is not for everyone. There is no reason it should be" [9].

THE CRITIQUE OF EQUALITY

Indeed, as Nietzsche already insisted, "those who have no wings must not try to soar above the abysses". The German philosopher is also cited in *De mundo pessimo*, where Sgalambro ruthlessly hammers away at and crushes the concept of equality.

But the sound of footsteps can echo the entirety of the universe.

"To the words, 'Humanity must constantly strive to produce singularly great individuals: this, and no other, is its task,' follows the counterpoint: 'In what way does your life, the life of the individual, achieve the highest value, the deepest meaning? In what way is it less squandered? Certainly, only if you live for the benefit of the rarest and most precious specimens, and not, therefore, for the benefit of the majority — those specimens which, individually, are the least valuable" [10, p. 29; 11].

And again, this time quoting Simmel, he laments the fact that today there are no longer 'remarkable men':

"There is, rather, a blindness to what Simmel, in his *Soziologie*, calls 'importance', and which, through a cumbersome process, he defines as "the lack of a sense of the differences in importance among men". Meanwhile, there abounds a disgusting sense of their 'equality', exalted to the point of absurdity. What we perceive from the outset is, for the most part, a pronounced lack of distinctions" [10, p. 29; 11].

The philosopher continues with words that recall the famous painting *Égalité devant la mort* (Equality before Death, 1848) by William-Adolphe Bouguereau: "A vile notion makes death the great equalizer. The death of anyone, brandished before our eyes like a whip, is the

typical judgment of someone barely possessing a name, and even then, only in the way objects do" [10, p. 29; 11].

A MATTER OF STYLE: ELEGANCE AND PROVOCATION

Beyond Simmel, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Cioran are the thinkers that resonate most through Sgalambro's writings. However, a distinction must be made here. Unlike the first three, the Romanian philosopher — who saw death as 'the only state of perfection accessible to a mortal' — is curiously cited very little, despite his style and cold, lucid visionariness continuously echoing through Sgalambro's invectives. The kinship, on the plane of sensitivity even before the intellect, is often blatantly and magnificently overflowing. This, moreover — yet another reason — places the Sicilian philosopher among the greatest of contemporary philosophical thought, great precisely because they are as much builders of that thought as they are destroyers of it: in a word, untimely.

Sgalambro, whom Antonio Carulli describes as "a disembodied intellect that crushes notions and castigates the world" [11, p. 64]. continuously references Hegel, Kant, and Spinoza, systematic philosophers par excellence, despite being anything but systematic himself.¹² Like Nietzsche, he 'avoids systematic thinkers on the road', yet, unlike the German philosopher, he does not 'mistrust' them, given his ongoing and relentless engagement with their work.

In terms of style, elegance, poetry, incisiveness, drastic, lucid, disorienting, and marvelous humor, and visionariness, Sgalambro is certainly closer to Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Cioran. Yet it is precisely this that makes him a philosopher beyond any classification, a solitary philosopher in the highest sense of the term, a *unicum*, as previously noted, who feels at ease between Hegel and Nietzsche, between an unyielding atheism — 'God is the completely here' — and the mystical and esoteric impulses of Battiato, between the treatises of Western philosophical speculation and the *divertissement* of Italian television, stages, concerts, pop music, and *Me gustas tú* — albeit "me gusta Baudelaire."¹³

¹² On this "blatant" asystematicity of Sgalambro, I refer once again to the intriguing contribution by Cosentino, who, in his insightful and previously mentioned work *Manlio Sgalambro: Weltanschauung, esprit systématique e storia della filosofia*, offers an original and countercurrent reflection, strongly questioning Sgalambro's allegedly asystematic spirit.

¹³ However, as Cosentino rightly points out: "Attempting or wanting to read, present, and understand Sgalambro through Nietzsche, Cioran, Schopenhauer, Leopardi, or other authors he cited or often referenced is among the most inappropriate things one can do in regard to this autonomous, original, and free philosopher. Those who take this approach, and those who, like some prominent names within the small and modest horizon of contemporary Italian philosophy, wrote

His cold, lucid, and drastic invectives against reality, humanity, and others are nothing more than elegant exercises in misanthropy, in disdain for the overly cherished concepts of good, virtuous, and just.¹⁴

As the keen scholar Donato Novellini states:

“It is worth emphasizing Sgalambro’s absolute originality, compared to his contemporaries and successors, in addressing post-Nietzschean nihilism. Here, as a paradoxical *trait d’union* capable of linking the indolent fatalism of an isolated islander to the beautiful yellow covers (in the same shade as those of Schopenhauer and Cioran) of Adelphi’s *Piccola Biblioteca*, lies the precious ‘devil’s flour’, the philosopher’s bran. The residue of an uninterrupted intellectual grinding: the great style of a whirling blade meticulously shattering concepts, systems, and frameworks. All the work of a sophist, nobly dedicated to a trifle, to the spiral of a cigarette’s smoke. [...]”

Then comes the irrational plunge, a reckless leap from a postcard cliff into the direction of apnea. For if nothing makes sense anymore, it seems pointless to fuss over the depth of the abyss” [12].

It is precisely in this experience of ontological apnea — which again recalls Cioran’s words, ‘every river has the color of drowning’ — that Sgalambro’s sacrilegious treasure chest takes form and shape. It is made of integral defiance, perpetual provocation, and politically incorrect challenges. Among these, his union with music itself — long before his collaboration with Battiato — fits splendidly: ‘Light music is man’s laughter in the face of God, a mockery of that destiny that ensnares everything. [...] “While He [God] crushes us properly, we sing in His face” [12].

And this is because, as Stefano Sacchetti rightly asserts, Sgalambro is:

“Cynical, sarcastic, elusive to externally imposed definitions, his answers were darts aimed at overly confident consciences. He assumed the role of

dismantling false consciousness without its even realizing it. Life itself did not bother him, but the deafening and constant sound of a conformist idealism which, in his view, debased the very act of thinking. Manlio Sgalambro traversed art in various forms and expressed a thought that, like an asteroid, flew over the vitality of those forms only to store it in an eternal now” [13].

The Sicilian philosopher is “a thinker as hard and brilliant as a diamond, who looks truth in the face without deceit or calculation, expecting nothing and having nothing to lose, because everything is already lost” [14, p. 17]. Sgalambro is too free even to be free: “I don’t love free spirits as much as those who are bound, ‘says Anatol’. The ‘free’ man bores him” [6, p. 11].

POP PHILOSOPHY

It is unnecessary to say that, just like Battiato, Sgalambro also offered himself to journalists with the same aristocratic, detached, ruthless, and amused attitude, skewering the poor questioners with his ‘answers’. Bewildered, humiliated, and castigated, they were drowned in a cascade of nihilism, marked by coldness, contradiction, and the destruction of every certainty, every presumed objective value, every good, and any sense of righteousness — least of all social justice.

As Novellini observes:

“How delightful to play with the puppets of TV, isn’t it, Mr. Sgalambro? Provided one knows how to twirl in the playful, the Dionysian, in drunken pirouettes and high falconry. So, it was that the gruff, rough, and misanthropic philosopher became, at the end of the 1990s, a curious media presence; like a ripe pomegranate, stern in its arcane seeds, a situationist by exhausted fatalism, amused in answering the foolish questions of the public, the plebe that he had always detested as an indistinct humanoid mass suffocating individual freedoms. Those same applauding people laughed at his exhibited old age on stage; he, instead, laughed with a sneer at their uniform naivety. The naivety of every audience, after all. Because there was nothing more to say, except for the allegory, the outrage of the yellow Adelphi given to the masses like a brioche, for a cabaret endured on his wrinkled skin; that ancestral tragedy, so intimate to the Sicilian, at the cost of appearing ridiculous, became the elegant mockery of a cynic. [...] Sgalambro’s was the aristocracy of a reactionary moralist, all the wisdom of a skeptic of the heterodox lineage, distilled in pessimism and amusement, the art of the Human, All Too Human, in the absence of men” [12].

This art was crystallized by the philosopher in his debut as a singer with his album *Fun Club* [15] — the club of amusement, where his deeply serious philosophical framework crashed from the heavens onto the earth

in national newspapers to commemorate him immediately after his death, have attempted to say something about his philosophy by reducing and downgrading him to a mere epigone of Leopardi or, for instance, by trying to interpret the meaning of the term *pietas* (to which Sgalambro opposes impiety), have barely known him and, if read, understood him even less. These individuals have sought, or still seek, to meddle with the purity of Sgalambro’s philosophizing by introducing names and titles. In such cases, the need to classify prevails over the desire to understand, and the urge to write the history of philosophy or attempt theorization between history and aesthetics overshadows that of authentic philosophizing.” M. Cosentino, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

¹⁴ “Destroy, create, reconsider. A vortex, a flow of lava hurls and invades the categories of political philosophy commonly considered as the ‘I,’ the ‘Other,’ ‘Society,’ ‘Community.’” S. Sacchetti, *Costruire per distruggere*, Manlio Sgalambro, l’ultimo chierico: ritratto di un anti-intellettuale, February 4, 2019. URL: <https://www.barbadillo.it/80418-cultura-costruire-per-distruggere-manlio-sgalambro-lultimo-chierico-ritratto-di-un-anti-intellettuale/>

of pop, of *Me Gustas Tú* (brilliantly interpreted), of the surreal juxtaposition between encyclopedic gravity, the severity of knowledge, the collapse of the 20th century (all imprinted in his heavy gaze, all transparent in his beautifully wrinkled, wise face — more sapiential than merely learned), and the lightness of that pop music that is a slap to God, the *completely this*, as he splendidly defines it in *Del pensare breve*, mocking the theologians of the *wholly other*.¹⁵

CONTRADDICTION AND FREEDOM

Yet, through the tank of his work, Sgalambro does not mock merely one category of society but society itself, with disdain at its root:

“Society holds your hand. It forces you to have relationships. It keeps relationships ready like traps in which you will surely fall (friendship, love...). It sustains itself, in short, and squeezes the blood out of you, only to toss you aside, an empty shell. Throw it away first” [10, p. 154].

His is an invitation to ruthlessness, to cruelty toward the external world of goodness and justice, wrapped in its viral conformist moralism. It is an invitation to become a *cursed philosopher*¹⁶:

“When Socrates drank hemlock, and Bruno and Vanini burned at the stake, philosophy was doing well. Yes, I think we can affirm this. Truth stood at its edges, brushed by poisons and flames, and the philosopher drew singular courage from it, perhaps his very virtue. In any case, it showed that philosophy was not only believed in by philosophers — the laughable situation today. Philosophers must become dangerous again, then. Exiled, on the run, outlawed, persecuted? That would be their best destiny, at least for the discipline. Whereas today, the very ‘criminal’ essence of philosophy is not even a memory” [10, p. 99].

What erupts and overflows here is a disruptive intellectual freedom, an absolute rarity in today’s world, where beliefs and values — especially moral ones — are imposed by a singular, dogmatic, and politically dismal “correctness.” This correctness operates within its two or three pitiful ethical boundaries, constantly driving its stakes into society’s flesh, piercing it.

Yet it is by transcending that pierced society that one pierces it in return — and this is precisely what Master Sgalambro teaches us. However, transcending it does not mean fleeing from it; on the contrary, it means

confronting it from the heights of an elitism alien to it and, by virtue of that elitism, mocking its intentions openly, in the manner of the Futurists, through constant derision of its value system. And it is with the razor-sharp sword of contradiction that the warrior Sgalambro achieves his salvation — the most important one, the only one that matters.

There is no such thing as a “good” thought, nor a “unified” thought (what a dreadful name!), as contemporary inquisitors would have us believe from the heights of their ideological pens. Instead, there is and always will be the freedom to think, of which syncretism is merely a framework.

“I do not care to whom a thought belongs, only about its truth or, if preferred, its conformity with my own. In such cases, I appropriate it as if it were mine. However much I search within my being, I find no moral idea; I deduce that it is a reflective idea and requires at least one other to exist” [1, p. 18].

THE OTHER AS THE HERD’S PERSPECTIVE

But it is precisely the “other” that Sgalambro despises and rejects in its ontological presupposition: the other as a representative of the herd.

“My conception of the other, whoever they may be, is that of an obstacle to my lucidity. (I am someone who has no neighbour). In some respects, I feel like a god; therefore, their mere presence humiliates me. Through the other, I see myself as they do: this outrages me. [...] I have not yet reached the point of distinguishing a human being from a thing. [...] (I confirm that the best relationships are with strangers. They run smoothly and amuse. Even when they die, they bring us no pain. ‘Oh, they’re dead,’ one thinks, and moves on.)” [15, p. 24; 5].

Unamuno seems to echo this when he says: “If my neighbour were another me, why should I love them? One self is enough for me, if it is not already too much” [16, p. 106].

In essence, the other is a limitation to freedom:

“I believe that anyone who thinks must so thoroughly forget the idea of an interlocutor that they can sincerely exclude having one. What Descartes thought necessary to do preliminarily — disregard every opinion and received knowledge — I believe must be done with every interlocutor. I assume, that is, that I have none; that philosophizing, I mean, has none. This, if held as true and believed to the extent that one has absolute indifference toward every possible being, generates in the philosopher such ‘freedom’ that they can genuinely claim to have neither limits nor conditions. Indeed, I believe that the limits to knowledge arise from the existence of the other or rather, from taking them into account” [1, p. 16].

¹⁵ “To the theologians of the Wholly Other: God is the Wholly This.” M. Sgalambro, *Del pensare breve*, Adelphi, Milan, 1991, p. 124.

¹⁶ A cursed philosopher, “inspired by a saturnine and hopeless philosophy that scorns men and things, seeking only ‘a perfect thought, shining like a diamond, that follows its laws of cutting.’ Indeed, as Sgalambro says, it is always the worst philosophies that claim to improve the world.” R. Damiani, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

The “other,” as a base, despicable, dangerous being — an obstacle and limitation to the philosopher’s freedom — is carefully “manufactured” in a specific institution: the school.

“Of course, this assumes that the school’s true task is to educate and teach, that is, what it appears to do. Instead, producing mediocre and malformed individuals — which is what it actually does — is exactly what it must do. Individuals capable of keeping the system running. Strong consciences, outstanding individuals, ‘geniuses’ (who could overturn everything with just *Plutarch’s Lives*) would indeed jeopardize the common sense of life and pose a direct threat to self-preservation. The school must therefore lower intelligence and teach, as it does, how to stick together. [...] By its very nature, it must create a sense of aversion toward what it teaches at the very moment it teaches it. [...] The destruction of every concept of truth is instead its mission; boredom with beauty is what it must absolutely instill, lest the dangers this could bring for entire generations arise. A strong sense of beauty and truth would derail those unfortunate enough to be captivated by them” [10, p. 107–108].

CRITIQUE OF SOCIETY AND POLITICS

Sgalambro’s critique of society is, of course, also a critique of politics:

“Today, only politics truly confronts the disappointing picture of life, stoking hopes that even the most squalid religions would be ashamed of. The agitation of a society is most evident during the frenzy of electing its political representatives. At that moment, the madness of illusion reaches its peak” [4, p. 113].

And again, in *L’illusion comique*: “For politics, that 120-kilo pig and I would be the same” [17, p. 9].

But it is in the brilliant and “most incorrect” *Dell’indifferenza in materia di società* that the philosopher unleashes his most violent attacks and expresses his utter disdain for the carcass of politics and society:

“Man is dangerous because he exists. From a metaphysical, that is, ontological, point of view, I am an outlaw. [...] To be honest, I consider myself outside humanity” [8, p. 67].

Cioran’s echo remains steady and ever-present: “The spermatozoon, the bandit in its purest form.”

Sgalambro’s frontal attack on the world is relentless, hammering away and causing accidents, fires, and metaphysical massacres at every turn:

“Social injustice has always seemed to me a successful injustice. I derive my notion of justice from this consideration: the world must not exist. That it has no other root seems evident to me. The world must not

exist: in this, I see the principle of ethics and all true justice. [...] Evil seems perfect to me — or what is called such (in agreement with Leibniz, I would connect social evil, along with physical evil, to metaphysical evil) — it seems it should not be tampered with. [...] No, justice does not interest me at all. To a naturally metaphysical soul, the appeal of justice seems ridiculous and vain” [4, p. 56].

SGALAMBRO’S HELL

Sgalambro is a cursed philosopher, and while Rimbaud stayed in hell for only a season, he wishes to remain there eternally because “truths must be constantly changed”:

“What does it matter to believe in God,’ I whispered to her, ‘believe in Saint Thomas... (Saint Thomas, the most skilled mechanic...)”

I introduced her to a passion for hell. There is no better exercise for entering the spirituality of the strong. I made her experience hell through these words of Gregory the Great: “The soul feels the fire simply because it sees it; and it burns because it watches itself burn’ (*Dialogues*, IV, 29, 417). She told me she felt the flames licking her, felt herself burning, already enveloped by them... But, contrary to the common theologians’ deceit, she wished to remain there. It seemed we had discovered together a startling theological truth: the soul that goes to hell wishes to stay there.

She now seemed prepared for these reversals and increasingly participated, drawn to them. ‘Truths must be constantly changed,’ she dared to say.”¹⁷

As Nietzsche said, “In paradise, all the interesting people are missing,” and for cursed masters like Sgalambro, up there or down below, they will undoubtedly

¹⁷ M. Sgalambro, *Del delitto*, op. cit., p. 139. Charles Baudelaire, of whom Sgalambro was a great admirer — he even references him in his reinterpretation of the song *Me gustas tú* (from his album *Fun Club*)— would gladly go to hell for just a moment of beauty and hatred, under the banner of the triumph of contradiction: “The first figure I saw in the street was a glazier, and his piercing, discordant cry reached me through the filthy and heavy Parisian atmosphere. For that matter, it would be impossible for me to say why I was seized by a sudden and despotic hatred for that poor man. [...] At last, he appeared: I set about curiously examining all his glass panes and said to him, ‘What! You don’t have any colored glass? Pink, red, blue glass! Magnetic glass! Paradise glass! You are indecent! You dare to wander through a poor neighborhood without even carrying glass that makes life appear beautiful!’ And I briskly pushed him toward the stairs, where he stumbled, protesting. I approached the balcony and grabbed a small flower vase. When the man reappeared, exiting through the door below, I let my war machine drop perpendicularly onto the rear edge of his basket. Struck by the blow, he fell, crushing beneath his back the miserable wealth of his trade — a crash as resounding as a crystal castle shattered by lightning. Drunk with my madness, I furiously yelled at him: ‘Life in beauty! Life in beauty!’ These neurotic amusements are not without risks, and one may pay dearly for them. But what does the eternity of damnation matter to someone who has found in a single second the infinity of pleasure?” C. Baudelaire, *Lo spleen di Parigi*, edited by G. Montesano, Milano: Mondadori; 1992, p. 31.

have built another, more fitting dimension — a higher dwelling for free, aristocratic, elitist, and thoroughly politically incorrect spirits, lucid analyzers of worlds and powerful creators of universes.

“I would sweep away the concepts of good and evil, which from my point of view are of no help in finding oneself.

The form of hermitism I have in mind is that of one who isolates not to save the soul but to scatter it to the wind. Thus, various forms of hermitic life are born. I seek a trace of isolation that allows me to answer the mysterious questions dwelling within me. For the men of the future, I occasionally dream of a kind of dehumanism” [18, p. 29].

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