

Miserere. Aesthetics of Terror

Antonio Incampo
Philosophy of Law
University of Bari, Italy

Abstract

I say: “Oh, what a beautiful surrealist picture!” With quite precise awareness: this *páthos*, these emotions of mine do not stem from our *common sense*. An aesthetic judgment is founded on an immediate subjective intuition: an emotion or a free feeling of a single subject towards an object. A universal sense, possibly. Some judgments of ours in ethics and in law are no different from our perceptions in front of art. It would be the same for a hypothetical sentence of the judge that concluded with these words: “I acquit Arsenio Lupin because of his magnificent handlebar moustache like that of Guy de Maupassant”. Everyone would think intuitively that it is an unfair sentence. Is there aesthetics of terror? The case that the article intends to examine is that of the famous kidnapping and murder of the Italian statesman Aldo Moro by the “Brigate Rosse” [*Red Brigades*] (1978). The method used here consists in studying the image of the kidnapping as iconic documentation of reality, and, above all, as an ethical-legal judgment about the terrorist crime. Moro was photographed during his kidnapping. There are at least two pictures. Both constitute an extraordinary source for a judgment on the basis of an image. In both of them, Aldo Moro is pictured in front of a Red Brigades banner during the captivity. In what sense do these pictures document an aesthetic judgment concerning the “case Moro”? The answer can be found in a remarkable iconic coincidence of these pictures with a masterpiece by Georges Rouault (Paris 1871-1958) devoted to the theme of the “*Ecce Homo*”. The Gospel in the “*Ecce Homo*” scene (*John*: 19, 4-5) narrates how Pontius Pilate wanted to arouse the compassion of the people with a scourging and the exposure of Jesus to the crowd. The plate under consideration is entitled “*Qui ne se grime pas?*” [Who does not have a painted face?] and is a key work in Rouault’s *suite* of prints *Miserere*, dated for 1923.

Keywords: aesthetic, law, miserere, Moro Aldo, pathos, terror, Rouault Georges.