Leaving the Cave in Search of Life
(A Platonic reading of R. Sirera’s La caverna (The Cave)\(^1\)\(^2\)

Pau Gilabert Barberà\(^3\)
Universitat de Basrcelona (University of Barcelona)

To Rosa Cabré, Mireia Sopena, Òscar Bodi and Àlex Matas

With the aim of alerting his readers and audience to the risk of being too comfortably ensconced in the realm of fiction as well the risk of falsifying life and death to the extent of turning them into shaming melodramas\(^4\), R. Sirera designs his plays as an effective means of rousing consciousness\(^5\). Concerning his own, everything should be very easy because of his “creed”, but Psychology has taught us to detect all kinds of passive and active human resistances to changing the mind, maturing and even to “being converted”. This is certainly an annoying obstacle but R. Sirera often thinks of extreme circumstances against which it would be impossible not to react. He adopts, then, a clear martial strategy whose major-generals believe in victory and know perfectly well that they must not take the liberty of being kind or merciful. On the contrary, R. Sirera thinks of unscrupulous characters such as a sadistic marquis\(^6\) or a smuggler\(^7\), who is both addicted to his own benefit and much used, if necessary, to traffic in human life.

At the same time, extreme circumstances have often been imagined with the invaluable help of closed and claustrophobic spaces. In El verí del teatre (The Poison of the Theatre), a famous actor, Gabriel de Beaumont, who suddenly notices that he is in fact a prisoner in a sumptuous palace, becomes a good example of how to put sophist Antiphon’s theories into operation. Indeed, Beaumont will never be able to prove that he has been kidnapped by a mad marquis simply because he can cite no one as a witness\(^8\). Now, however, we are in a cave in a

\(^{1}\) R. Sirera. La caverna. Barcelona: Lumen. Teatre català contemporani. Els textos del Centre Dramàtic, nº 7 –Contemporaneous (Catalan Theatre. The Texts of the Dramatic Centre, number 7), 1995. All the quotations will correspond to this edition.

\(^{2}\) First published in Catalan: “Pau Gilabert i Barberà. ‘Tot sortint de la caverna per cercar la vida (Lectura classicitzant de La caverna de Rodolf Sirera’)”. Barcelona: Itaca. Quaderns Catalans de Filologia Clàssica, 1998-1999, n. 14-15, pp. 119-138. The translation into English is mine and has been revised and corrected by Steve Hampshire, teacher in the School of Modern Languages (EIM) at the University of Barcelona.

\(^{3}\) Ordinary teacher in the Classical Greek Department (Departament de Filologia Grega) at the University of Barcelona. Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes 585, 08007 Barcelona. Telephone: 934035996; fax: 934039092; e-mail: pgilabert@ub.edu; personal web page: www.paugilabertbarbera.com

\(^{4}\) Concerning this theory, the reader should take into account above all R. Sirera’s El verí del teatre.

\(^{5}\) As an introduction to his theatre, see e.g.: Benet i Jornet, J., 1982; Gallen, E., 1999; Pérez, R., 1998; Riquer, Comas, Molas; and Rosselló, R. X., 1999.

\(^{6}\) He is sadistic enough to prefer the live vision of Gabriel of Beaumont’s death to its fictional performance on the stage. Therefore, two different ways of contemplating (thēamai) are confronted in El verí del teatre, so that from the point of view of the marquis, passion and enthusiasm will take possession of the audience only if the falsehood and fiction which are peculiar to any performance are “assassinated”.

\(^{7}\) He will be in The cave, the true cause (aitía) of the young character’s consciousness-rousing, though by means of radical methods which will also imply the use of violence.

\(^{8}\) It is worth remembering that, according to Oxirrincus (XI, n. 1364 ed. H(unt)., fr. B 44 edited by H. Diels- W.Kranz. Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker, vol. 1, 6th edn. Berlin: Weidmann, 1951, rpr. Dublin / Zurich, 1966), Antiphon, one of the most outstanding upholders of the opposition phýsis / nómos, asserted that: “Justice lies in not transgressing the provisions of the law in the city where one lives as a citizen. So,
Mediterranean island, close to Naples, so that darkness, inconveniences and oppression which are peculiar to the underworld are guaranteed. For the time being and having taken advantage of the trembling shadows of the cave, R. Sirera will strive to provoke all sort of doubts regarding real things that in the end are nothing else but simple appearances or fiction. As far as the young character is concerned, the cave is for instance a true one; he is alone in the dark, and both fear and anguish have taken possession of him. But it is also unreal on the account of being the imagined cave of a fiction-play –i.e. a book- which, as a consequence, is doomed to disappear save on its pages or in the readers’ mind. Needless to say, however, that the century-old tradition of the Platonic image of the cave must be taken into account. Firstly it might be considered as that burden which destiny called to suffocate R. Sirera’s creativity, but the reverse is obviously the case and we notice very soon that he is not going to doubt the Platonic authorship of all literary caves. On the contrary, he is very happy to use it now for his own benefit and, on the other hand, he is convinced that it will be a first class incentive to his literary inspiration.

In fact, his friendly relationship with the ancient image –and a philosophical one- needs no justification. After all, in accordance with Plato’s guidance, the image (eikón) of the cave must be understood as an energetical exhortation to our soul’s ascension towards the intelligible region, towards the idea of Good, the sole light, the Light which blinds the eyes of those who usually live in the dark and are still burdened with matter. Therefore, if Plato’s effective image of the cave has already been discovered and is within our reach, why should R. Sirera create a new one? He needs only to suggest that everybody is free to ascend as high as wanted –and this last point Sirera makes with great irony-, but there are other people who, following a worldly and positivist creed –in my opinion R. Sirera’s plays cannot be read otherwise-, know perfectly well how to disregard the exhortations of famous metaphysical masters such as Plato without ignoring the suggestive images (i.e. the cave) with which they often illustrated the passage from the real to the ideal.

Whatever the case is, the Platonic image of the cave belongs to our Western cultural heritage. Now, however, in spite of my intention is to betray the narrative structure of R. Sirera’s The a man will practise justice for his own benefit if, in front of witnesses, he obeys the laws, but when no one can be cited as a witness of his actions, he obeys Nature’s orders. Indeed, while legal provisions have been imposed, Nature’s ones are unavoidable: the legal provisions are the result of an agreement, they are not innate, while Nature’s ones are innate, and are not the result of any agreement” (Col. 1). So, if when transgressing the provisions of the law, one is not observed by those who have come to the agreement, he will be free from shame and punishment... Indeed, laws have been adopted for the eyes (dikaiosúniou σύν τὰ τῆς πόλεως νόμιμα, ἐν ἣν πολιτεύσεται τις, μὴ παραβαίνειν. χρώμεν’ ἀν ὁνος ανθρώπος κάλλιστα ἐστίν τοὺς εἰμιδικαστέας δικαιοσύνην, εἰ μετὰ μὲν μαρτύρως τῶν νόμων μεγάλους ἁγού, μονούνυμεν δὲ μαρτύρον τὰ τῆς φύσεως· τὰ μὲν γὰρ τῶν νόμων ἐπίθετα, τὰ δὲ τῆς φύσεως ἀναγκαῖα· καὶ τὰ μὲν τῶν νόμων ὁμολογηθέντα ὡς φύρει' ἔστιν, τὰ δὲ τῆς φύσεως φύτα συχ ὁμολογηθέντα (Col. 1) τὰ σύν νόμων παραβαίνως εἰάν λάθη τοὺς ὁμολογήσαντας καὶ αἰσχύνης καὶ ζῆμας αἰσθάνεται... νενομοθέτηται γὰρ ἐπὶ τε τοῖς ὀρθολογίους (Col. 2)—the translation is mine).

9 Cf. Republic 517b: ‘This image then, dear Glaucum, we must apply as a whole to all that has been said likening the region revealed through sight to the habitation of the prison, and the light of the fire in it to the power of the sun. And if you assume that the ascent and the contemplation of the things above is the soul’s ascension to the intelligible region, you will not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear... is likely if in this point too the likeness of our image holds’ (Ταύτην τοῖνυν, ἢ δ’ ἐγὼ, τὴν εἰκόνα, ὦ φιλέ Γλαύκων, προσάπτετον ἀπάσιν τοῖς ἑπιστήμονες λεγομένοις, τὴν μὲν δὲ ὅψεως φαινομένην ἐδώκα πᾶς, τῶν τοῦ δεσμωτηρίου ὁίκημα ἀφομοιοῦντα, τό δὲ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐν αὐτῇ φῶς τῆς ἡλίου δυνάμει· τὴν δὲ ἄνω ἀνάβαςαν καὶ θέαν τῶν ἄνω τῆς γῆς εἰς τὸν νους τόπον τῆς φυσικῆς ἀνοδον τιθεὶς ὡς ἀμφιτήρια τῆς γ’ ἐμῆς ἐλπίδος, ἐπειδὴ τάυτης ἐπιθυμεῖς ἀκούειν... εἶκος γὰρ που οὕτως, εἶπερ αὖ κατὰ τὴν προερυθμένην εἰκόνα τούτ’ ἔχει -translated by Paul Shorey, Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970; idem regarding the rest of quotations of the Platonic image of the cave).
cave, it would be useful in my opinion to present its basic plot in order to obtain a quick understanding of those circumstances which explain that a young man coming from a wealthy family has become an unfortunate prisoner now.

Here is a wealthy Italian family at the turn of the XVIIIth century. The wife is already dead and her widower, who has already two children—sons—, has married again, an Englishwoman. They have moved to England because of the widower’s business. As is always the case with wealthy families, children have been sent to foreign countries in order to become educated and cultivated citizens who will be well prepared to take up privileged positions in society. Therefore, the inevitable reference in this case is the “Grand Tour”\textsuperscript{10} which was made for centuries till it was transformed into simple tourism\textsuperscript{11}. The elder son has travelled to Italy on his own initiative to study Arts, but the youngest one, who is nineteen years old, has refused for a long time to leave his parents’ sweet home. In spite of this, he is sailing now to Italy and explaining to the captain in front of Gibraltar that, in addition to visiting his brother and attending family business, this is a pleasure trip. The captain, in his turn, lets him know that he could put him in contact with significant members of the revolution against Absolutism which aims at re-establishing the Parthenopean Constitution\textsuperscript{12}. This young man, notwithstanding, refuses to receive any sort of additional information and adds at the same time that his family has never had anything to do with politics.

He has already arrived at Italy (Naples) but hasn’t found his brother till that captain comes to see him simply in order to put them in contact with each other. Indeed, his elder brother is now dying as the result of his participation in the revolutionary and progressive fight against Absolutism. While being at the point of death the elder brother asks the young brother to go on with his fight, so that on account of these specific circumstances but not on his own initiative this young brother also supports to the revolution. From now onwards, the young man will fight as a member of a revolutionary battalion, although they are all badly equipped and commanded by a man who went into exile due to French repression.

They do not succeed; on the contrary, the royalist soldiers execute all his fellows. He is the only member of the battalion to survive though because of his cowardly escape when the standing army came near: in fact, he can show only one and insignificant wound which is due to his ridiculous stumbling over some roots -that is to say, nothing to be proud of.

On the other hand, the above mentioned commandant had got in touch with a smuggler who, in case of a serious defeat, would help them to leave Italy. All the members of the battalion, then, were warned of where they had to go if this was the case. Finally, the young man is imprisoned in an island that is two miles away from the shore. He had looked for the smuggler and the smuggler took him in his turn to the cave since the royalist soldiers had been rounding up people next to Naples.

Being feverish and victim of a constant anguish, the young man believes to see among shadows a wide range of characters who are always interpreted by “He” and “She” and who speak to him. They will all contribute to rouse his consciousness, to his maturing and taking the initiative for himself. Suddenly, he shares the cave with a military man who was also imprisoned by the smugglers and escaped from an army in which he could not believe any longer. He is liberal and belongs to the group of progressive military men.

\textsuperscript{10} On this theme, see e.g.: Grand Tour. The Lure …, 1996.
\textsuperscript{11} R. Eisner analyses accurately this phenomenon in Travellers to …, 1991.
\textsuperscript{12} See e. g.: Walley, D. P., 1966.
whose aim is the re-establishment of the Constitution, but, paradoxically, before he is “converted”, he commanded the shooting-company of the young man’s commandant.

These have been the two first days of the three ones into which R. Sirera’s The cave is divided. I have wanted to collect and summarize all kind of scattered data. We know now perfectly well the nature of the conflict and are excited about what may happen during the third day –perhaps its resolution. Notwithstanding, the temptation of arriving quickly at the end should be resisted since we have been told many things which require ask an accurate analysis now. Let us begin, then, with a “He” who might be –why not?- the young man’s father:

‘Do you see your own shadow reflected in the wall? […] The sun creates it […] The sun seems to move, but both, you and I, know that it is not true, that it is the earth that moves. Well then, we know as well that this statement which was made by Galileo Galilei two centuries ago is still considered as a heresy by the Roman Church. Who would dare to defend nowadays the Ptolemaic system? They would be esteemed either crazy or uninformed persons […] Churches […] have always been against progress and freedom and, as a consequence, I find the attitude of believing in the idea of God, as conceived by them, unworthy of a responsible person, just another way of surrendering to their slavery and perpetuating indirectly their oppressive system with the help of human passiveness. It would be in the end as if someone continued to believe that the sun moves around the earth or that what really exists, as imagined by the unfortunate prisoners of the cave, is the shadow reflected on the wall instead of what projects it’13.

First of all, it should be noticed that, as a prisoner in a cave –and taking the Platonic one as the main reference-, this young man who, unlike others, knew what light is 14, should not mistake

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13 Cf. Plato. Republic 514a-515b: ‘for to begin with, tell me do you think that these men would have seen anything of themselves or of one another except the shadows cast from the fire on the wall of the cave that fronted them?’ (τοὺς γὰρ τοιούτους πρῶτον μὲν ἑαυτῶν τε καὶ ἀλλήλων οἷς ἃν τι εἴδοσιν μοί ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς εἰς τὸ καταντικρὺ αὐτῶν τοῦ σπηλαίου προσπιπτούσας;).

14 Cf. with Plato’s Republic 514a-b: ‘Next ’, said I, ‘compare our nature in respect of education and its lack to such an experience as this. Picture men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern with a long entrance open to the light on its entire width. Conceive them as having their legs and necks fettered from childhood, so that they remain in the same spot, able to look forward only, and prevented by the fetters from turning their heads’ (ἀπείκασον τοιούτῳ πάθει τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν παιδείας τε περί καὶ ἀπαιδευσίας. ἢδε γὰρ ἀνθρώπους οἷς ἐν καταγείῳ οἰκήσει σπηλαιώδει, ἀναπτυσσομένην πρὸς τὸ φῶς τὴν εἰσοδον ἐχούση μικρὰν παρὰ πάντοτε καὶ πρὸς τὸ σπήλαιον, ἐν ταύτῃ ἐκ παιδῶν ὄντες ἐν δεσμῷ καὶ τα σκέλη καὶ τοὺς αὐχένας, ὧν ἔμενεν τα αὐτῶς εἰς τὸ πρόσθεν μόνον ὁμόν ῥώμων).
the shadow reflected on the wall, pure fiction, with what projects it; in other words: he ought to be the Light, above all if he becomes increasingly resplendent and an enlightener as the result of his determined intellectual curiosity. Whoever wants to grow up –lato sensu- in order to mature –that is to say, whoever must replace a half made personality with a full one with both consciousness and personal view- must not surrender to the madness and ignorance of any power, particularly –“He” dicit- to that one of the most reactionary institution: Roman Church. Therefore, comfort must be abandoned –it is worth remembering that caves can also tempt on account of the protection they offer-, since any matured person must know how to leave the cage of slavery and passiveness in order to overcome the difficult stages of an unavoidable initiation-journey: life.

This is undoubtedly an overwhelming warning –Plato always impresses us-, so that this time “She” –possibly his stepmother?- having known by intuition that his husband’s son must be like any other young man, appeals to his pride as a boy who has already grown up and should now mature:

‘I have thought that it is time for me to concern myself with your life to come. Travelling will be of benefit to you. I am preparing, then, a long journey for you’ […] ‘You must begin to think about it. Your brother has already gone away before being asked for, and it does not seem right that you remain at home with me. You are old enough to understand the reason’.

‘He pensat que és hora ja que m’ocupe del teu futur. Et farà bé conèixer món. T’estic preparant un llarg viatge’ […] cal que et faces a la idea. El teu germà se n’ha anat, abans que ningú li ho demanàs, i no em sembla correcte que et quedes tot sol amb mi. Ets prou gran ja per entendre’n el motiu’ (33).

Looking at the life to come, travelling, knowing, going away. Here is another personal Odyssey and it is well known that, with regard to Western Culture, Ulysses’ adventure has symbolized our long existential apprenticeship. In this case, however, we should emphasize the stepmother’s call –thinking of the Platonic one- to leave the cave definitively, bearing in mind furthermore that this is a special cave which is understood as home or motherly bosom, which is soft, warm and hospitable. And needless to say as well this kind of caves are able to provoke paralysis, a spiritual rather than a bodily one, in persons who are addicted to enjoy themselves, while life, as a river, runs away. “He” rebels once more against all this by appealing to his experience:

‘Your world is still a little one […] Concerning the rest of the world –what do you know of the rest of the world except this house and its garden […]?- you are only interested in those people who know how to value your clothes […] When are you going to open your eyes, when are you going to be conscious? Will you ever be able to judge impartially other lives, different from yours, other desires, other worries, different from your own and present sadness […] All over the world there are things which are much more important than what happens to you, and the time has arrived for you to take them into account. There are countries which are oppressed with tyrannical cruelty, there are men who are victims of injustice, exploitation, violence […] there are young people like you and I who will grow old in dark prisons […] but you, well-born, well-dressed, well-nourished, well-educated […] you are in an innocence-limbo […] My dear friend, life is a very bitter

15 It seems essential to mention Joyce’s Ulysses, although in this case the reduction of time and space, only one day in Dublin, condenses the epic pilgrimage to the extent to turn it into an existential exploration of human inwardness.
adventure which is costly and very difficult to perform properly. I am referring to real life, not to a literary one.’

‘El teu univers és, encara, un univers petit [...] De la resta del món –què en saps tu, de la resta del món, fora d’aquesta casa i del jardí, [...] ?- només t’interessen aquelles persones que saben avaluar-te correctament el vestuari [...] Quan obriràs els ulls, quan arribaràs a tenir una consciència pròpia? Podràs jutjar alguna vegada, amb imparcialitat, altres vides diferents de la teua, altres afany, altres preocupacions que no siguin com és d’intensa la teua tristesa d’avui, [...]Hi ha coses prou més importants sobre la terra que allò que a tu et passa, i ja és hora que en comences a prendre consciència. Hi ha pobles oprimits, homes que pateixen injustici, explotació, violència [...] joves com tu i com jo que envelliran en obscurres presons [...] Però tu, fill de bona família, ben vestit, ben alimentat, ben educat [...] vius en els limbs de la innocència [...] Amic meu, la vida és una aventura molt amarga, molt costosa, molt difícil d’interpretar amb dignitat. La vida vertadera, em refereix, no la dels llibres’ (33-34).

It’s quite evident, then, that with the help of our imagination we must move now from the dark and uncomfortable cave near Naples in which the young man is imprisoned to a previous Arcadian cave –the family house and its garden- in which he lived too well and for too much time. At any rate, this specific space is less important than the spiritual shadows with which the young man is covered and by which he is oppressed; in other words: he ought to open his eyes to catch a glimpse of another light, consisting paradoxically of others’ misery, but easy to be detected by any human being who has not adopted blindness as a job. Sweet caves must be abandoned in order to be conscious of our privileges, since dark prisons are always far from the limbo of innocence or infantilism -a sort of golden cave. As soon as this sweet cave has been left and the protection that it offers has also disappeared, life itself is deprived of all kind of theatrical sophistications and refinements -that is to say, they are transformed into something to be contemplated which is worth contemplating (as seen in other R. Sirera’s plays16)-, and life also gains all its bitterness as a consequence of having left definitively the pleasant realm of literary fiction.

Till now, if my hypothesis is admissible, what might be considered the logical and predictable parents’ warnings –even friends’- has been examined. It is surprising, however, that this list of educators, who -as seen- only at first glance are very kind, lengthens because of a smuggler who is also firmly convinced that he will be capable of straightening out the young man’s life:

‘Tell me: what are your revolutionary projects, if you get out alive of this difficult moment? [...] you must have thought of something regarding your life to come [...] I have the impression that your silence means that an irreversible dissociation has begun between your mind, which continues to be revolutionary, and your body which, after the fiasco, has become significantly conservative’.

‘I digues, quins són els teus projectes revolucionaris, si surts d’aquesta amb vida? [...] alguna cosa deus haver pensat per al futur [...] Em fa l’efecte que el teu silenci significa que s’ha iniciat una dissociació irreversible entre el teu cervell, que continua sent revolucionari, i el teu cos que, després de l’aventura, ha esdevingut notablement conservador’ (53).

It is really surprising, but, at any rate, it is certain that, as a true psychologist who is very used to diagnose all sort of traumas in human subconsciousness, this smuggler is right when warning that revolutions are the result of uninterrupted efforts –day after day. Many defeats and fears

16 All that has been said with regard to El verí del teatre from the point of view of the marquis would be enough to become the most suitable example.
must be overcome; otherwise, human fears are able to petrify a courageous body to the extent that it turns into both a solid and conservative receptacle -that is to say, into a cave- of ideas or ideals which are doomed to die. Just a moment ago, “He” reminded the Young man to bear in mind that, as soon as an ivory-tower or paradise is abandoned, others’ misery is discovered to our great surprise. The smuggler asks him whether he was ever hungry or not:

‘I mean not theoretically but actually’
‘No, no pas a nivell teòric; de veritat, vull dir’ (54-5).

His answer is extremely unimaginative:

‘It isn’t necessary having known personally either oppression or misery to fight against others’ suffering them’,
‘No cal haver patit personalment l’opressió ni la misèria per lluitar perquè no la patesca ningú’ (55).

Indeed, this man, who is much used to traffic both in goods and human beings, must think that a bit more of middle-class preaching shouldn’t annoy anyone:

‘These are only words […] Our parents were absolutely right when they told us that answering for someone else is a stupid thing, that nobody would thank us for it and that playing with fire implied the risk of being burnt unwillingly’.
‘Paraules, només paraules […] Quanta raó te nien els nostres pares, quan ens deien que treure la cara per la xusma era una bajanada, que mai no ens ho agraïrien, i que jugar amb foc tenia el perill que acabàssem cremats sense voler-ho’ (55).

He will even dare to ask the audience not to interpret his words as the hidden apologia of his own business, since:

‘Business exists and prospers when what is produced or provided is necessary for many others. Or, and this is the same thing, when someone has made it necessary. And this situation will not change under the rule of Absolutists or Constitutionalists’.
‘Un negoci existeix i prospera quan allò que produeix o subministra és necessari per a molts. O se l’ha fet necessari, tant se val. I això no canviarà, governen absolutistes o constitucionals’ (55).

To sum up: the message is so clear as peculiar to a sort of wisdom that, in this case, has nothing to do with parents or friends’ advice –in other words: loving advice-, but with the smuggler’s overwhelming and definitive experience. Both the former and the latter are pleased to be protected by the symbolical power of a Platonic image, the cave, since they are anxious to speak about falsehood and truth, shadows and light. Indeed, isn’t it true that the young man is victim of a cavernous intellectual and spiritual darkness? Isn’t it true that his mind, which is closed to reality, insists on denying that the members of his family always think of their own benefit but never of contributing to eliminate others’ poverty, while they hasten yet to:

‘Send the heir to Italy to study Arts or to built a new pavilion next to the sea […] ?’.
‘Fer que l’hereu vaja Itàlia a estudiar art, a bastir un nou pavelló de ball vora el mar […]’ (55-6).
Otherwise, why does he find it so difficult to open his mind and admit that human beings are selfish and fret for walking along well-known and safe routes? “He”, on the contrary, a former combatant at the war against the French invasion, saw:

‘How many excellent people died for nothing. And I saw how a crowd of undesirable persons triumphed as well. Sometimes they fought helping us, sometimes they fought against us […] They now occupy different well-paid places in the states administration, and they will continue to occupy them […] They are professional and all the governments are in need of good professionals’.

‘Morir moltes persones excel·lents per un no res. I vaig veure també triomfar una caterva d’indesitjables, que un dia eren dels nostres i l’endemà de l’enemic […] Ara ocupen diferents llocs molt ben pagats a l’administració. I allà continuaran […] Ells són professionals. I de professionals, de bons professionals, tenen molta necessitat els governs’ (56-7).

It would be both difficult and unfair not to recognize the modernity of the smuggler’s preaching. As a philologist, however, it is my duty to emphasize that, although the above mentioned parents wanted to take their son out of the cave so that he attained Platonic ideals such as freedom, personal view, etcetera, on the other hand both the radical and unscrupulous smuggler’s positivism also aims at taking him out of the cave, but as soon as the young man has abandoned its shadows, he would like him to start an horizontal travel and, as a consequence, to avoid the undeniable risks of ascending too high –that is to say, of being too metaphysical. And so, it is now the young man who sickens at his jailer’s base teaching and must built a Platonic castle alone –i.e. made of illusions- which will save him at least for a few hours.

‘All you say is nothing else but justifications. Justifications which, on the other hand, are certainly vulgar and peculiar to bad literature. The deceived idealist turns into both a cynical and cruel bandit. But he has a good heart and finally redeems himself: when he is about to deliver the hero into the hands of the soldiers, something reminds him of his respectable past, changes his mind and helps the hero to escape although this good deed will cost the bandit his life’.

‘Tot allò que dius no són altra cosa que justificacions. Justificacions d’altra banda, prou vulgars. De literatura barata. L’idealista desencantat esdevé un bandoler cínic i ferotge. Però com, en el fons, té bon cor, en l’últim moment es redimeix: quan està a punt de lliurar l’heroi als soldats, alguna cosa li fa recordar el seu passat honorable, canvia d’idea i l’ajuda a fugir, malgrat que al bandoler això acabe costant-li la vida’ (57).

These two first days in the cave have been very hard for the young man, but Literature, moreover, has a wide range of resources to make the things complicate and keep us in suspense. This young man, who comes from a wealthy family and has been imprisoned because of a tragic fate, hopes to survive. Notwithstanding, R. Sirera likes him to be completely unarmed, so that he hastens to make him fall once again into the abyss of desperation –and it is not difficult since, in spite of his former psychological recovery, he had never succeeded in leaving definitively the oppressive cave. After all, the fact that he has faith in the smuggler’s idealism is as foolish as the innocent confidence which, according to the military man who suddenly shares the prison with him, is peculiar to most of the young revolutionary men fighting against Absolutism.

Indeed, he is surrounded now by persons who have already grown up and matured; in other words, by persons who lived long ago in the cave but have already finished successfully their existential anábasis. Therefore, he must be taught nolens volens the necessary realism in order to disregard the marvellous paradise of fiction. The military man, being expert at victories and
defeats, knows perfectly well how to detect on the battlefield of human life the unprotected flanks into which disaster often infiltrates:

‘There are many people who are weak enough to be convinced by inflamed words. Young people coming from wealthy families who start living with foggy minds […] Priests who feel offended […] Simple-minded people […] Peasants and artisans who delude themselves believing that brotherhood and social justice are not empty words […] everybody hides a dream deep in their heart […] It is not surprising, then, that many people prefer a fantastic life to a real one […] You are so naïve! When you talk about the army, you only think of soldiers and corporals. But they are insignificant, they are cannon fodder. They obey orders. If they are ordered to re-establish the Constitution, they will fight to do it, just in the same way as if they were forced to suffocate the Constitutionalists. Do not delude yourself, the only important person is whoever orders. This is the true army. The true power of the army’.

‘Hi ha molta gent de voluntat prou dèbil, que es deixa arrossegar per unes paraules inflamades. Els joves de bona família que comencen a treure el cap ple de boira a la vida […] Els clergues ressentits […] Algun ànima ximple […] Camperols i menestrals que es fan així la il·lusió que la fraternitat i la igualtat social no són només paraules […] Tothom amaga en el fons del seu cor algun somni […] No és gens estrany, doncs, que molts hi preferesquen la vida imaginada a la real […] Són vostès tan ingenus! Quan parlen de l’exèrcit només pensen en soldats i caporals. Però els soldats i els caporals no hi són res. Carn de canó. Compleixen ordes. Si se’ls ordena restablir la Constitució, lluitaran per restablir-la, igual que si se’ls obliga a reprimir els constitucionals. Els que importen, no s’enganye vostè, són els qui donen les ordres. Aquest és el vertader exèrcit. El poder vertader de l’exèrcit’ (71-2).

As suggested before, this is an excellent lesson that shows the way to be followed by the young man, if he really aims at leaving for evermore the dark and cavernous anonymity, the real and symbolical cannon-fodder that he is now, in order to become a significant person who has his own initiatives. The creator of the ancient image (eikón) –better known as the myth of the cave- strengthened his personality on the account of having glimpsed the unchanging and everlasting Reality, the world of the Idea, both a solid and safe basis upon which any human project can be built. The truth is that Plato might be considered a visionary, but, on the other hand, he takes care of worldly affairs as well. Indeed, he “lands” and writes the Republic – perhaps another sort of golden cave-, in whose bosom there will be a specific place for everyone –or everybody will play their role. Plato, who aimed conscientiously at the ethical recovery of the Athenian citizens –and human beings in general- fell paradoxically into the worst error when he believed that others could become fully ethical only by obeying, while, for the same reason and at the same time, they are obviously deprived of the opportunity to take part in the very design of the orders. Military life lies precisely in discipline, so that the image of soldiers who sometimes are forced “to defend” and sometimes “to suffocate” might awaken the young man to the stupidity of certain institutions. It is time for him to gain a strong will, to inflame others instead of being inflamed by them, to gain a clear mind and perceive the real world; to sum up: it is time for him to get out of the den, which is peculiar to beasts, to turn into an actual human being who deserves a much nobler residence. This lesson, however, might also be baneful if our young man disregards others’ destiny, while it will be highly profitable if his personal revolution is just the first step towards unselfishness.

Anyway, for the time being we must still wait, because the young man doesn’t react; on the contrary, he seems to have lost his way. R. Sirera is going the whole hog now: after having shown him mercilessly the nasty nature of the world, now “She”, as a draughts player, is thinking of a full “neutralisation”, that is to say, this young man must know that everyone living as a prisoner in a cave is really nothing:

‘You are nothing in the end; simply a shadow which disappears among others. Your dream is the dream of a sleeping man who dreams that he dreams, and one day he dreams that he has woken up. This was your last pawn. What are you going to do now?’.

‘No ets res, al capdavall; una ombra més, perduda entre les ombres. El teu somni és el somni d’un dorment que somia que somia, i un dia somia que s’ha despertat. T’he mort l’últim peó. Què faràs ara?’ (75).

In fact, he has been annihilated and his circumstances are not the best ones either to console his brother -who is at the point of death- or to accept to continue his revolutionary project. Everything seems to tell us that all the vicissitudes of the last two days ask him to try a final desperate solution. Will he succeed in finding it out? Will he abandon definitively this underworld which darkens both his spirit and will to the extent of petrifying them? The answer will arrive very soon, since the third day has already come and everybody will be called – regardless of their personal concern- to declare themselves.

The smuggler will be the first to confess his secrets. He cannot hide any longer his philosophical readings and, above all, his skill at finding out the best use for them:

‘We live imprisoned among shadows for too much time, and we don’t still know […] whether we keep on being persons or we have become shadows as well. And this is the reason why […] everybody must be tested, both the shadows and we, in order to be clearly distinguished. We must unchain those who have remained chained in front of the wall, ask them whether the shadow which is reflected in this wall is for them more real than what projects it18 […] and whether they want to continue to live in this underworld or they prefer to go out into the light, bearing in mind that the sunlight might blind them. Indeed, as soon as they see the light, their eyes will be so full of it that they will not be

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18 Cf. with Plato’s Republic 515c-d: ‘Consider, then, what would be the manner of the release and healing from these bonds and this folly if in the course of nature something of this sort should happen to them: When one was freed from his fetters and compelled to stand up suddenly and turn his head around and walk and to lift up his eyes to the light, and in doing all this felt pain and, because of the dazzle and glitter of the light, was unable to discern the objects whose shadows he formerly saw, what do you suppose would be his answer if someone told him that what he had seen before was all a cheat and an illusion, but that now, being nearer to reality and turned toward more real things, he saw more truly? And if also one should point out to him each of the passing objects and constrain him by questions to say what it is, do you not think that he would be at a loss and that he would regard what he formerly saw as more real than the things now pointed out to him?’ (Σκόπει δή, ἢν δ᾿ ἐγὼ, αὐτῶν λύσιν τε καὶ ἱκανόν τῶν τε δεσμῶν καὶ τῆς ἀφροσύνης, οία τὰς ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἕνεκ᾿ ἡμῖν παρενεπεριστάσεις, ἐμβαλλόμενοι αὐτοῖς. ὡς τε λύθηκεν καὶ ἀνατεύθυνότως ἐξαιτήσθαι τοιacco καὶ περιεχόμενον τὸν αὐχένα καὶ μαθητήραν καὶ πρὸς τὸ θέαμα ἀναβλέπειν, πάντα ἴνα τὰυτά πιστεύον ἔλγεον τε καὶ διὰ τὰς μασμαραγγής ἀδύνατον καθόσον ἔχειν ἄν τότε τὰς σκίας ἑώρας, τι οἶει αὐτὸν εἰπεῖν, εἰ τῶν αὐτῶν λέγων ἀντί μὲν ἑώρα φιλοσοφίας, νῦν δὲ μᾶλλον τοι ἐγγυτέρω τοῦ ὄντος καὶ πρὸς μᾶλλον ὄντα τεττυσμένου ὑπῆρθεν βλέποι, καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐκατέρων τῶν παριόντων δεικνύς αὐτῶν ἀναγκάζων ἐρωτῶν ἀποκρίνεσθαι ὅτι ἐστιν; οὐκ οἶει αὐτὸν ἀποφεύγει τα ἐν καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι τά τότε ὄρομαν ἀληθέστερα ἢ τὰ νῦν δεικνύμενα).
able to see not even one of the things that they consider to be true now.\textsuperscript{19} What an embarrassing situation! Their choice is undoubtedly a risky one, but, at any rate, it is inevitable. I know how to distinguish bodies from shadows. I know what everybody is made out of and I like to put both them and their contradictions face to face as well. / The fellow: ‘And what do you do that for?’ / The smuggler: ‘Maybe to force them to react [...] as well as to get them used to sunlight’.

‘Vivim massa temps tancats entre les ombres, i ja no sabem si nosaltres [...] continuum sent persones, o hem esdevingut ombres també. I per això [...] ens cal posar tothom a prova: les ombres i nosaltres. I desitri què és cadàsc, desencadenen els que han romàns encadenats davant el mur, preguntar-los si encara els sembla més real l’ombra projectada que allò que la projecta [...] i si volen continuar vivint en aquest món subterrani, o volen sortir a la llum, atès el fet que el sol segurament pot encegar-los. Perquè un cop arribats a la llum, en tindran els ulls tan plens que no seran capaços de veure ni una sola de les coses que ara anomenem vertaderes. Terrible desconcert! Una tria, la seua, no ho dubtes, una mica ariscada, però, en qualsevol cas, indefugible [...] Jo tinc la virtut de separar ombres i cosossos. Sé de quina matèria està fet cadàsc, i m’agradà enfrontar-lo amb les seues contradiccions’. / El Company: ‘I per què?’ / El Contrabandista: ‘Possiblement per fer que actuen [...] Perquè s’acostumen a la llum del sol’ (95-6).

The use of the first person plural, just at the beginning of this paragraph, is so emphatic that we notice very soon that the smuggler speaks not only to the fellow with whom he is arguing now the method to be followed concerning the young man but also to someone else. R. Sirera’s plays, as said before, are thought to rouse consciousness\textsuperscript{20}, so that it should be acknowledged that many times we all are perfectly content to look for the “dark” refuge—in its ethical sense of self-satisfaction and, consequently, we must be tortured by receiving the impact of a merciless Light. Some degree of allegorical interpretation could even be proposed: whenever we go to the theatre, i.e. another sort of dark cave, we must not be confident that the powerful spotlights over the stage will only blind the eyes both of actors and actresses; on the contrary, in this case the spotlights have been thought to annoy the audience. Passivity and hesitation are always more comfortable than revolution, but R. Sirera seems to be firmly convinced that “each Plato needs his Aristotle”, or, what would be the same, everyone is free to ascend towards an unattainable Idea, but living in this material world and gaining experience is much more important.

‘(I believe) in experience, in everyday-life. I believe in the happy moments [...] of common people’s life [...] those who don’t aim at [...] being heroes [...] Unlike your

\textsuperscript{19} Cf. with Plato’s Republic 516a-b: ‘And if’, said I, ‘someone should drag him thence by force up the ascent which is rough and steep, and not let him go before he had drawn him out into the light of the sun, do you not think that he would find it painful to be so haled along, and would chafe at it, and when he came out into the light, that his eyes would be filled with its beams so that he would not be able to see even one of the things that we call real?’ ‘Why, no, not immediately’, he said. ‘Then there would be need of habituation, I take it, to enable him to see the things higher up. And at first he would most easily discern the shadows and, to enable him to see the things higher up. And at first he would most easily

discern the shadows and, after that, the likenesses or reflections in water of men and other things, and later, the things themselves’ (Εἱ δέ, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, ἐνετεύθην ἐλκυόν τις αὐτὸν βίᾳ διὰ τραχείας τῆς ἀναβάσεως καὶ ανάντους, καὶ μὴ ἀνέθη πρὶν ἐξελκυθηνεὶ εἰς τὸ τοῦ ἡλίου φῶς, ἄρα οὐχὶ ὁδυνασθαί τε ἄν καὶ ἀγανακτεῖν ἐλκυμένον, καὶ ἐπείθη πρὸς τὸ φῶς ἐλθοῦν, ἀγής ἃν ἔχοντα τὰ ὁμάτα μεστά ὀφέρν ὁμάθαι ἐν δυνασθαι τῶν νῦν λεγομένων αληθῶν; Οὐ γάρ ἄν, ἐφη, ἐξαιρήθη το ἀνθρώπινον γε. / Συνήθειας δὴ οίμαι δέοιτ’ ἄν, εἰ μέλλοι τὰ ἄνω ὑψώσειτι. Καὶ πρώτον μὲν τὰς σκιὰς ἃν ὄστα καθορίζει, καὶ μετὰ τούτο ἐν τοῖς ἕκαστο τα τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τὰ τῶν ἄλλων εἰδώλων, ὑστερον δέ αὐτά.).

\textsuperscript{20} See e.g. the introduction of R. Pérez to The cave.
“we” I propose my “I” […]. There’s another feature that makes me different from you. As a consequence of being selfish, I live in this world, while you are always alone in spite of your “we”. And you will always be alone, because you want no dealings with anyone.’

‘(Crec) en la experiència. En les petites coses quotidianes […] de la gent comuna […] dels que no aspiren […] a ser herois […] Davant del teu “nosaltres” jo defense el “jo” […] Hi ha una altra cosa que ens diferencia. Jo, l’individualista, viss immers en el món. Per contra, tu, malgrat el teu “nosaltres” estàs tothora sol. I sempre ho estarás, perquè no suportes el tracte amb les persones’ (90).

Therefore, this smuggler is in great measure a good instance of zôon politikón: he is addicted to microcosm, friend of identifiable human beings and, above all, against all sort of philanthropic idealism which dooms its followers to prefer an intangible “we” to a concrete and somatic “he” or “she”. And just for the same reason he knows how to share his life with the prisoners of the cave even when he has already abandoned it and runs the risk of forgetting his humble origins:

‘With regard to those who have walked up to the surface and have already seen the sunlight, it is our duty to make them not to refuse either to walk down again into the cave […] or to share with the prisoners their troubles and honours’.21

‘És tasca nostra fer que aquells que han pujat a la superfície i conegut la llum del sol, no es neguen després a tornar a baixar a la caverna […] ni a participar en els seus treballs ni els seus honors’ (98).

It is quite clear that we are faced with a conscious philosopher and an excellent master of ceremonies who, having seen that the young man is about to have an initiation-experience, has sent him to have a bath. It is time for him to become immersed in lustral waters. Both in the dark of the cave or in the water of this peculiar baptism, the young man is always under the surface. Everything, however, is going to change since “She” and “he” are here again to play new roles. They will now be the mirror on which the young man’s memories are reflected (96). And so, due to the fact that he will be able to contemplate his consciousness (théamai-theatre), he will notice paradoxically that his life has often been a sad performance. Now this attitude must changed since “She” and “He”, as if they were a little inner cave that hides terrible secrets, are here to be observed:

21 Cf. with Plato’s Republic 516c-d: ‘Well then, if he recalled to remind his first habitation and what passed for wisdom there, and his fellow-bondsmen, do you not think that he would count himself happy in the change and pity them?’ ‘He would indeed’. ‘And if there had been honours and commendations among them which they bestowed on one another and prizes for the man who is quickest to make out the shadows as they pass and best able to remember their customary precedences, sequences and co-existences, and so most successful in guessing at what was to come, do you think he would be very keen about such rewards, and that he would envy and emulate those who were honoured by these prisoners and lorded it among them, or that he would feel with Homer and greatly prefer while leaving on earth to be serf of another, and endure anything rather than opine with them and live that life?’ (Τί οὖν; ἀναμμηνησκόμενον αὐτὸν τῆς πρώτης οἰκήσεως καὶ τῆς ἐκεί σοφίας καὶ τῶν τότε συνδεσμωτῶν ὅλον ἀν οἶει αὐτῶν μὲν ευδαμονιζέειν τῆς μεταβολῆς τοὺς δὲ ἐλεεῖν; / Καὶ μᾶλλα. / Τιμαὶ δὲ καὶ ἐπαινοῦν εἰ τινὲς αὐτοὶ ἦσαν τότε παρ’ ἀλλήλων καὶ γέρα τοῦ ὁμοίωτα καθαρόντα τα παριόντα, καὶ μνημονεύοντα μάλιστα ὡς τὰ πρότερα αὐτῶν καὶ ὅστε εἰσεθεὶς καὶ ἀμα πορεύεσθαι, καὶ ἐκ τούτων δὴ δυνατώτατα ἀπομαντευομένῳ τὸ μέλλον ἥξειν, δοκεῖς ἀν αὐτῶν ἐπιθυμητικῶς αὐτῶν ἔχειν καὶ ζηλοῦν τοὺς παρ’ ἐκείνους τιμωμένους τα καὶ ἐνδυναστεύοντας, ἢ τὸ τοῦ Ἡμήρου ἢν πεπονθέναι καὶ σφόδρα βουλευόμεθα “ἐπάρθουρον ἐνότα θητευόμενον ἄλλω ἀνδρὶ παρ’ ἀλήθω” καὶ ὠτοῦ ἢν πεπονθέναι μᾶλλον ἢ ἱκεῖν ἡ δοξάζει καὶ ἐκείνως ζῇν).
‘Everyone has his own cave, his own darkness, his own night […] and he believes he is within, but it is the cave which is within, at the centre of his soul […] at any time and circumstance he will find what he is afraid to find […] It is only you the one who shapes us’.

‘Cadascú du, ell mateix, la seua caverna, la seua foscor, la seua nit a sobre […] I es creu que ell és a dintre, però la que és a dintre, de veritat, és ella. Al centre de la seua ànima [...] en cada cas i en cada circumstància hom acaba trobant allò que tem trobar [...] Ets tu, únicament tu qui ens dones forma’ (102-3).

Ergo, if the young man is not in the cave but the cave in the young man, it is easy to conclude that we are in need of an Oedipus-therapy. We all should psychoanalyse ourselves with the firm determination that Sophocles’ Oedipus showed in order to find himself out. Or, according to the context of the play, we are advised in fact to practise a peculiar kind of spiritual spelaeology which, on the other hand, by no means should be mistaken with a simple daily physical training. On the contrary, although the young man continues to be a prisoner, he appears now in the open air and the walls which oppressed him have disappeared as well. Finally then, he must react and put “She”’s creed into operation:

‘Afterwards” doesn’t mean “now”: think over what you are doing. And when you have made a decision, don’t hesitate […] Whatever you do won’t be worse or cause worse troubles than your living –a cruel one- endlessly imprisoned in the cave, among shadows’.

‘Després no és ara: valora bé el que fas. I quan et decidesques, no dubtes [...] Qualsevol cosa que faces no podrà ser pitjor, ni originar-te conseqüències més dolentes que aquest viure –malviure- eternament tancat en la caverna, entre les ombres’ (104).

Well then, it is time to know the denouement. Finally the smuggler confesses to the young man that he has sold him to the royalists soldiers. As far he is concerned, the traffic in human life is so advantageous that any subsequent remorse is counterbalanced. At the most, he certainly regrets that, due to the time –long time- that the army has wasted, the young man may now be tortured. If so, he will remember the cave as a paradise, since in the dark of torture, courage disappears and death is much more preferable.

Notwithstanding, the smuggler’s cruelty is as odd as himself. As suggested before, he likes to check the effectiveness of his teaching by forcing his pupils to react. He gives him now a knife thanks to which he will choose the option between dying or killing. And, as we can guess, the young man does react and discover suddenly that he has been able to kill, that he wanted to. In fact, he cannot believe it, but, since R. Sirera’s plays are addicted to the tension fiction/reality, now it turns out that: a) the smuggler lets him go; b) he will be taken to the ship -the only way to be rescued n- and c) the soldiers have abandoned the island –or they seem to have-; in other words: he has been told lies all the time. It is true that one man has died, but:

‘It was written and, to a certain extent, it was necessary […] With regard to this story, you may have played the most lifeless role; even it might be imagined that the only reason for your presence among us has been in the end to make the main character to start his change’.

‘Estava escrit i, en certa manera també era necessari [...] Potser d’aquesta història t’ha tocat interpretar a tu el paper més poc lluit, i fins i tot hom podria pensar que l’únic motiu de la teua presència entre nosaltres ha estat, al capdavall, permetre al protagonista iniciar el seu canvi’ (113).
Maybe. History, when written by States, assures us that mankind has often improved thanks to the sacrifice of both innocent and unselfish victims. After having read *The cave* and being therefore a bit more sceptical about it, we should admit that sometimes mankind also improves even because of the absurd death of insignificant persons. However, this is a sad ending concerning a very serious play where that Plato’s image, the cave, skilfully readapted, has been extremely useful. Now, when the previous wide range of possibilities seems exhausted, R. Sirera seems in his turn to beat the retreat calling the readers to an active choice:

“After he has left this island, I cannot decide what his destiny will be. He may have been taken without resisting by the officer towards the shore […] and there he may have died […] arrested by the enemies […] Or he may […] Or even may he […] After all, the main thing is that we have always thought of […] a worthy escape for him: he will become a hero if he is killed by the soldiers, and he will become twice a hero if he succeeds both in avoiding them and getting on board. Let us imagine, then, his last chance: he has the knife and that sort of blind fear that turns the coward into the bravest. He has just killed another human being, the second one, and he is scared by having checked that it is an easy and simple deed […] he is helped miraculously to get near the ship. Here is the siren announcing it is about to weigh anchor. He has arrived just at the last minute […] he has been welcome on board, both trembling and insecure, stained with blood –the sign of the initiation-rite which transforms the boy into a man- […]”.

“Des del moment que ha abandonat aquesta illa, no tinc poder per decidir el seu destí. Potser s’haurà deixat conduir mansament per l’oficial [...] cap a la costa, i allí haurà caigut [...] en mans dels enemics [...] O potser [...] O, fins i tot, potser [...] Al cap i a la fi, el que importa és que, en qualsevol dels casos, li hem procurat ... una sortida digna: serà un heroi si el sacrificuen els soldats, i ho serà doblement si aconsegueix burlar-los i embarcar. Imaginem-nos, doncs, la possibilitat darrera: té el ganivet, i aquella classe de por cega que fa valents els homes més covards. Només fa un moment que ha tallat una altra vida humana, la segona, tot espantat de comprovar com és de fàcil aquest gest, i quan poc costa [...] L’ajuden miraculosament a aprofitar-se al vaixell. El senyal que anuncia que aquest es disposa a salpar. Ha arribat en l’últim moment [...] L’han acollit a bord, tremolós i insegur, tacat de sang –el signe del ritu d’iniciació, que converteix el noi en home- [...]” (113-4).

We knew from the very beginning that the young man has entered a new existential dimension –significantly dressed in the purple of his blood- just on account of having abandoned definitively the underworld. Therefore, R. Sirera’s *The cave* dramatizes the human access to a sort of maturity which is far more important than the spontaneous growth which Biology dictates. But, as a result, it must be difficult to ignore –and, on the other hand, why should he do it?- all the topics that Literature has stored up century after century. We have seen how the ancient image –the cave conceived by a philosophical mind- has become for the dramatist an effective incentive to his creativity. Nevertheless, from now onwards the fact of looking at the physical world –leaving aside the idealist Plato- will also give him another wide range of seductive images which by no means betray the spirit of the play. Shells of insects which have already been transformed into flying butterflies, magic cocoons which have released their “secrets” and, on the contrary, a last prison containing a prisoner awaiting execution: they all seem to be the last effective and cavernous resort of the dramatist’s imagination. Indeed, here are the words that, according to the smuggler, our young man might have said when taking his leave of everything he knew before:
“‘Leave me alone with nothing, leave me abandoned, unarmed, empty, such as the dried shell of an insect, such as the cocoon every radiant butterfly has taken flight from’ […] He means that everything has ended, that the past will never come back and a new life starts for him, and that he is about to change […] hence the image of the cocoon and the empty shell. To tell the truth, this text might have been the same […] if he would have been arrested and imprisoned by the soldiers and was awaiting execution, taking his leave of this world’”.

“‘Déixeu-me sense res, deixeu-me abandonat, inerm, deixeu-me buit, com la carcassa seca d’un insecte, com el capoll d’on s’ha aixecat tota esplendent la papallona’ […] Vol dir amb això que tot s’ha acabat, que el passat no ha de tornar ja mai i que una nova vida s’inicia per a ell, i que es troba en el moment del canvi […] d’aquí la imatge del capoll i la carcassa buida. Ben mirat, aquest text podria servir també […] si hagués caigut presoner dels soldats i es trobàs en capella, aconiadant-se d’aquest món” (114).

The Valencian writer assures that “we must not worry about […] which was the definitive end of the story” and I am not worried about it. Let me say that, as a teacher of the Classical Tradition who fell in love with it long time ago, I am very grateful to a dramatist who, with regard to the Platonic image of the cave, has known how to discover its constant capacity to provoke. Indeed, whoever reads R. Sirera’s *The cave* should acknowledge—and react accordingly—that his/her duties are: a) abandoning definitively the dark cave of any ideological repression; b) leaving, as men and women who have certainly matured, the golden cave, the Arcadia of the motherly bosom, the parents’ house and the garden; c) torturing, if necessary, his/her conservative body, a cave-body, whenever it closes up to suffocate the mind’s boldnesses; d) opening the personal cave to discover others’ misery; e) loving the physical world and hating, if necessary, the ideal one; f) having a clear political vocation to work for other people; g) walking up out of the cave but walking down again into it to live with and recuperate the underdeveloped ones; h) dipping his/her head in the cave of his/her consciousness to find out terrible secrets; i) facing the others, if necessary; j) killing instead of dying; k) becoming innocent victims to provoke others’ change; l) paying the blood tribute which is peculiar to some initiation-rites, or m) becoming proud butterflies on the account of having abandoned too comfortable cocoons. Anyway, if the reader believes that he/she is faced with an unattainable aim, neither must he/she worry about it: R. Sirera has thought of an enigmatic end thanks to which he/she, as a last resort, can imagine that everything has been the result of a Freudian fixation concerning his/her repressive father:

“Let us hope, then, that the sun rises and all the shadows disappear with the help of its brightness; and let us hope as well that, thanks to it, one can check that everything seeming to be a terrible monster is nothing else in fact but our father’s overcoat which is hung on a nail near the door”.

“Esperem, doncs, que el sol s’aixeque, i amb la claror s’esborren totes aquestes ombres, i es puga comprovar, gràcies al seu concurs, que el que semblava un monstre horrible no era pas altra cosa que el vell abric del nostre pare penjat d’un clau al costat de la porta” (115).

Finally, I should like to go further into some matters which do not fit exactly the Platonic reading of my previous analysis. Rafael Pérez González, when presenting *The cave* edition in *Els textos del Centre Dramàtic de la Generalitat de Catalunya* (*The Texts of the Dramatic Centre of the “Generalitat de Catalunya- The Autonomous Government of Catalonia”*), emphasizes its significance as the final step of his progressive ascent to the highest peak of creativity. It would be absurd and unforgivable on my part if my intention were to correct him now, since R. Pérez
has examined accurately all of R. Sirera’s plays and has been devoted for many years to theatre as a social phenomenon. Anyway, I am really interested in quoting some of his judgements which might be very useful afterwards: “It is a logical and conclusive play with both a free and dense way of writing […] and a very personal view”. “He uses fantastic elements and, therefore, abandons realism”. “The cave is a true theatre-play: the stage is divided into different spaces as a chessboard […] it has noteworthy plastic images as the last scene of the first day, the lustral bath or the beautiful image of the ship, etcetera”. “Text-theatre as an intellectual method of thinking over and acquiring self-knowledge […]”.

Bearing in mind, then, these judgements, the radicalism of the smuggler’s methods might be interpreted allegorically as the dramatist’s -R. Sirera- merciless fight against any remains in his personality of immaturity, doubt, conformism, fear or human tendency to comfort and self-satisfaction. Sometimes killing is even necessary to avoid the inevitable sclerosis that often accompanies our personal success. As a consequence, here is a good method to be followed: if one imagines from time to time to be a young man/woman whose life is too comfortable, he/she might accept to think of an unpleasant experience in the underworld as a result of which he/she will get angry enough to look anxiously for the exit, to change, to fight, to learn or, in the end, to live.

As said before, whoever reads The cave with the aim of remaining unconcerned about R. Sirera’s provocations should think it over. It is certain that, after all, we all could consider The cave as the dramatist’s personal psychomachia, but, on the other hand and with the help of such a play –I’m referring obviously to the fact of reading it and at the same time carrying out a serious self-evaluation-, who could neglect the chance to check whether he/she has really matured or not? At any rate, if R. Sirera aims at being a sort of everlasting provocative writer, readers have the right in their turn to ask all kind of questions concerning his degree –high or low- of commitment and coherence. And, in this respect, it would be really unfair not to acknowledge precisely that both features are peculiar to R. Sirera’s work. All of his personal curriculum as theatre-theoretician, actor, critic, translator, scriptwriter, dramatist, consultant, director or theatre-manager show a permanent will to conceive theatre as the fitting way to change society. In the bosom of the independent university-theatre he took part very early in the collective effort to change the political system at the end of general Franco’s dictatorship, which in Valencia implied claiming its national identity –that is to say, its national language, Valencian. After the democratic institutions were restored, he promoted the National Theatre of Valencia that he conceived as the sum of the local dramatic centres, everyone being free to do the programme planning. He even worked for the Culture Department of the “Generalitat Valenciana” -The Autonomous Government of Valencia- in different fields such as music, theatre and cinema. Anyway, some years later, as soon as he considered that Politics prevailed over Theatre interest, he offered his resignation. To sum up: R. Sirera has devoted many years of his life to rouse public consciousness, so that in my opinion he should be exempt from presenting any captatio benevolentiae in order not to offend susceptible audiences.

22 See e. g.: Guia per recórrer Rodolf Sirera, 1998.
24 This is the written text of the lecture I gave in the Institut d’Estudis Catalans -The Institute of Catalan Studies- on the 28th of november 1997. I am interested to emphasize that I have focused on the Platonic reference. However, after my lecture, professor Carles Miralles insinuated another possible reference, Calderon de la Barca’s La vida es sueño, which in my opinion is unquestionable, though I have followed another path. The very same R. Sirera, who read my article and liked my Platonic reading of his play, told me the same. I take then the opportunity to remember now that the three days scheme of The cave carries back in time to the baroque period and the death of the smuggler’s friend –this is a personal confession of
Complete bibliographic references:


the dramatist- would be the extrapolation of Clarin’s death, the loyal Segismundo’s fellow (third day, scene XIII).