

MISTER DUDRON¹
(FROM A NOVEL IN PREPARATION WITH THE SAME TITLE)

Sitting at a rustic table near the entrance of a tavern from where wafts of the sour odour of wine came, Mister Dudron had taken from his jacket the notepad in which he took note in rapid sketches and in thoughts and even in verses, what he saw and what he imagined. And so, he hurriedly wrote this strange and profound poem that had lightened upon his mind:

“I saw men enter and exit the houses... I saw sweet blooms sprout and expand. I became acquainted with the great laws that define themselves through number. I engraved marks in the darkest caves... When the wind cried near the drowsy stations I thought about the old gods like one thinks of ants. And everywhere the vagabond life roars, everywhere the wreckage of shipwrecks floats on the wave. An eternal work continued over years unites the instant of today with the sweet dreams of a time that was...”.

But Mister Dudron wrote no longer. He was aware that down below, the sacred hill of the Acropolis raised itself up. He thought of how he could enter that place at night and hide himself without being seen, to spend the night. “Once, thought Mister Dudron, one could, in the day as well as at night, go freely on that extraordinary hill and I remember when in my childhood my father, holding my hand, took me up there and among the ruins of broken columns he spoke to me of a time when the inhabitants of the peninsula adored the gods and offered them sacrifices, one could, even after sunset, remain on the sacred mount of the Acropolis. Instead today, not only does one have to pay to enter but at a certain point, toward sundown, a guardian circulates among the ruins and with a nasal voice announces the closing of Pallas and Athens’s sacred place.”

Mister Dudron looked at his watch. It was five p.m. In an hour he thought, or little more, the gates of the Acropolis will close. I would need to go now and just before closing try and hide myself behind a column or on the ground between the ruins and wait for the closing of the gates, in order to remain alone all night on that sacred hill under the infinite vault of stars. And this is what he did; he climbed

¹The novel *Signor Dudron* was published posthumously in 1998 in commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the death of the Maestro by the Giorgio and Isa de Chirico Foundation (Le Lettere, Florence). It is known that the Maestro started ideating *Signor Dudron* after the publication of the novel *Hebdomeros*. The complete design of what *Signor Dudron* was to become was already present in the first draft of the novel, written in French. This draft was published in n. 1-2 of this Periodical, pp. 263 ssg. Published here are two variations of the novel presumably written in the 1960s. Previously published in *Giorgio de Chirico. Dalla metafisica alla "metafisica"*, exhibition catalogue Potenza, Pinacoteca Provinciale October 10, 2002 - January 9, 2003, curated by V. Sgarbi, Marsilio Ed., Venice, 2002, pp. 124-127. Two manuscripts by Giorgio de Chirico composed of three sheets each. The Giorgio and Isa de Chirico Foundation Archives.

up on the Acropolis, paid his entrance ticket and then, staying close to a group of tourists he started walking, looking for a safe place to hide himself. It seemed to him that some of the columns that he noticed could offer such a hiding place. He split from the tourists and with a distracted air he wandered over to the pieces of columns, when he saw that the last tourist had disappeared he threw himself on the ground among the ruins and tried to position himself so as not to be seen by anyone passing by that way.

After a while he heard the sound of the gates being closed. But he continued to remain immobile in fear that someone could still pass by. In fact, after a while he heard footsteps and a guardian, walking slowly, stopped very close to the place where Mister Dudron was hiding. The guardian stopped and slowly lit a cigarette.

Mister Dudron's heart beat wildly with emotion and he thought of a quail which remains immobile close to a hunter who passes slowly by, because it instinctively feels that the colour of its feathers blends with the colour of the ground where it sits.

But then the guardian started walking again and disappeared toward the exit. In the meantime night had fallen, a clear night, sweet and solemn. Mister Dudron understood that he could come out of his hiding place: he stood up, moved his legs and arms which were stiff and headed toward the centre of the Acropolis.

The solemn outlines of the temples raised themselves in the semidarkness of the summer night. Mister Dudron looked up and all of a sudden he thought he saw something like clouds; he feared the coming of a storm but the sky was clear and he could see the stars. All of a sudden Mister Dudron stopped: gigantic human shapes although with harmonic contours appeared behind the temple, behind the mountain, behind everything... Mister Dudron looked, he looked intensely and saw Jupiter with his feminine features and flowing beard and hair, and slightly cross-eyed stare. He saw Pallas in his severe purity and flying Mercury and others, still others... All of a sudden Dudron was afraid: a violent desire made him run toward the exit to find life again, everyday life with its troubles and miseries, but life... Just when he was about to run toward the exit, having decided to wake the guardians, he became aware that the entire Acropolis had slowly raised itself up and like a boat that has broken its moorings, was rowing in the infinite calmness of the beautiful summer night.

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Mister Dudron found himself once again in the spiritual atmosphere of ancient Rome, of battles between gladiators and veils pulled on top of circuses from which rose the smell of blood-soaked sand; but this time it was night, just after nightfall; he was behind the Coliseum and was looking into the dark streets at a door because he remembered that it was that door which one entered to go up to the dwelling of an elderly lady who had high blood pressure and who was lovingly cared for by a daughter who Mister Dudron said was the daughter of Apollo. In fact at times, exactly at that time of night, just at the start of night, right in front of that dark street in which silent men and women stirred, a magnificent carriage pulled by three horses of an immaculate white colour appeared without making noise and stopped silently, like the stopping of a silent palpitation of wings; on that

coach a wonderful woman sat slightly bent forward and held in her perfect hands the reigns of the horses; she was the daughter of Apollo, they say she was the most pure and most beautiful and that she was also the daughter of the elderly lady who suffered from high blood pressure, and so Apollo's daughter, like a vestal that looks after the sacred fire consecrated to the divinities in the temple, watched lovingly over the mother who suffered from high blood pressure, to protect her from the slightest emotion. Mister Dudron looked intensely upon those extraordinary spectacles, he looked intensely at the dark streets, at the carriage with Apollo's daughter, to the left of the dark street came a light; a strange light like a that of a factory where flying saucers are forged; the light had the strange shape of a question mark lying upon the sidewalk... Mister Dudron went over that way and saw that in the middle of the luminous question mark was a door which was also luminous and had a big opaque glass; someone was moving behind the glass door; Mister Dudron glimpsed the silhouettes of some people who were behind it; all of a sudden Mister Dudron found himself in that big luminous room full of diffused light too and he found himself before an incredible spectacle: Apollo's daughter was sitting in front of a mirror; the three horses of the carriage had been left outside alone and were scraping the ground without making noise... One of the people whose silhouette Mister Dudron had glimpsed behind the opaque glass door, a man who was neither handsome, nor ugly, tall nor short, young nor old, so this man was close to Apollo's daughter and was combing her triumphant hair; not a sound did he hear, everything was silent and meditative and outside on the dark street passed silent troupes of gladiators.

When Apollo's daughter returned to her father's legendary carriage, the three white horses silently carried the coach toward the Sacred peak of Helicon, Mister Dudron approached the man who had combed the triumphant hair of the legendary Woman and asked him to give him the comb with which he had combed that triumphant hair and offered him, in order to have the sacred comb, a work of his; the hairdresser was not surprised – they were all characters of dreams that marvellous night –, he handed Mister Dudron the now sacred comb. Mister Dudron unbuttoned his shirt and placed the comb on his breast, there, where he felt his heart beating, then, holding the marvellous comb to his breast with his left hand, he went out, fleeing as if he were afraid someone steal the Argonaut comb; he fled in the night that had become late, he fled like an Orestes chased by the Erinyes, desperately looking for refuge in the temple where faithful Pylades awaits him; he fled with the wind in his hair, passing in front of the dark mass of the Coliseum, he kept fleeing and found himself, all of a sudden, in a solitary place near a forest grave with silence; there before him was a stele and at the four sides of the stele there were four tripods from the top of which a very pure smoke rose; with trembling hands, Mister Dudron pulled the legendary comb from his breast and with an impetus full of extremely pure emotion he placed it on the stele, he then bent one of his knees and stayed like this in the silence of the great night; near to him the black forest was quiet... not the cry of a hoopoe was heard, not the rustling of a falling leaf; all was quiet, all was ecstasy and meditation – then, on the dark starless sky, passed silently in triangular formation, with a guide in front, dark migrations of white birds, of a whiteness never before seen... –