

THE LAST CHAPTER OF THE LIFE OF
MEDORO SACRIPANTE.

Cambridge in the Seventies – almost a recollection

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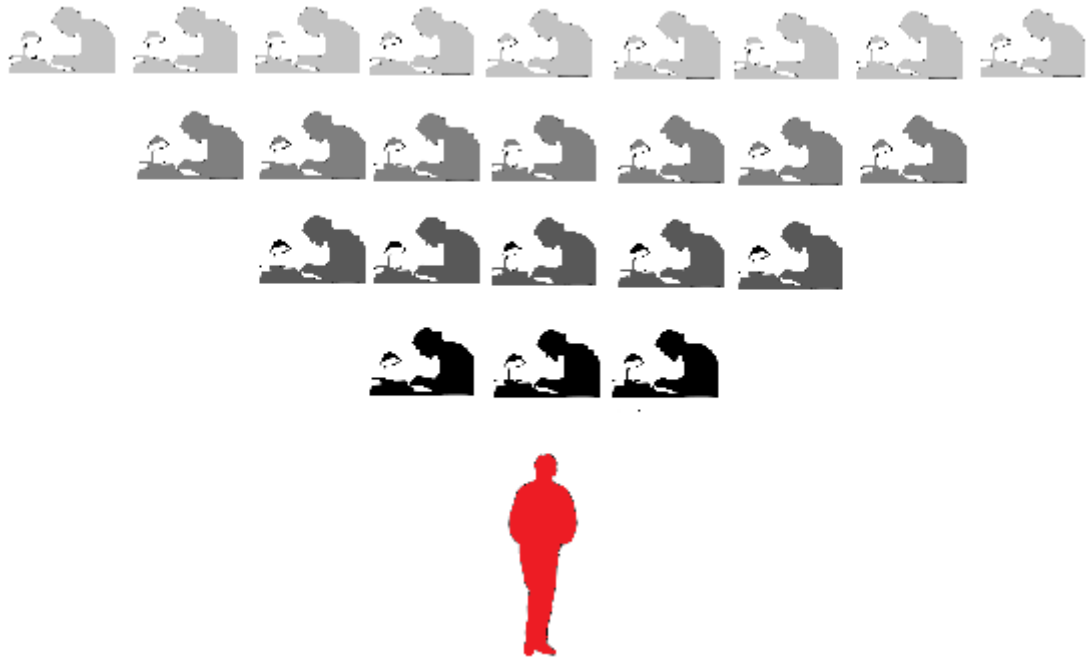
The “mathematical bridge” at Queen’s College (Cambridge)

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To a dear Hellenic reader



When Sylvie, dressed in a decidedly seductive dress, entered the room, chatting away with a handsome young man she must have just met, Medoro Sacripante realized that he should never have come. Her partner was a character wearing the Bachelor of Arts toga with the nonchalant elegance that only ten generations of ancestors at King's College can imprint in the DNA. Now Medoro would have to assist at a distance a conversation in which there would be no chance for him to participate. He was locked in an armchair next to a low table, surrounded by British citizens, for whom sipping coffee in a company is not synonymous with having a conversation (but if you get up and leave, they could deduce that their conversation does not interest you). Medoro Sacripante, however, hated formal parties and receptions, hated small talk - he always came first, when there was no one yet, and left when all the guests were all there.

What did Sylvie have to say to the young man, who looked at her as if she were uttering profound, yet extremely original, truths? What was he saying

to her, that made her laugh so heartily, throwing her head back, a gesture that highlighted her perfect throat, her beautiful hair, and so on? Two moles, intellectually, thought Medoro Sacripante furiously. He is undoubtedly the last of his family, anyone could guess it from his maxillary tic; he probably is on a bland diet and has intervals of madness, during which he is tied up in a padded room of the attic. And she is a little social climber, coming straight from the Massif Central, of bomb-proof selfishness, and who probably still sticks her fingers in her nose. But the mere thought of an angel who came down to Earth to make the human species better, who puts his fingers in his nose or cuts the salad with a knife, was like a sacrilege that certainly would not go unpunished.

Careful, now! Sylvie was looking at him. Did the almost imperceptible jolt mean that she had seen him, that she had recognized him, that her heart had given a throb? Was her look an anonymous look, with the focus to infinity, or a look that, under the apparent coldness, could not hide a supplication: "Come, take me away from this bore, who is explaining to me all about cricket ... let's go out, let's walk under the magnolias in bloom, enough with pretenses! ". A gust of rain beat on the windows, the walk under the magnolias in bloom could not take place for the moment - after all, Sylvie was not even looking at him anymore. Or maybe yes, there was a tiny wall lamp on the wall with a mirror, that framed her face: perhaps she was still looking at him, always with the same imploring look.

"And now let's talk about you, his neighbor at the coffee-table told him point-blank. Have you read the reviews concerning my last book?" Medoro winced: "Actually ... I do not think we have introduced ourselves yet ". "It's true, admitted the neighbor, but (and here he yawned) for heaven's sake, do not tell me your name. This evening, I met thirty-two people ("Thirty-three, dear," the slim female figure by his side interjected, looking at him with adoring eyes) ... OK, thirty-three people, and I am damned if I remember the name of just one of them: Surely there must have been some John Smith or a Clarissa Jones, or God knows what. I am Gawain MacDonald ". "Glad to meet you, Medoro Sacripante moaned. (Sylvie had led the way to the bar, and now the young man touched the glass looking sensually into her eyes - but weren't they all supposed to be gay, at King's College?) Then he shook himself: "Are you a writer?" "Famous, too, said the wren-like woman, without taking her

eyes off her idol - Gawain has not finished his first novel yet, and already the critics to whom he just read the plot and the first chapters are all in agreement in predicting that it will be a best seller. You should know how good he is, Gawain! He works all night, while I ... I sleep ". A shadow of guilt passed over her eyes. Still, looking at the two, the thin woman, feverish, devoured by her worship for Gawain, and Gawain well in the flesh, well cared for, chubby and relaxed, one would have said that it was Gawain who slept peacefully, and the woman who was awake in the night, perhaps working for him. Maybe Gawain was the type who left the light on in the studio with the order of absolutely not to disturb him, looted the refrigerator, and then went to sleep the sleep of the just man in the remote guest room - a man full of himself, I am here, admire me. "But get lost!" Medoro thought (the elegant young man had come very close to Sylvie, a movement a bit sudden of her could bring their hands to touch ... Maybe they did not want anything else - the moment was critical). Here Medoro decided to punish the bothersome gentleman: "What do you want, I'm a mathematician, and I confess that I read very little in the way of novels. And besides, I never heard your name ."

But instead of having silenced for good his interlocutor, Medoro Sacripante realized with horror that he had only given him extra sprint. "A mathematician! And, what's more, an Italian mathematician! But this is unexpected luck. Can you imagine it? My novel tells the life (completely imaginary, of course) of an Italian mathematician." Here Medoro felt a faint sense of disgust emerging. He remembered that the barman of his usual bar in Ferrara once had told him: "Now that there are electronic computers, you mathematicians must have very little work to do." On that occasion, he had realized in a flash that nobody has a precise idea of what mathematics is about, and ninety-seven percent of humankind barely knows how to use three out of the four operations, and not too well for that. So the idea that an unknown writer, certainly unaware of Gödel's theorems, would take the liberty of glibly writing a novel about a mathematician, rather annoyed him. The writer was continuing: "Tell me, do not the Gödel's incompleteness theorems distress you? In my story, the mathematician is a logical philosopher, and he experiences intense suffering, I would say almost metaphysical suffering, because of Gödel's theorem ..." "Alas, Medoro thought, now my persecutor starts with the search for truth, and our

existential anguish, and the unknowable reality, and who are we, where we go ... where we come from ... ". "You see, the writer continued, I enjoy putting my characters in unpleasant situations. It gives me a feeling of omnipotence. My present character struggles like one of those clay statues (can you think of the sculptures of Medardo Rosso?) that want to get out of the clay, and I put more clay on him. Well, for example, I gave him an uncomfortable name, a name coming straight from Ariosto. I called him Medoro Sacripante ". Medoro Sacripante did not laugh heartily, as perhaps the other expected. Now, a queasy, undefinable feeling began to take hold of him.

At this moment, a young gentleman of about thirty approached Medoro's table staggering. The glass of whiskey wobbled a little in his hand, and his eyes looked small and shiny. "Can I sit? Am I disturbing you?" He asked stammering. "Yes" "No," the people answered all at the same time, leaving the newcomer somewhat perplexed. "If I'm not welcome here, he said touchily, I'll be leaving right away." "But yes you are welcome" "Oh, no, you must not leave" answered the bystanders, now utterly confused. However, even if he wanted to, the young man would not be able to leave, because he was hardly able to stand. Unfortunately, introductions began, an interminable ceremony, because the newcomer repeated and had everyone's name repeated at least a couple of times until he was quite sure he could pronounce it with absolute precision (only to forget it immediately). There were a Hungarian, an Italian, a Scotsman and three Englishmen, and the family names of the latter were by no means the easiest to pronounce. Then he wanted to know what professions each of them practiced. When he came to Medoro Sacripante, his still grim face lit up: he laid out his hand warmly and poured at least half the glass of whiskey on Medoro's trousers. He was very excited, and stammered enthusiastically: "I'm a mathematician too, in my spare time!" Medoro was now certain that he should have found the most abject excuses, not to go to that reception. And besides, his attention was distracted by some horrible events, which almost certainly were going on unseen in the background: Sylvie and the young man had disappeared. Medoro imagined them passionately kissing each other in some quiet corner, behind an innocent philodendron, that perhaps tomorrow would be found all withered because plants are more prude than most people believe. Or maybe the couple was preparing to leave for a romantic trip along the river Cam in the moonlight (it had even stopped raining). "I ..., the drunk man was

whispering to Medoro looking furtively around, ... I squared the circle. And it wasn't even difficult, believe me ".

"Oh, is that true? Medoro asked with fake interest. I had heard that it was an insoluble problem. " "But do you believe that the Greeks would set themselves insoluble problems? They were not stupid, you know. " "Of course not, Medoro admitted hurriedly. But you, what did you do, after your discovery? ". "I told my math teacher ... (he thoughtfully took a sip) Who?" "Your math teacher," Medoro suggested quickly. "Now I would like you to tell me what does my math teacher have to do with us." The drunken asked suspiciously. "I do not know," replied Medoro, "after you squared the circle ... " "Ah, yes," said the drunkard. Then he became thoughtful and, looking at his glass, said, "I really must be drunk! My math professor told me: Bravo, keep it up. " "So, you, what did you do?". "I trisected the angle," the amateur mathematician solemnly answered. Medoro told himself that he should have guessed it. Then he added: "You will not tell me that you even duplicated the cube!" The drunkard was immediately interested: "Was there also a cube to be duplicated?" "Of course, said Medoro. It was the third classical problem. The altar of Delos appears to have had the shape of ... " But already the drunkard had risen and was hurrying to the exit of the hall with a wobbly gait, holding in his hand the now empty glass. "I gotta go, excuse me ..." "Where are you going?" two or three people asked him. "To duplicate the cube."

Nobody could have stopped him, and anyway, nobody tried.

The writer said between his teeth: "You see? For example, I would not want that guy in my novel, not even as a secondary character. It's fine that he's a mathematician, but there's a limit to everything ". But Medoro Sacripante still felt somewhat uneasy, and he turned to the writer MacDonald. "Tell me more about your character. Does he have a happy life? "You must be crazy! Happy lives never were of interest to anyone. Everyone knows that the phrase "and everyone lived happily ever after" indicates the end of the fairy tale. No need to add a word. "Perhaps, Medoro interjected, because nobody knows what happiness is, and therefore no one can describe it. My opinion is that Cinderella, once she grew up, had a mirror, to which every morning she asked: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" It's a little-known fact of Cinderella's old age ". "That's a good one, the writer said. Would you mind if I should introduce it in my novel as a saying of Medoro

Sacripante? "Go ahead," replied Medoro Sacripante. "Since my story is of interest to you, the writer continued, I will give you a brief biography of Medoro Sacripante, mathematician. Born in Fossano without much enthusiasm from a petty bourgeois family, hopelessly clumsy as a child, and even more, once he grew up, smothered by overprotective parents and an aunt Irene, for whom he had a morbid, childish affection, skeptical since childhood, some success as a student. He was longtime abroad (Germany, Poland and so on); Inherently unfortunate and unable to communicate. I'm frustrating him, and I have to say I'm doing well." Medoro Sacripante, born in Fossano without enthusiasm from a petty bourgeois family, etcetera etcetera, felt he hated him.

He tried to make a captivating smile: "You should give him some respite, now and then: Just as an example, you could make him meet a nice girl, for example, a French girl from the Massif Central ..." "But do you know that I had just in mind a Sylvie of the Massif Central, who drives him mad with love? It's a love of course, one-sided, because she is not even aware of him." "What do you mean, she is not aware of him?" Medoro pleaded. "Maybe she's secretly in love with him, she wrote him a love note, and put it in his pocket." "Do you know that you're a mine of ideas? Let's do this: Sylvie initially fell in love with Medoro, wrote a note to him, put it in a pocket of his jacket at a party. But Medoro realizes it too late, when she has already found a younger and brighter company. "Medoro put his hand in a pocket and felt with his fingertips a piece of paper that he did not remember having put there, and that now was no longer necessary to read.

"But how do you intend to end your novel, if I may ask?" He asked with some anxiety. "Well, I'll tell you that I have not thought about it yet," replied the writer. "But I've already told you the general trend. In any case, it will end badly; a happy ending would not do, at all! I believe the best is a long life worse than death. He will gradually close in on himself, just like oysters die. With my novel, I want to make the world understand that we are the main architects of our solitude. My prospective editors all like this message". "But I do not think that Medoro appears to be the architect of his loneliness." "My character is a borderline case - and then, what do you know? Maybe it is true that everything depends on him. After all, he is happy that Sylvie does not want him. My character despises the others, is selfish and enjoys torturing

himself. And now please excuse me. I'm sorry, I've seen other people to whom I have got to talk. "

Gradually Medoro remained alone. He pondered gloomily, looking at the bottom of his glass of whiskey, a drink he did not like and did not drink. Still ... He could seize the author, close him in a cage, and then negotiate ... A slice of bread for a tête à tête meeting with Sylvie; a glass of water for the success of the research he was doing; a slice of roast beef, maybe with potatoes, and perhaps even with Worcestershire Sauce, and - why not? - some Brussels sprouts, and a glass of Beaujolais if ... oh, life would have been so simple!

But then he started thinking. For example, the drunkard, who was he? What did he have to do with his story? The author had already stated that he was not interested in him. So? A flash of sudden understanding crossed his mind, revealing a whole landscape, like a lightning in the night. It was clear that the drunkard was the character of some other novel: perhaps we are all characters of one or more stories, maybe even the authors are themselves characters of other stories, and they too are bound by their authors to do and write what they do and write. Medoro now had the impression that on his shoulders hung a massive pyramid of writers who wrote the story of each other, and of many others, and, finally, of himself.

For a moment he thought that he could write another's story too, and let off steam giving him endless frustrations, but felt extraordinarily tired (alas, he told himself, there are also people born to be only characters).

He left the villa where the reception was drawing to its end, saw Gawain MacDonald in a dark, secluded corner climbing into a car with the thin woman. He rummaged in his pocket, immediately found a gun that he did not even remember having, fired three shots, one for the author, two for the woman, who seemed harder to die. Then, carefully cleaned the gun (you never know), threw it in a privet hedge and went away with a light spirit to his home. There were two possibilities: either so wanted the super-novel (who knows what new adventures it reserved for him!), or, although he felt perfectly fine tonight, he probably would not wake up the next morning.

POST SCRIPTUM.

It remains only to add that the title of the story already says that the next morning, although feeling perfectly fine tonight, Medoro Sacripante would not have woken up, having killed the author who was writing about him.

That is what the title says. But, dear reader who has read thus far, does this conclusion seem logical to you? And who am I? Am I not writing the life of Medoro Sacripante and his author? And slowly aren't you entering into my story too?