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Lenta ginestra.**Saggio sull'ontologia
di Giacomo Leopardi**

By Antonio Negri

Milano: SugarCo Edizioni, 1987

This book should not be underestimated, though it is easy to predict it will be. Shall we say this is due mainly to the fact that Antonio Negri—a philosopher who talks about a poet—is, so to speak, invading a space in which he does not belong? But Antonio Negri is not only an academic philosopher. Everyone knows him as a political thinker, revolution theorist and, according to Italian justice, spiritual father of all the tolerance and sympathy toward extreme-left terrorism that made Italy's days so hard in the second half of the seventies. Antonio Negri is, also, still an uncomfortable presence, struggling from his Parisian residence not to be overcome by the recent turns of Italian political and philosophical debate. "E chiaro che questo mio libro si rivolge ai non pentiti," he says (383). This should read: to everyone who believes that, after the Restoration, the Revolution is still possible. Are these "unrepentant ones" going to read this book? Are they going to need it?

For them, the preface is perhaps sufficient. "Leopardi europeo" (7-18) recovers all the assertive and flamboyant style that inflamed the young "autonomists" who read the famous/infamous *Il dominio e sabotaggio: Sul metodo marxista della trasformazione sociale* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1976). In the other 386 pages, the entire encyclopedia of Negri's readings—ranging from the Renaissance to the most recent and different authors—has been recruited to lay siege to Leopardi's citadel. The statement is simple and fascinating too: Leopardi is the real anti-Hegel, the true "sovvertitore dell'

'essere" (92), due to his total refusal of every dialectic mediation. He is not pessimist, moralist or progressive, because "il suo pensiero e la sua poesia sono puramente e semplicemente rivoluzione" ("his poetry and his thought are pure and simple revolution") (16). The dimension of his philosophy is "un'ontologia tutta positiva che non lascia spazio all'ideologia, comunque interpretata" ("a wholly positive ontology that leaves no room for ideology, no matter how the latter is defined") (86). What makes Leopardi's thought so alternative is his use of the "immaginazione" not as a means for knowledge, but instead as the constitutive act of "infiniti mondi" ("infinite worlds") (118).

Let us not forget that, in the bibliography of Negri's works, Leopardi comes after Spinoza. *L'anomalia selvaggia: Potere e potenza nel pensiero politico di Spinoza*, (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1982) is in fact the title of his previous book. Even if Negri is assuring us that he is not trying to make a Spinoza out of Leopardi (surely Leopardi could not consider our miserable existence "divine," as we read at 330), Negri's mention of the "all positive ontology" must be taken seriously. Ontology of fullness is the key to the Spinozian pantheistic materialism, and the same kind of anti-dialectic and anti-nihilistic ontology is what Negri wants to find in Leopardi's materialistic atheism.

Why? Because, I think, this seems the only way to give a foundation to an "ontological revolution" after the collapse of the ideological one. What is a "pura rivoluzione" against the being itself, if not the ultimate utopia? Leopardi is the only materialist after Giordano Bruno in the history of Italian thought, but, owing to the increasing evidence of the utmost radicality of his philosophy, it is easy for Negri to gently get rid of the "consolatory" Marxist interpretations of the "Leopardi

progressivo" school (Luporini, Binni, Timpanaro, Biral). His Leopardi stands as a titan, as a sarcastic destroyer of every political and philosophical compromise, whose conception of being and existence is fortified only by the experience of desire and the acquaintance with grief. The portrait is impressive and Negri does not lack in rhetorical energy and familiarity with the matter. The abundant footnotes, especially the polemical ones, are among the best and more interesting pages. Of course, Negri never suspects that radical, sensistic materialism could be just another chapter in the history of metaphysics. His hasty remarks on Heidegger demonstrate that Negri is simply not concerned with the issue of ontological difference, accepting the being of beings the way the metaphysical tradition has thought it and handed it down to us. Great skill in analysis is not required to illustrate how much Negri depends on the language and the schemes of the criticized Hegelian dialectic. He rarely tries to match and follow Leopardi's language. He does not really "listen" to the text. He merely translates the poet into a modern Hegelian left *repertoire*, of which he has great masters. This makes the book a partially wasted chance. Its "over-philosophy" and massive erudition often turn out to be pedantic, a fault which should be carefully avoided in the revolutionary and provocative perspective that Negri claims. A pamphlet could have served better. The thousands of quotations and references are just a case of overkill, not required by the matter at issue. And, speaking of overphilosophy, when Negri promptly discards every comparison between Leopardi and Kafka to the point that Kafka's philosophical background is made to belong to neo-Kantism, he just as quickly forgets that "la tesi di Kafka sul pensiero di Mach" ("Kafka's thesis on Mach's thought") that he mentions

at page 352 was actually written by Musil.

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The Plague-Sower
By Gesualdo Bufalino
Hygiene, CO: Eridanos, 1988

Gesualdo Bufalino's *The Plague-Sower* may be regarded as a heretical interpretation of judeo-christianity. Cultures differ in attitudes toward heresy: in predominantly protestant United States, a recent heretical film on Jesus was met with a barrage of hostility; in catholic Italy, where popular beliefs often vary dramatically from established doctrine, Bufalino's story won the Premio Campiello in 1981 and the Premio Strega in 1988.

The author describes "a flat, ash-colored road, running with a river's flow between two walls taller than a man . . . jutting over the void." Beatrice of Dante's *Divina Commedia* has been replaced by a tubercular jewess, Marta, who had survived the Holocaust but, as the story begins, lies dying in a sanatorium.

To inmates of this Palermo sanatorium in the summer of 1946, death seems at once angelic and whorish. The trinity has become a doctor who rages in his unbelief/belief, a priest whose despair is nearly bottomless, and Marta, coupled with the protagonist/author.

Dr. Longbones, watching his patients die in pain, shouts: "He exists: there can be no guilt without a guilty party." In the doctor's outbursts (which, the author notes, contained as much "anguish as buffoonery"), God