

Assange against the avenging Furies

The Furies pursue Julian Assange. They are three horrid deities, angry and avenging. Greek mythology calls them Alecto, Megera and Tisifone.

The power wants Assange dead. This has been denounced by personalities close to him and committed to his cause, such as Yanis Varoufakis, former Greek Minister of Economy, Stefania Maurizi, an Italian journalist who has defended him from the beginning, and Roger Waters, the star of Pink Floyd. Assange is wanted dead, his mother, his father and his girlfriend say so and repeat it. The United Nations, through Nils Melzer, a specialist in torture and mistreatment, has declared that Assange's life is at risk.

The disjunctive offered by the Power is not absolution or sentence; freedom or imprisonment; the United States or England. It is between three forms of death: death penalty, forced suicide or burial in life. Three, like Furies, Erinias or Eumenides. Death penalty could be represented in Alecto, that of snake hair. Forced suicide, in Megera, the one that cries blood. And the burial in life in Typhon, the one who carries the whip.

Today Assange celebrates a partial victory. The extradition to the United States, which was hanging over him like a sword of Damocles, has been denied by a judge of Great Britain. The outcome of the appeal is pending. For Assange, extradition would mean the death penalty, the maximum and exemplary punishment against those who are labeled as spies, traitors and enemies of his nation. The United States, which needs to keep its own crimes secret, accuses the man who reveals them of being a criminal.

The British justice has rejected the extradition on the grounds that Assange could take his own life if he is locked up in one of the rough American prisons. This is where the shadow of Magera, the Fury of forced suicide, appears. The verdict is not based on the claim that Assange is innocent. Nor does it recognize that any conviction against him involves demolishing the basis of freedom of the press. It overlooks the legal absurdity of the United States demanding that England hand over to it an Australian journalist who revealed military secrets in Afghanistan and Iraq. And it sets a precedent so that any journalist anywhere who reports crimes from any country can be extradited... unless he commits suicide.

In the old cruelly childish game of hangman, a little doll has to be drawn, part by part, as the player fails: the arms, legs, head, eyes and, at the end, the platform: a rope around the neck that gives meaning to the pastime. Assange, tormented, cornered and pressed to the limit of his resistance, would find no other way out than to inflict death on himself. This is what is presupposed. The irony is that Justice itself corners, torments and pressures Assange to the very edge of suicide, and then seeks to protect him by preventing him from committing suicide. He washes his hands, like Pontius Pilate: We are not going to extradite you, but not because you are innocent, but because you are weak. Similarly, the all-powerful and benevolent British state exempts you from torment because you are prone to depression and prone to suicide. Thus, you come out of the problem without recognizing that the opposite is true: strength on the part of Assange, and fragility of some States consumed in the dirt of their secrets.

This sets a precedent and has a history. It is based on an ancient form of execution that gave the victim the choice between committing suicide or a worse alternative, such as death penalty, torture, banishment, dishonor or life imprisonment. Forced suicide: if you don't kill yourself,

we'll kill you. Viewed from another angle, suicide was assumed to be an act of defiance, a defeat of the authority that defeats you: if there is nothing left to burn, you set your own heart on fire. This is the case of Socrates, when, arrested in Athens under the accusation of corrupting the youth with his teachings, he ends the farce by drinking hemlock. Seneca, the great tribune, sentenced to death in Rome for his alleged participation in a conspiracy against Nero, cuts his veins and bleeds in a bathtub. Do you remember Frank Pentangeli in *The Godfather II*? In 1925, Yukio Mishima, a Japanese writer, nostalgically pro-imperial, meets with a small group of samurai after the failure of their revolt, and following a code of ethics that demands to die with honor before accepting defeat, commits suicide by harakiri, or unraveling ritual.

This scenario of forced suicide descends to our days and is generalized among those who reveal the crimes of the State. In 2010, the American Chelsea Manning, a transgender soldier and intelligence analyst, discovered evidence of atrocities, torture and massacres committed by her army in Afghanistan and Iraq. She did not want to be a bureaucrat who, closing her eyes and limiting herself to carrying out orders, embodied what Hanna Arendt called the banality of evil. Instead, despite the high risk she was taking, she made the decision to pass the material to Wikileaks, Julian Assange's website.

One of the materials he gave her was the video now known as *Collateral Murder*. It shows an episode from 2007, in Baghdad. The staff of an American Army Apache helicopter enthusiastically massacres, as in a video game, twelve Iraqi civilians. Among them were two journalists from the Reuters agency who were walking peacefully down a street, and who the staff would later try to pass off as terrorists in a typical case of false positives. The other side of that story is significant. Because of that video and similar materials, Trump is asking for Assange's extradition. But later he

granted a presidential pardon to the Blackwater mercenaries, condemned precisely for massacring fourteen civilians in a Baghdad square in 2007. As a result, Trump considers the crime committed forgivable, but severely punishable for denouncing it.

Discovered for her leaks, Manning is accused of 22 offenses and is dishonorably discharged. One of his transgressions warrants a death sentence: treason for helping the enemy. Reduced to total confinement in a maximum security facility, she is released after seven years, after having led a hunger strike and committed two suicide attempts.

In 2013, the programmer prodigy of North America, Aaron Swartz, known as the Son of the Internet, considered that it was a miserable attitude not to share knowledge as he had received in elite universities. He was arrested on four charges of computer fraud and attempting to publish private databases. The State increased the initial penalty from one million dollars and 35 years in prison to four million and 50 years. Such was the pressure, so overwhelming was the dead end, that Swartz committed suicide by hanging himself from a rope, as in the macabre game of hangman.

Thousands of anonymous people, enraged by Swartz's forced suicide, unleashed a barrage of cyber-attacks against intelligence agency websites. Urged to set an example, and to give a name to an anonymous crowd, Justice chose as a victim Lauri Love, a young British hacker and autistic named none other than Love. Love had been doing severe computer hacking with a computer he kept hidden in a closet in his parents' home in London, and was arrested on charges of massive theft of official data. In clear precedent of what has just happened with Assange, England denied his extradition on mental health grounds that would lead him to extreme depression and suicide.

Enter now into the scene of Typhoon, the Rage of the Whip and the Burial in Life. The third death. Assange has been exempted

from extradition, but denied parole, and remains in Belmarsh prison, the English Guantanamo, where he has been held for the past three years, confined 23 hours a day in total isolation and sensorial deprivation. In his cell, his fight against Typhoon is constant. If he wants to survive, he must keep her at bay. Yanis Varoufakis, who visited him in Belmarsh last June, could see how he resists minute by minute, determined to preserve at all costs his integrity and lucidity. "As soon as I let go of my guard, I lose it," he told Varoufakis. Pedro Miguel, from the Mexican newspaper La Jornada, knows Assange personally and believes that "no one is better prepared than he is for the situation he has to face".

They accuse me of being a demon, a monster. The phrase is from Assange himself. But monster comes from showing. Monster is the one who shows, and Assange's ordeal shows us how Power manipulates Justice. Any of the three forms of death applied to Assange would be a coup de grace for the freedom of the press. To see him alive, lucid and free is the battle of his vast solidarity network, and of every journalist, researcher, informant, filter, writer, artist, academic or hacker who believes in the right to inform and be informed. And that revealing the truth cannot be a cause of death.