

**Nikos Xenios, extract from the novel "THE GUTS", Kritiki editions, Athens, Greece**

*THE TEENAGERS of the military school "Saint Cyrile" organized these strange soirées at the pub "Onion Cellar", on the anniversary of the battle of Austerlitz. The choice of this particular historical battle picked my curiosity and it was one of these evenings when I asked: What did Napoleon have to do with our time? The answer - if one can call it thus - was impressive: one of them - I think they called him Julien - instead of explaining, took off his shirt and proudly showed me his hairless chest. A simple, very simple tattoo represented a small Greek letter "m". In the midst of all that fuss I put my head closer to see and he bent down to my ear and uttered aloud in French: "mu": something between "me" and "mi". I still did not understand. Then this teutonic figure turned to his friends, who had been drinking beers and running. They laughed, with this characteristically carefree grimace that the northerners make with their lower lip when they feel relaxed.*

*-He doesn't know what "mu" is! Julien joked, pointing at me with his index finger and, automatically turning to me again, asked the interrogator: What's your opinion about women?*

*-What do you mean?*

*-I said: what do you think about women.*

*-A...bah...the best, of course!*

*- Wrong! grimaced Julien.*

*-Wrong? Why wrong?*

*--'Cause all women are "grosses", he answered in French and he burst into laughter. Immediately the others started laughing. I was annoyed. But I did not have time to react.*

*-What did Napoleon do in Austerlitz? asked Julien, trying to interrogate me.*

*- He won! I uttered, pretending I hadn't noticed the change of subject.*

*-- Well, 't wasn't exactly him who won. the infantry men, the cavalry and the gunners, these were the real winners! Great men, don't you think? Fancy that, their*

*fathers were all insignificant: one was maker of barrels, one was a notary, another was a merchant. But they were all men, my friend! Real Men!*

*-Men! repeated the others and closed their eyes with a conspiracy expression.*

*Julien leaned down closer to my face, half-smiling:*

*-What you now see ... I mean the letter "m" ...it means: "misogyne"! he declared proudly.*

*This clarification confused me more. Where had Napoleon to do with all this? Why should a notary be insignificant? And why did these young people tattoo their misogyny on their bodies with such a pride?*

*But I didn't have the time to think: the very next minute a redhead woman rushed into the bar, wearing the famous Napoleon hat and the insignia of the officer of the same school "Saint Cyrile". She was a classmate of theirs, probably a military career woman, who frequented the same pub. The combination of her skin colour with her reddish hair was impressive: you could at least call that girl beautiful. They all turned around and looked at her. She – evidently of the same persuasion as her male company - interpreted the script of a mini-show: she stripped her breasts in front of everyone and, the moment the bartender smiled with a secret complicity, the exact same tattoo appeared near her nipple: "m", with a highlighted um-laut.*

*The smile on their faces was immediate:*

*-Look at her! Look at her! shouted my interlocutor, addressing his French classmates. The girl looked anything but annoyed.*

*-She is not like the others! Julien declared, then he raised his beer as if making a toast and shouted in French: - Youlez les! as if waiting for the rest of the men to finish his sentence.*

*Immediately, as if they had put it forward, all together the French completed the sentence:*

*-Youlez les grosses! and they raised their own beers in a toast, bursting into laughter.*

*The redhead girl made a sharp movement with her right hand and she suddenly took off the wig, along with her Napoleonic hat. She was completely bald, with a carefully shaved skull. Everyone in there turned and looked at her approvingly. Then, with her head and chest bare, the girl fell into the arms of the manlier between them, kissing him passionately on the mouth. Everyone applauded. A second muscular arm of Saint Cyril's boys inserted his tongue into her mouth shortly afterwards. Then, a third. The atmosphere was electrified, all of a sudden.*

*-Now, you might have understood now? Julien asked, winking at me.*

*-Understood what?*

*- I said: do you understand now why Napoleon?*

*-Oh, yes, I understand now, yes! answered I with a smile.*

*But, to be honest, I did not understand. All I realized was that that woman was part of their company. And that this absurdity concerned me, in a strange way: it fascinated me and it somehow concerned me. Was it the Irrational itself, was it this explicit combination with eroticism? Was that woman different from the others, and did she have any self-respect at all? I couldn't give any answer. What was happening in front of me was terribly exciting. As the fumes of beer stunned me and many, many explanations were not needed, my new German acquaintance shouted:*

*--Bottoms up!*

*My psychosynthesis was that of someone who always attributes those of Caesar to Caesar and those of God to God. Apparently, these traditionalists had a huge problem facing women, Jews, gypsies and, most likely, homosexuals. And that, for some inexplicable reason, scared me. So, without thinking much, I lifted the heavy glass and I toasted:*

*-To Napoleon's health!*

*And I emptied the glass in one go.*

**Nikos Xenios, extract from the novella "A triple apartment for Oedipus", Farfoulas Editions, Athens, Greece**

*LEONIDAS was terrified by ignorance, he actually could not stand it: ignorance has always been the great fear of civilized societies. "People do not want to face the truth, Vera!" he said. Perhaps the word "ignorance" does not accurately describe what — in an in-depth approach — we would call "voluntary ignorance" or — why not? — "voluntary blindness." Oedipus takes his eyes off with his own hands only in order to see the truth that the world of the senses deprives him of.*

*Is this, apart from idealism, the quintessence of Tragic? Misinterpreting, believing one is other than one really is, caressing the body of a woman who is one's own mother, having one's children dragging their father in front of the judge and claiming their father's property...*

*Leonidas opens the package with the "Papastratos" cigarettes. He pulls one out, he cuts it into four. He cuts this quarter of a cigarette again, he pours it in a small pipe and he lights it. He looks down, all contemplation. He then gets up and he touches the objects in the room. These are no longer cups, ashtrays, books, posters: they are parts of his own skin, they are the roots of the rock, near the combed chamomile that grows in the thickets outside Athens. Every step he takes is a thorn, every touch of his is an abrasion, that opens a new passage to the abyss of this city. His tattered clothes leave scratches on all the sharp and angular objects. Trip of violence and exile. With his own departure, the town of Thebes loses the blessing and inherits the curse. His unfortunate fellow citizens fantasize there is a better tomorrow for those who made mistakes. But nothing. None of*

*this. Only mud and fallen houses. The citizens in this thicket believe in divine justice. They consider every step of a stranger in their territory as violation of a sacred place. They tremble and in dance their unwavering faith in the gods.*

*Stasimon Number Two: just at the moment when they rise up against the afflicted Oedipus, they hold him back, they are an obstacle for his journey, they remind him of his mortality and lawlessness. And then he, the alien man, raises his voice. The Athenian elders ignore Oedipus's direct communication with the spirits of the earth. While his two children trample him, while they show him the way to the upper world, he keeps following his prescribed course.*

*Now that Leonidas walks this path verse by verse, he sees Vera closing her eyes, listening to the utmost degree of bitterness being uttered. Leonidas takes the curse and processes it. He throws various medicines in her prescription, which he prepares in this heavy old house- now an alchemy laboratory, flooded with memories and unrealized plans. Under the watchful eye of his dead wife.*

*From the frame of her frozen photo, Magdalene sees paths in the sacred grove, while deities embrace the old olives and silver their leaves. But she does not recognize him. She does not know who really is this man who tries to reach her. She vaguely remembers — and a smile so hurriedly formed on her lips — her journey into the universe of her familiar objects. She feels the enormous pressure that was put upon her, she remembers the small blackmails she could not stand, the gradual loss of memory, the gradual loss of direction.*

*Leonidas does not want to look away, he does not want to turn. Nowhere. What had been for her whole life is now lying in front of her in this small living room in the three rooms apartment at Exarcheia.*

*—"What is the holy land where we come from?" recites Leonidas in a thunderous voice. He amuses with Vera's expression, who is probably afraid that, sooner or later, the neighbors will call the Police.*

*Leonidas is struggling again to light his quarter of a cigarette.*

*—"These fields around say that Colonos will defend them!" he continues with high voice. He notices an inexplicable stress on Vera's face: her real motivation, the real interpretation of the role, they are now explicitly reflected in her eyes.*

*It's simple; Oedipus is lonely and desolate, betrayed by all; he walks around in an abandoned, deserted place; he suddenly realizes how annoying every human presence is to him.*

*-“Does this place has any inhabitants?” he screams in disgust.*

*He doesn't give a damn what Negrepontis wants for his mise-en-scene of the tragedy. Let the director do whatever he wants, who gives a shit!*

*This rehearsal is Leonidas's own rehearsal, it is a real life's rehearsal. He has got this role, and now this role is, to him, a piece of cake...*