1|2|2-1

1

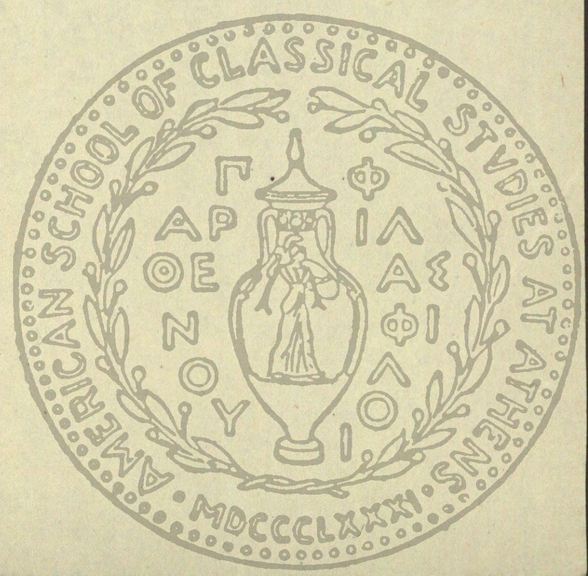
II - 2

Ç. 1-9

MATER TENEBRARUM

" She is the defier of God. She also is the mother of Lucifer and the suggestress of suicides. And her name is Mater Tenebrarum — Our Lady of Darkness."

De Quincey.



How can my Muse want subject & invent
While thou dost breathe. - -
Shakespeare.

Even today I cannot remember without some emotion that:

"Pourquoi pas?"

The words were uttered by Antony with the difficulty and the clumsiness that sometimes make the Englishman's French so moving. But, as you may well imagine, it was not only the accent that moved me so. The fair, young Englishman who spoke the French phrase - or rather the boy, for he was hardly nineteen — looked so frail, so unprotected as he sat in the huge easy-chair of crimson velvet. Yet he was saying that his device was "pourquoi pas" - why not - and shrugged his shoulders as if asking "what can I do?" "what can we do?"

3

and was smiling submissively. I was
ten years older and I felt affection and respect
for the purity of his being. How could I not
then feel the necessity to protect him? But how?
I felt the urge to take hold of his hand,
as if wanting to warn him for the misfortune
that was so inexorably approaching or
as if to protect him from it. But I thought
that such a gesture would have been not
only useless but also ridiculous and I turned
my head away, for I felt that tears were
coming to his eyes. Antony did not suspect that
day how much his motto had moved me. But
neither did I know the story you are about
to read yet. I heard it somewhat later
and I laughed very much — perhaps because
there were other people present also — and I hope
that you will be amused too. But before
anything else I would like to tell you about
how much the "Pourquoi Pas?" moved me that day

3/ and also add a few words about my personal relations with Antony. I think it is perhaps fair to make you laugh at me before I shall make you laugh at others. I know that what seems to me so sacred:- my tears for the brave boy that surrenders himself so defenceless against and unsuspicious of life - this very thing may seem to you no more than some silly or even ridiculous sentimentalism. I, also, have often laugh at other people's sentiments and I feel that I must pay for it. This is why I surrender so defencelessly to your mirth. If I had, that day, hidden my eyes from Antony, I no longer do it to you today. He could have been surprised, "I think that I had been more familiar than I should, and, as he is so reserved by nature, withdraws, or even accept rather stoically by silliness, shrugging his shoulders with a "Pourquoi pas?"

AMERICAN SCHOOL OF CLASSICAL STUDIES AT ATHENS · MDCCCLXXXI

4

But you will laugh; and, to be frank, my only ambition is to make people laugh. And if at times, like now for instance, I am carried away and shed a tear in the presence of others, this means that I am not afraid to make people laugh at my expense. But let them be careful, so as not to be carried away themselves by my emotion and be themselves moved. For then, they are running the risk that we too may laugh at them.

I noticed Antony for the first time at a lecture room in Cambridge. He sat alone on the back desk and the cold and far-away look in his eye caught one's attention, for it was so incompatible with his age. From the first moment I realised that I could have never got to know him, without being formally introduced. And I felt that even after a formal introduction, it would have still been difficult for one to approach such a proud sensitivity. For everything in the face of the boy— this big and hard blue eyes behind the spectacles, the nose with

5 the dilated nostrils, that from time to time trembled so peculiarly, this mane of fair, untidy and uncut hair, the thin and erect neck — all these showed that the young man's pride was only equalled by his sensitivity.

He always came alone and very early to the lectures, and preferred to sit on the back desk. He didn't greet anybody, and once, when somebody smiled at him, someone who had not been formally introduced to him, he ignored him, pretending that he hadn't seen him, and turned his head away proudly. And yet, one felt by the trembling of his nostrils, the disturbed expression of his eyes, and by some spasmodic and nervous movements of his body that nothing escaped his sensitiveness from what was going on around him. I admit that these observations made me wish to know him. But how could I succeed, when he seemed to know nobody? And I am sure that had not fortune favoured me in the most incredible manner, I would have never met Antony and you would have never read this story.

I used to see him practically every day at the lectures and very often at the Theatre or at concerts in Cambridge, but it was in London that I met him

Lady L.. had sent me an invitation to a reception she was giving in that ~~~~ pleasant house of hers in St. Leonard Terrace. I had heard from mutual friends about the interesting couple and the good music one enjoyed on such occasions and

-- — — — ——

A dream of love

Shaped by some solitary nymph, whose breast
Long'd for a deathless lover from above,
And madden'd in that vision---

BYRON

Madame Photakos made an effort to sit up on her bed, in order to enjoy the sight of a wounded enemy, but when she realized what senses meant to her, how they tortured and killed her, she collapsed once again heavily on the pillow.

"Oh, the senses!" she sighed, holding her heart

"'I', have no senses?" Hero repeated, fully bent to challenging her enemy. But she had so many arguments, that she didn't know where to start from, and kept on repeating "I?" "I?" until she was in a position to begin her attack.

"Oh, the senses", repeated Madame Photakos, on the other hand, breathing with difficulty. They've made me a wretched wreck, they've humiliated me, and they'll be my death. What am I now? A wreck--- a wreck...

AMERICAN SCHOOL OF CLASSICAL STUDIES AT ATHENS MDCCCLXXXI

tattered by the senses..." and two big, round tears ran from her eyes

"Listen to that! I have no senses!" continued the other "But you know very well, Maria, that if I have something, it's senses. They make me feel the divine in life. Don't you remember that day in Glyfada with Axiotis? I bit a pear and in its taste I felt Nature so strongly that I almost bursted. Don't you remember how I cried out: "My dear, I cannot suffer any longer, I will burst." And you remember how Axiotis admired me.--- Axiotis--- "Here is a true Greek woman, he said, who [makes love to] sleeps with the Gods in a fear".

"Words, words and play-acting" said madame Photakis, jumping quickly from her bed. The recollection of that day at Glyfada was not at all pleasant to her. And now that the opportunity to revenge was given her, would [it not] have been a pity not to make use of it? Some Love senses, and some pretend to have senses. And the pity of it is, that those who pretend benefit from it much more than the others, the true ones. There are the injustices of the world.

"What do you mean? That Aristis should kiss you that day instead of me? Or do you want to say, perhaps, that he cannot distinguish the fake from the true?"

"I pity his kiss, I say" replied the other looking with some sort of satisfaction and yearning at her naked feet, which seemed younger than ever. Women without senses should not be censured. One's tenderness is wasted --- Yes, wasted --- wasted ---." Tell me for God's sake what did you feel the day Aristis kissed you?".

"What did I feel? Oh, my God! How terrible like to tantalise me. How can it be possible to describe such a thing!"

"Don't tire yourself, because you'll never find out what those who really feel experience."

"This is just what I'm thinking. I'm thinking that you could have never felt that shuddering which the revelation of the divine affords the senses. It doesn't matter how many details I'd give you, you'll never imagine what's like to be in the arms of Apollo, Zeus, to be embraced by God! ---- I've experienced it

perhaps as many as ten times until now, and I hope I'll feel it many, many ~~other~~ more times before I die:—"

Madame Photakos shuddered and felt tears surging in her eyes. But she tried to halt them.

"Words, only words" she said swallowing a sob.

"What you've just said, you've never experienced because such things don't exist" (But how she wished they existed, so that she herself could have felt them) "I'll tell you myself what you felt the day Aaiotis kissed you" (Here she didn't succeed in thwarting her sobbing and an unearthly sound was heard at the end of the sentence. The long kiss of that day in her presence, had opened a wound inside her that she couldn't touch without crying with agony) "You've felt the joy of ~~the~~ a kiss by a great poet, and nothing more. Only a joy of vanity. Not a joy - or rather pain — of blood. I remember you. After the kiss you beamed with pride, you shone, you triumphed, but you felt no other emotion of any kind. You weren't melting from pleasure."

"But, of course, I had my dignity to consider. I couldn't show what I felt infront of so many people"

5 "Women who really love senses. do not know the meaning of dignity. Indeed, how well I could even suffer to be humiliated and be made a wretch in the eyes of the whole world by the man who would have given me true pleasure"

This last phrase coming from the lips of the unkept and almost naked old woman was so ridiculous that Hero couldn't help smiling. But Madame Photakis hadn't noticed her smile, for that very moment she was taking off her stockings, which she had in the meantime put on, & look once more at her feet, so peculiarly young and ungainly. Nature had not been generous & her. "I have been humiliated so many times. she whispered, sadly. But I had decided it should be so. Those who do not risk their dignity, cannot gain anything. They gain nothing, nothing" She shuddered again. The word 'nothing' frightened her so terribly lately. "Nothing" she repeated with blank eyes. "Except very few things, except you" she said looking at Hero with

6 tenderness. "What would I do without you. Come and sit by me and tell me that I haven't lost everything. Tell me that I still have you". Hero went and sat by her without any hesitation and let her put her arms round her and rest her face on her shoulder.

"We've been talking for so long about the senses" said the older woman to the girl "and yet we've forgotten the feelings. These also exist, and also, how terrible it would have been had they not existed"

Hero put her arm around the hard, bony waist of her friend. She rather hoped that she would have thus make the other woman take back what she had said about her senses.

"I know that you don't want to recognise the feelings" Madame Photakos was saying, stroking the girl's hair. "For me, the girl said coldly, "there are only senses" Madame Photakos pretended that she didn't understand.

7. And instead of replying, she kissed the girl's neck.

"Only the senses and desires" insisted Hero leaning her head gently against the other woman's face. But Madame Photakos had made up her mind not to give in. "My good, dear friend" she whispered only.

"For I believe that only the senses, desires and passions reveal to us God, our Greek God"

Then followed silence.

Hero was compelled to speak differently.

"Dear Maria, she said tenderly, do you really think that our friendship is purely emotional and not at all sensual? I don't believe it, as far as I am concerned. To love you so much, it means that you appeal to my senses, because for me only the things that appeal to my senses can exist." Madame Photakos knew what Hero was wanting from her, and had decided not to give in. Later she would repent bitterly very soon. The girl, intoxicated with the picture of herself as she would have wished it, and forgot her immediate purpose and was talking away:

8. "If God who wouldn't have spoken to my senses, wouldn't have been a God for me. This is the reason I'm so Greek." (Here her voice became solemn and acquired a chanting quality, as if she were reciting:) "I am expecting him like Semele, like Leda, like Europa" She hesitated a little before each name, because she couldn't remember them all at once "like Danae and all the others. I expect him to come to me as a swan, a bull or a beautiful youth". And remembering the episode of Glythada. She added: "Or perhaps as a fruit, for me to possess him, to kiss him, to become his. This is the purpose of my life: to become the mistress of a God. I feel that this is my fate. And I feel him coming to me."

Madame Photakos was sobbing loudly. Had she replied earlier to Hero's insisting challenging, the girl wouldn't have shown her a picture of a happiness that could no longer be hers. And she was crying and being hurt, for

9 ~~her~~ fate was not only denying her to be
the mistress of a God, but ~~even~~ the lover of
a desirable, common mortal. She hated
the warm, strong body of the girl, as her
hands held it and pressed it desperately.
Very often, during sleepless nights, she dreamed
that she was killing her friend, either
shooting her, or poisoning her, and was
feeling such a relief, a pleasure and
peace. And yet she couldn't live without
her. Everything that happened to Hero,
somehow it happened to her also. The day Hariotis
kissed Hero before her, she was very much
hurt, yet she too had a minute but certain
share of Hero's pleasure. It few crumbs
from the rich table. This was something, instead
of nothing. And she was sobbing about and
put her arms desperately round the girl's
neck, like a drowning person to the man that is
saving him.

"You're right," she was saying between
her sobs "our friendship is something sensual,
something very sensual"

Hero smiled with satisfaction.

AMERICAN SCHOOL OF CLASSICAL STUDIES AT ATHENS · MDCCCLXXXI ·