

**THAÏS: AN OPERA  
IN THREE ACTS AND  
SEVEN SCENES**

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Thaïs: An Opera in Three Acts and Seven Scenes by Louis Gallet & Anatole France & Jules Massenet

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**LOUIS GALLET & ANATOLE FRANCE & JULES MASSENET**

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# THAÏS

AN OPERA

IN THREE ACTS AND SEVEN SCENES

Book by

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From the novel by

ANATOLE FRANCE

Music by

JULES MASSENET

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# THAIS

## THE STORY

### FIRST ACT.

**T**HE work opens among a gathering of religious men known as Cenobites, in the desert of Thebes, Athanael, one of them, has just returned from Alexandria, a city whose unholy pleasures have revolted him, though in his earlier youth he had, himself, trodden there the rosy path. In his sleep he has a vision of Thais, the reigning beauty, acting in the theatre of Alexandria before an immense crowd. Waking he resolves to go and save the soul of the courtesan. The chief Cenobite would dissuade him from the dangerous mission, but he adheres to his purpose and departs.

The second scene is in the sumptuous house of Nicias, one of the principal voluptuaries of Alexandria. Though Athanael arrives in most sordid attire, Nicias receives him kindly as an old friend, but when he tells his mission, Nicias laughs him to scorn. However, that he may properly meet Thais in her resplendent surroundings, Athanael is made to don purple and fine linen. Thais comes and curiosity, after a time, causes her to inquire as to the new guest whose severity of mien is unusual in her surroundings. Athanael tells her bluntly that he has come to bring her to the only true God. Thais is sceptical though the earnestness of Athanael makes an impression on her.

### SECOND ACT.

The first scene shows a room in the abode of Thais. She is alone, after dismissing her train and, though a priestess of Venus, finds that fugitive love grows at times tedious and unsatisfying. She prays the goddess for eternal beauty as Athanael appears. She treats his words flippantly at first but as he proceeds to unravel the plan of a life everlasting beside which the shameful pleasures of to-day are as nothing, she is impressed, despite herself. Then she grows frightened and at last defiant. Athanael leaves, saying, he will pass the night on her doorstep.

The second scene shows the square in front of the house.

Athanael sleeps. Thais comes from the house to tell him that she is ready to follow, if he will lead. All she wants to keep is a small statuette of Eros. But Athanael smashes it to pieces and tells her to go within and put a lighted torch to all her earthly possessions. At this moment, Nicias, who has won a fortune at gaming, emerges from a house opposite with his companions and orders a diversion of singing, dancing and drinking. As this proceeds Thais comes out, meanly clad,

followed by her lamenting women. She joins Athanael and flames are seen to issue from the house. As it burns, the populace grow excited and resent the taking off of Thaïs. Their fury concentrates on Athanael and they forcibly attempt to oppose his progress. They wish to burn him, hang him, and thus save Thaïs. When the excitement grows greatest, Nicias causes a diversion by throwing gold to the people. In the midst of the mad scramble, Thaïs and Athanael escape.

### THIRD ACT.

After a long and painful journey Athanael and Thaïs, the latter almost dead with fatigue, reach the oasis. Athanael bathes her bleeding feet and brings her food. He uses endearing terms to the sufferer and, at the appearance of Albine and the White Ladies, delivers her over to them to pass her life. When they bid farewell Thaïs is spiritually exalted but his affection has become more human.

Scene second shows the home of the Cenobites again. Athanael is in despair and confesses to Palemon that, despite his prayers and flagellations, the image of Thaïs is always before him—he loves her. Then in a vision Thaïs appears to him, first as the courtesan as she was and, now dying at the monastery in the desert.

The third scene shows the monastery. Thaïs lies dying. The White Ladies look on her as a saint for she is worn out with penance and repentance, Athanael comes. He hopes to bring her back to life and carnal love, but she is beyond earthly emotion. Quoting Athanael's own maxims, she sees heaven open before her and hears the rustle of angel's wings, and while he calls upon her in despairing tones to come back to him, her gentle spirit passes away.

### PERSONAGES.

ATHANAEL	THAÏS
NICIAS	ALBINE
PALEMÓN	CROBYLE
A SERVANT	MYRTALE

The scenes are near Thebes and at Alexandria.

In the early Christian era.

# THAÏS

## ACTE PREMIER.

### PREMIER TABLEAU.

*(La Thébaïde.—Les cabanes des Cénobites aux bords du Nil. Ce n'est pas encore la fin du jour; douze Cénobites et le vieux Palémon sont assis autour d'une longue table. Au milieu, Palémon préside le frugal et paisible repas. Une place est vide, celle d'Athanaël.)*

UN CENOBITE.

Voici le pain.

UN AUTRE.

Et le sel.

UN AUTRE.

Et l'hysope.—

UN AUTRE.

Voici le miel.

UN AUTRE.

Et voici l'eau.—

PALEMON *(se levant, avec onction)*.

Chaque matin le ciel répand sa grâce—sur mon jardin, ainsi qu'une rosée.—Bénéissons Dieu dans les biens qu'il nous donne—et prions-le qu'il nous garde en sa paix!—

LES CENOBITES *(presque murmuré)*.

Que les noirs démons de l'abîme—s'écartent de notre chemin!—

*(Paisiblement les Cénobites continuent leur repas.)*

UN CENOBITE *(rompant le silence)*.

Sur Athanaël, notre frère,—étends, Seigneur, la force de ton bras!—  
PLUSIEURS CENOBITES *(avec regret)*.  
Athanaël!..

D'AUTRES CENOBITES *(de même)*.

Bien longue est son absence!..—

D'AUTRES *(avec intérêt)*.

Quand donc reviendra-t-il?..—

PALEMON *(mystérieusement)*.

L'heure de son retour est proche...  
—Un songe, cette nuit, me l'a montré vraiment—hâtant vers nous sa marche!..—

LES CENOBITES *(avec foi)*.

Athanaël est un élu de Dieu!..—  
*(Pieusement.)* Il se révèle dans les songes!..—

*(Athanaël paraît; il s'avance lentement comme épuisé de fatigue et de chagrin.)*

LES CENOBITES *(avec respect)*.

Le voici! Le voici!

ATHANAËL *(au milieu d'eux, douloureusement)*.

La paix soit avec vous!—

PALEMON et LES CENOBITES.

Frère, salut! *(Tous s'empressent autour de lui.)* La fatigue t'accable! —la poussière couvre ton front...— repose-toi!... reprends ta place!..— mange, bois!—

ATHANAËL *(il s'est assis avec accablement et repousse doucement les mets qu'on lui présente)*.



# THAIS

## FIRST ACT.

### SCENE I.

*(The Thebaid. Huts of the Cenobites on the bank of the Nile. It is the declining day. Twelve Cenobites and old Palemon are seated at a long table. In their midst Palemon presides at the frugal and peaceful repast. One seat is empty, that of Athanael.)*

A CENOBITE.

Here is bread.

ANOTHER.

And salt.

ANOTHER.

And hyssop.

ANOTHER.

Here is honey.

ANOTHER.

And here is water.

PALEMON *(rising with unction)*.

Each morning Heaven spreads its mercies—on my garden as a dew.—Let us thank God for the things that He gives us—and let us pray that He keep us in peace!—

THE CENOBITES *(almost in a murmur)*

That the black demons of the abyss—leave clear our path!—

*(Quietly, the Cenobites continue their repast.)*

A CENOBITE *(breaking the silence)*.

Upon Athanael, our brother—extend, oh Lord, the strength of Thine arm!—

SEVERAL CENOBITES *(with regret)*.

Athanael!...

OTHERS *(same tone)*.

Very long is his absence!...—

OTHERS *(interested)*.

But when will he return?—

PALEMON *(mysteriously)*.

The hour of his return is near...—A dream, this night showed him truly to me—hastening his march toward us!—

THE CENOBITES *(with faith)*.

Athanael is an elect of God!...  
*(Piously)* He reveals Himself in dreams!...—

*(Athanael appears: he advances slowly, as if exhausted with fatigue and sorrow.)*

THE CENOBITES *(with respect)*.

He is here! he is here!

ATHANAEL *(in their midst, painfully)*.

Peace be with you!—

PALEMON AND THE CENOBITES.

Brother, salutation *(all gather about him)*. Fatigue crushes thee—dust stains thy forehead...— Rest thee... once more take thy place!—eat, drink!—

ATHANAEL *(he sits down, overcome with fatigue, gently declining the food they offer him)*.

Non! mon cœur est plein d'amertume...— Je reviens dans le deuil et dans l'affliction!...—La ville est livrée au péché!...—une femme, Thais, la remplit de scandale—et par elle l'enfer y gouverne les hommes!—

LES CENOBITES (*avec une curiosité calme et simple*).

Quelle est cette Thais?

ATHANAEL (*sortant un peu de sa torpeur*).

Une prêtresse infâme—du culte de Vénus... (*Humblement, et comme se souvenant d'un passé lointain*.) Hélas! enfant encore—avant qu'à mon cœur la grâce ait parlé,—je l'ai connue!... (*Plus sombre, plus agité*.) Un jour, je l'avoue à ma honte,—devant son seuil maudit, je me suis arrêté...—mais Dieu m'a préservé de cette courtisane—et j'ai trouvé le calme en ce désert,—maudissant le péché que j'aurais pu commettre!...—Ah! mon âme est troublée...— La honte de Thais et le mal qu'elle fait—me causent une peine amère;—et je voudrais gagner cette âme à Dieu!—

PALEMON (*simplement, sagement*).

Ne nous mêlons jamais, mon fils, aux gens du siècle;—craignons les pièges de l'Esprit;—voilà ce que nous dit la sagesse éternelle.—(*La nuit vient peu à peu*.) La nuit vient; prions et dormons!—

LES CENOBITES (*avec une crainte mystérieuse, les mains jointes, se séparent, tout en priant*).

Que les noirs démons de l'abîme—s'écartent de notre chemin!—Seigneur, bénis le pain et l'eau.—Bénis les fruits de nos jardins.—Donne-nous le sommeil sans rêves—et l'inaltérable repos!—

(ATHANAEL *s'est étendu devant sa cabane, la tête appuyée sur un petit chevalet de bois, les mains jointes*).

ATHANAEL (*seul, dans l'ombre*).

O Seigneur, je remets mon âme entre tes mains.—

(*Il s'endort*.)

(*Nuit presque noire. Après un instant de calme, au milieu des ténèbres, une blancheur se fait; dans un brouillard apparaît l'intérieur du théâtre, à Alexandrie; foule immense sur les gradins. En avant se trouve la scène sur laquelle Thais, à demi vêtue, mais le visage voilé, mime les amours d'Aphrodite. —Dans le théâtre d'Alexandrie, immenses acclamations d'enthousiasme très prolongées.—Effet extrêmement lointain.—On peut distinguer, le nom de Thais hurlé par la foule.—Les acclamations augmentent jusqu'à la fin de la vision, la mimique s'accroissant de plus en plus.—La vision disparaît subitement; le jour revient.—Aurore*).

ATHANAEL (*qui s'est éveillé peu à peu, se lève; avec épouvante et colère*).

Honte! horreur! ténèbres éternelles!— Seigneur, assiste-moi!— (*Il s'est jeté à terre et il y reste prosterné*.) Toi qui mis la pitié dans nos âmes,—Dieu bon, louange à toi!— j'ai compris l'enseignement de l'ombre,—je me lève et je pars!—(*Il s'est relevé avec enthousiasme*.) Car je veux délivrer cette femme—des liens de la chair!—Dans l'azur, je vois penchés vers elle—les anges désolés!—N'est-elle pas, Seigneur, le souffle de ta bouche!—Ah! plus elle est coupable et plus je dois la plaindre!—Mais, je la sauverai, Seigneur! Donne-la-moi—et je te la rendrai pour la vie éternelle!—(*Il appelle ses frères qui reparaissent et se pressent autour de lui*.) Frères, levez-vous tous! venez!—ma mission m'est révélée!—Dans la ville maudite il faut que je retourne.—Dieu défend que Thais s'enfonce davantage—dans le gouffre du mal!—et c'est moi qu'il choisit pour la lui ramener!—

(*Athanael s'incline devant Palémon*.)

PALEMON (*à Athanael avec une douce expression*).

Ne nous mêlons jamais, mon fils, aux gens du siècle.—Voilà la sagesse éternelle!...—

No! my heart is full of bitterness...  
—I return in mourning and affliction...  
—The city is given over to sin!...— A woman, Thais, fills it with scandal—and, through her, hell there governs men!—

THE CENOBITES (*with calm and simple curiosity*).

Who is this Thais?

ATHANAEL (*recovering from his torpor*).

An infamous priestess—of the worship of Venus (*humbly as if remembering the long gone past*). Alas, when still a child—before that to my heart grace had yet spoken,—I had known her! (*sombre and excited*). One day, I say it to my shame—before her accursed doorstep, I had stopped...—but God had preserved me from this courtesan—and I found calm in this desert,—cursing the sin that I might have committed...—Ah my soul is troubled...—the shame of Thais and the harm that she has done—cause me bitter pain—and I would win this soul to God!—

PALEMON (*simply, sagely*).

Let us never meddle, my son, with the people of the time...let us fear the traps of—the Spirit;—this is what eternal wisdom tells us (*night begins to fall*). Night comes; let us pray and sleep.

THE CENOBITES (*with a mysterious fear, hands clasped, separate while they pray*).

May the black demons of the abyss—move from our way. Lord bless the bread and the water. Bless the fruits of our gardens—give us the sleep without dreams—and the unalterable rest—

(*Athanael has stretched himself before his hut, his head on a wooden pallet, his hands clasped.*)

ATHANAEL (*alone in the shadow*).

Oh, Lord, I place my soul in thy hands—(*he sleeps*).

(*Night is almost black. After a moment of calm in the midst of the darkness light is seen; in a mist appears the interior of the theatre at Alexandria. Immense crowd, in rows. In foreground the stage on which Thais, half clothed, but, the face veiled, mimics the lovers of Aphrodite. In the theatre of Alexandria great, very prolonged, acclamations of enthusiasm. The effect is of great distance. The name of Thais, howled by the mob, can be distinguished. The acclamations increase to the end of the vision, the mimicry being more and more accentuated. The vision disappears; suddenly Day begins. Dawn.*)

ATHANAEL (*who gradually awakes, rises. With fear and anger*).

Shame! horror! eternal darkness!—Oh Lord, assist me—(*He throws himself prone and remains thus*). Thou who puttest pity in our souls.—Good God, praise to thee!—I have understood the teaching of the darkness—I rise and go. (*He has risen with enthusiasm*). For I will deliver this woman—from the thralldom of the flesh. In cerulean heights I see leaning toward her—the angels sorrow stricken—Is she not, Lord, the breath of thy mouth—Ah the more guilty she the more I compassionate her!—But I will save her, Lord! Give her to me—and I shall give her back to thee for life eternal!—(*He calls his brothers who reappear and press about him*). Brothers, rise all of you! come—My mission is revealed to me—To the accursed city I must return...— God forbids that Thais should sink deeper—in the pit of wickedness! and I am the one He chooses to bring her back!

(*Athanael bows before Palemon.*)

PALEMON (*to Athanael, with a gentle expression*).

Let us never meddle, my son, with the people of this time—That is the eternal wisdom.—