

Cinema Roads to the Platonic Image of the Cave¹

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To Mercè Valls & Xavier Biosca

It seems necessary and above all logical to demand from researchers in the realm of the Classical Tradition the provision of conclusive proofs of the dependence of literary or artistic works on Greek or Latin models that, after having been adapted *–lato sensu–*, have reached our times. The preservation of Classical Wisdom offers in its turn a wide range of possibilities among which there would be, for instance, not only replicas *ad litteram* but adaptations, mere allusions and, why not?, all sorts of rules and commonplaces, thus becoming sometimes a burden rather than a source of inspiration. Whatever the case may be, it is essential to provide the proof and demonstrate that there has been both awareness and deliberate use of the ancient model -and perhaps of its tradition all through the centuries-, so that we can draw a line that associates -since Cinema is now our subject- the ancient world with the contemporary one. In other words, those who do research into the Classical Tradition and Cinema may and must write, for instance, on Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Edipo Re* or *Medea*, Jules Dassin's *Phaedra* or the Victorian experience of Platonic love in James Ivory's *Maurice*, etcetera, but they should neither analyse a film simply to establish certain parallelisms with Classical models, nor pay attention to significant coincidences if finally they cannot confirm any Classical authorship or inspiration. Following this professional code, they will exhibit an irreproachable behaviour, but they will not take good opportunities to lead contemporary men and women to a Classical Culture that they often consider out-of-date and completely extraneous.

It is quite clear, therefore, that what I have just written is not a *captatio benevolentiae stricto sensu*, since, if so, the title of my article probably would have been different. Indeed, "Cinema Roads to the Platonic Image of the Cave" permits me to be heterodox, since in my opinion I must not only provide some proofs of a true dependence on Plato –and certainly there will be a good deal- but, due to the fact that cinema is nowadays a general cultural habit, I can also take reasonable opportunities to lead contemporary men and women to Ancient Civilization. At any rate, the readers will decide –this is their inalienable right- if the journey has been pleasant and convincing and, above all, interesting enough to study in depth aspects of Classical Antiquity which they had probably never known before.

Indeed, cinema is now one hundred years old, and there are already many films which, in spite of their different perspectives, invite us to go back to the Platonic image of the cave both from the purest orthodoxy –as said before, demonstrating their dependence on Plato- and from an acceptable heterodoxy that by no means demands a somersault. Nevertheless, first of all it is worth reading some chapters of the seventh book of Plato's *Republic*, since it would be absurd to ignore that we usually refer to the "myth" of the cave, while I think that we might have no right to change Plato's own words capriciously:

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‘Next’, said I, ‘compare (ἀπέικασον) our nature in respect of education and its lack to such an experience as this. Picture (ιδε̐) men dwelling in a sort of subterranean cavern with a long entrance open to the light on its entire width. Conceive them (ὄρα) 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. Picture (ιδε̐) further the light from a fire burning higher up and at a distance behind them, and between the fire and the prisoners and above them a road along which a low wall has been built, as the exhibitors of puppet-shows have partitions before the men themselves, above which they show the puppets’. ‘All that I see’, he said. ‘See also, then, men carrying past the wall implements of all kinds that rise above the wall, and human images and shapes of animals as well, wrought in stone and wood and every material, some of these bearers presumably speaking and others silent’. ‘A strange image you speak of’, he said, ‘and strange prisoners’. ‘Like to us’, I said; 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 (τὰς σκιάς) cast from the fire on the wall (προσπιπτούσας) of the cave that fronted them?’. ‘How could they’, he said, ‘if they were compelled to hold their heads unmoved through life?’... ‘And if their prison had an echo from the wall opposite them, when one of the passers-by uttered a sound, do you think that they would suppose anything else than the passing shadow (τὴν παριούσαν σκίαν) to be the speaker?... such prisoners would deem reality to be nothing else than the passing shadows (τὰς σκιάς) of the artificial objects... 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 (τὰς σκιάς) he formerly saw... do you not think that he would be at loss and that he would regard what he formerly saw as more real than the things now pointed out to him?... And so, finally, I suppose, he would be able to look upon the sun itself and see its true nature, not by reflections in water or phantasms of it in an alien setting, but in and by itself in its own place... ‘Well then, if he recalled to mind 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’... ‘This image (εἰκόνα) then, dear Glaucon, 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 miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear. But God knows whether it is true. But, at any rate, my dream as it appears to me is that in the region of the known the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, and that when seen it must needs point us to the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the authentic source of truth and reason, and that anyone who is to act wisely in private or public must have caught sight of this’. ‘I concur’, he said, ‘so far as I am able’. ‘Come then,’ I said, ‘and join me in this further thought, and do not be surprised that those who have attained to this height are not willing to occupy themselves with the affairs of men, but their souls ever feel the upward urge and the yearning for that sojourn above. For this, I take it, is likely if in this point too the likeness of our image (εἰκόνα) holds’³.

³ Plato. *R.* 514a-517d -translated by Paul Shorey, Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970.

Consequently, Plato does not write a myth that will explain to us why things have become as they are, but he proposes an effort of imagination, thanks to which and also to the applicability of the image that will appear in our minds, we shall understand the idealistic nature of his philosophy. It certainly deals with something uncommon: some men imprisoned in a cave since their birth, though the very same creation of the image (*eikón*) makes the prisoners credible (*eikótes*). Indeed, the image offers *per se* many advantages, and the most remarkable one is that we can contemplate what is projected on our intangible cerebral screen. Let us imagine, then, that our minds have already obeyed the order and we are now contemplating the prisoners. The result is really surprising: the cave has a long entrance open to the light (*anapeptaméne*) on its entire width, so that we see the prisoners inclining their bodies slightly and their eyes staring at the opposite wall of the cave (*eis tò katantikry*). Behind them, far away and higher, a fire burns as if it were a spotlight. It projects on the opposite wall of the cave the shadows of all kinds of objects that we are also required to imagine being manipulated -as puppets are- by their exhibitors above a low wall which in its turn is placed between the fire and the prisoners. They are doomed, then, to the eternal contemplation of “shadows”, i.e. “simulacra” of reality. On account of the inherited strict Aristotelian and Stoic Logic, Plato could be advised of the fact that they are certainly capable of contemplating the “true” opposite wall of the cave, but obviously he wants us to pay attention only to the projected images, not to the screen on which they are projected. Whatever the case is, it is worth noticing that we have just entered a sort of contemporary cinema where, as it is well known, a film is placed between the projector and the audience, so that the images contained in it are projected (*prospitoúsas*) on a screen at the far end –usually going down- of the cinema (*eis tò katantikry*). The time during which we have been prisoners in the dark cave of the cinema throughout our lives is short –or not- but, above all, we have always lived in reality. Plato, however, did not think so and hastened to assert that, before attaining the everlasting and unchanging Idea, everything will continue to be both prison and shadow, i.e. a dark simulacrum of a true Light that has never been darkened by the *tenebrae*.

The first road to the Platonic image of the cave that I have chosen is certainly heterodox: Peter Weir’s *The Truman Show* (1998), written by Andrew Niccol. I use the adjective “heterodox” since, if Niccol does not “confess” that Plato’s famous image was somehow a reference for him, I should be content both with pointing out a great number of astonishing parallelisms and with using his film to reflect, as Plato did, on a centuries-old voyage from the darkness of ignorance to the light of freedom and wisdom⁴. In other words, Plato, if we pay attention to his effective images rather than to his personal metaphysical ascent, invited us to look for a freedom that we must gain day after day, just as *The Truman Show* exhorts us nowadays to “go out” by means of presenting a series of circumstances that are highly comparable with those of Plato’s prisoners. Let us see it!:

‘1.7 billion were there for his birth. 220 countries tuned in for his first step. The world stood still for that stolen kiss and, as he grew, so did the technology. An entire human life recorded on an intricate network of hidden cameras and broadcast live and unedited 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to an audience around the globe. Coming to you now from Seahaven Island, enclosed in the largest studio ever constructed, and along with the Great Wall of China, one of the 2 manmade structures visible from space, now in its 30th great year, *The Truman Show*’. Mike: ‘What a week it’s been. I don’t know about you, I was on pins and needles the entire time. Hello and good evening. I’m your host Mike Michaelson, and welcome to Tru-Talk, our forum for issues growing out of the show. But

⁴ At any rate, I must recognize that my “exercise” is not an original one, since thanks to the internet and a search for “Truman Show + Plato’s myth of the cave” we verify that the parallelism has already been established –at least in general.

tonight, something very special indeed, a rare and exclusive interview with the show's conceiver and creator. So, come with us now as we go live to the lunar room on the 221st floor of the omni cam ecosphere, where we'll find the world's greatest tele-visionary, the designer and architect of the world within a world that is Seahaven Island, Christof. Before we begin, I'd like to thank you on behalf of our audience for granting this interview. We know how demanding your schedule is, and we all know how jealously you guard your privacy. This, sir, is indeed an honour'. / Christof: 'Don't mention it'. / M: 'Well the catalyst for the recent dramatic events on the show has been Truman's father, Kirk, and his attempts to infiltrate the show, but before we get into that, I think it's worth noting that this is not the first time someone from the outside has attempted to reach Truman, is it?'/ Chr: 'We have had close calls in the past'. / M: 'But there's never been anything to compare with this most recent breach in security, the first intruder to be a former cast member'. Chr: 'And a dead one at that'. / M: 'Gotta say, writing Kirk back in –masterstroke'. / M: 'Since Kirk started this crisis in Truman's life, I came to the conclusion that only he could end it'. (Flashback. Truman's father: 'Truman! Truman! No! That's off limits'. / Truman: 'Why? What's over there?' / Truman's father: 'Nothing. It's dangerous. That's all. You've got to know your limitations, Truman'.) / M: 'But let's remind viewers exactly why dad was written out in the first place'. / Chr: 'As Truman grew up, we were forced to manufacture ways to keep him on the island'. (Flashback. Truman: 'I'd like to be an explorer, like the great Magellan'. / Truman's teacher: 'Oh, You're too late. There's really nothing left to explore'.) / Chr: 'Finally, I came up with Kirk's drowning'. / M: 'Most effective'. / Chr: 'Truman's been terrified of the water ever since. When Kirk read the synopsis of the episode, he was disappointed to say the least. Jesus! I'm sure that's what caused him to break into the set'. / M: 'But how do you intend to explain his 22-year absence?'/ Chr: 'Amnesia'. / M: 'Brilliant. Let's take some viewer phone calls. Charlotte, North Carolina, you're on with Christof'. / Voice: 'Christof, I was wondering how many cameras you got in that town?'/ Chr: 'Somewhere in the vicinity of 5000'. / Voice: 'That's a lot of cameras'. / Chr: 'Remember, we started with just one. / M: 'He was curious from birth. Premature by 2 weeks. Almost as if he couldn't wait to get started. His eagerness to leave his mother's womb was the very reason he was the one selected. In competition with 5 other unwanted pregnancies, the casting of a show, determined by an air date, Truman was the one who arrived on cue'. / Voice: 'Incidentally, I believe Truman is the first child to have been legally adopted by a corporation'. / Chr: 'That's correct'. / Voice: 'The show has generated enormous revenues now, equivalent to the gross national product of a small country'. / Chr: 'People forget it takes the population of an entire country to keep the show running'. / M: 'Since the show is on 24 hours a day without commercial interruption, all those gathering revenues are generated by product placement'. / Chr: 'That's true. Everything on the show is for sale. From the actor's wardrobe, food products, to the very homes they live in'. / M: 'And all of it available in the Truman catalogue, operators are standing by. Christof, let me ask you, why do you think Truman has never come close to discovering the true nature of his world until now?' / Chr: 'We accept the reality of the world with which we are presented. It's as simple as that'. / M: 'The Hague for Christof. Hello? The Hague?. All right, we've lost that call. Let's go to Hollywood. You're on Tru-Talk'. / Voice: 'Christof. I'd just like to say one thing. You're a liar and a manipulator, and what you've done to Truman is sick!' / Chr: 'Well, we remember this voice, don't we? How could we forget?' / M: 'Let's go to another call'. / Chr: 'No, no, no. It's fine, Mike. I love to reminisce with former members of the cast. Sylvia, as you announced so melodramatically to the world, you think because you batted your eyes at Truman once, flirted with him, stole a few minutes of air time with him to thrust yourself and your politics into the limelight that you

know him? That you know what's right for him? You really think you're in a position to judge him?' / S: 'What right do you have to take a baby and turn his life into some kind of mockery? Don't you ever feel guilty?' / Chr: 'I have given Truman a chance to lead a normal life. The world, the place you live in is the sick place. Seahaven's the way the world should be'. / S: 'He's not a performer. He's a prisoner. Look at him! Look at what you've done to him!' / Chr: 'He could leave at any time, if his was more than just a vague ambition, if he was absolutely determined to discover the truth, there's no way we could prevent him. I think that what distresses you really, caller, is that ultimately Truman prefers his cell, as you call it'. / S: 'That's where you're wrong. You're so wrong, and he'll prove you wrong'. / M: 'Well, aside from the heated comments of a very vocal minority, it's been an overwhelmingly positive experience. Yes, for Truman and for the viewing public. Well Christof, I can't thank you enough for giving so generously of your time tonight. I think it's safe to say now that this crisis is behind us and Truman is back to his old self, we can look forward to some exciting new developments?' / Chr: 'Well, Mike, the big news is that Meryl will be leaving Truman in an upcoming episode, and a new romantic interest will be introduced'. / M: 'Aha'. / Chr: 'I'm determined television's first on-air conception will still take place'. / M: 'Well, another television milestone straight ahead. You heard it here first. It has been a singular honour and pleasure, sir. Christof, thank you'. / Chr: 'Thank you, Mike'⁵.

Here is, then, a life –a whole one- that has been thought to become a “projected” image on the screen of millions of televisions all over the world. Indeed, people have been watching it day after day for years and they do believe that what they see is true, the most genuine of the reality shows since the “star” does not perform fake emotions. Nevertheless, Truman is not a real actor, a man who on his own initiative has chosen the roles he wants to play. On the contrary, his image, life and emotions lacking spontaneity –they have been completely planned⁶- are as fake as the shadows of Plato's cave. His whole life –transformed into an image- which seemed to be so real, belongs in fact –using Plato's words- to the realm of appearance, thus being a simulacrum of a true one.

Truman is not a free man but a prisoner since his birth –like Plato's-, and the great irony is that he is not a “true man” but a fake and planned one from the very beginning. However, Andrew Niccol not only seems to reveal Truman's sad condition, a sort of self-negation, but he denounces above all the self-imprisonment or addiction of millions of people as much prisoners as Truman, who every day are orphans for hours of their own life in order to live Truman's one. He is an enclosed man on the Island of Seahaven, which is enclosed in its turn in the largest studio ever constructed. Truman and this little world have become a kind of Chinese box containing other boxes in it as planned by an “Anointed”: *Christof*. Have we arrived at the end of the chain? Have we met the true free man? Not at all, since the Anointed, who is the greatest visionary, is also “enclosed” in the lunar room on the 221st floor of the omni cam ecosphere, and he cannot abandon the control of the show. The audience of *The Truman show* could certainly practise a sort of Greek tragic irony because they know what the protagonist's limits are as well as the traps in which he will be probably caught. However, if we take into account that

⁵ *El Show de Truman*. Widescreen DVD Collection. Distribution: Paramount Entertainment (Spain) S. L., 2000.

⁶ Let us remember for instance the conversation led by Christof & Truman when the latter is about to abandon definitively his singular cell: 'Truman. You can speak. I can hear you'. / 'Who are you?'. / 'I'm the creator of a TV show that gives hope and inspiration to millions'. / 'Was nothing real?'. / 'You were real; that's what made you so good to watch. Listen, Truman, there's no more truth out there than in the world I created for you: the same lies, the same deceit, but in my world you have nothing to fear. I know you better than you do'.

Truman will finally be free although everything was planned to keep him a slave, the *denouement* of the Show will transform Truman into an incarnation of the another sense of Greek tragic irony according to which everything ends sometimes in a completely unexpected way.

After all, Truman always aimed at being an explorer like the great Magellan⁷ or, what would be the same, he desired to go beyond the limits. His father was required, then, to accustom him to all sorts of prohibitions, so that, in order to prevent him from leaving Seahaven, Christof thinks of provoking a severe hydrophobia that he will not overcome. In fact, if I may speak so, Truman could be adopted by Amnesty International as someone tortured and imprisoned who needs to be released from the corporation that adopted him to turn his life into a show.

In any case, if Truman wants to escape, he must ask himself about the nature of the world in which he lives. Nevertheless, the Anointed has always known that ‘we accept the reality of the world with which we are presented’. Once more, then, and without Andrew Niccol’s confession, I cannot assert that the Platonic image of the cave –and the subsequent reflections on the false logic of deeming reality what is only a shadow- has been a reference, but it certainly seems so.

A genuine Platonic man/woman asks himself/herself about the nature of the world because of the *anámnēsis* or reminiscence of something better that he/she has almost forgotten. Obviously, concerning Truman, there cannot be reminiscence –he has been a prisoner from his birth- but discovery, slow but gradual, of clear evidences of a world that he had never known before. He will have the support of *éros*, embodied by Sylvia, who, after having been kidnapped by the “police” on the beach, will make him feel the desire or *éros* for what he lacks⁸, i.e. not only herself but also a true life and freedom. And he will obtain them with the aid of her “*daimonic*” power, which is made an image when Truman takes Sylvia’s photograph with him and searches for a new world on board of the Santa Maria.

Meryl, who plays the role of Truman’s wife, maintains: ‘Well, for me there is no difference between a private life and a public life. My life is *The Truman Show*. *The Truman Show* is a lifestyle. It’s a noble life. It is a truly blessed life’. And Marlon, Truman’s friend, will say in his turn: ‘It’s all true, it’s all real. Nothing here is fake. Nothing you see on this show is fake. It’s merely controlled’. Consequently, if the parallelism that I have established before looks acceptable, we should conclude that Meryl and Marlon’s absolute lack of *anámnēsis* is really disappointing, if one bears in mind that they were never prisoners. However, “they are in on it”, so that only the one who was able to abandon the show, Sylvia –in fact she was expelled from it-, can remember and follow again the parameters of a noble life. Indeed, as far as she is concerned, Christof is “a liar and a manipulator” and, as a consequence, Truman is a “prisoner” whose life has been transformed into a show. She will repeat it afterwards when it becomes quite clear that, unlike what is read on some arches in Seahaven, *unus pro omnibus, omnes pro uno*, this island is not a marvellous place where everybody takes care of Truman⁹. On the contrary, the inhabitants

⁷ (Truman): ‘I’d like to be an explorer, like the great Magellan’. / ‘Oh, You’re too late. There’s really nothing left to explore’. Marlon too knows his desire to leave Seahaven, although: (Truman): ‘It’s not that simple. It takes money, planning. You can’t just up and go. I’m gonna do it, don’t worry about that’. He even tries to convince his wife, though he will not obtain her help: (Truman): ‘We can scrape together 8000. We can bum around the world’. / ‘And then what?’.

⁸ Plato. *Symposium* 200e: ‘Is not love –*éros*- in the first place the desire for anything and, secondly, for what it happens to be lacking?’ (ἔστιν ὁ Ἔρως πρῶτον μὲν τινῶν, ἔπειτα τούτων ὧν ἂν ἔνδεια παρῆ αὐτῷ; -the translation is mine following the edition by J. Burnet, *Platonis Opera*, vol. 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901, rpr.1967).

⁹ Bearing in mind that, in a previous scene, Meryl says to Truman that they should throw away their lawnmower in order to buy a new one in “Rotary”, I should dare to think that the film must be also understood as a rigorous attack against freemasonry. In other words and seeing what has happened with Truman, brotherhood in it would be simply an illusion.

of Seahaven will become a true political police, although they will not be capable of controlling Sylvia and preventing her from telling him: ‘Truman, listen to me. Everybody knows everything you do. They’re pretending. Understand? It’s fake. It’s all for you, the sky and the sea. Everything is a set’.

I have chosen *The Truman Show* as a road to reach Plato but, all the same, I should like to appeal now to those who were so undervalued in his dialogues, to the Sophists, and above all to Antiphon. Let us remember, then, the famous opposition *phýsis / nómos*, and in this respect Antiphon’s view is the following: “Justice lies in not transgressing the provisions of the law in the city where one lives as a citizen. So, 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” (δικαιοσύνη οὖν τὰ τῆς πόλεως νόμιμα, ἐν ἧ ἂν πολιτεύηται τις, μὴ παραβαίνειν. χρῶντ’ ἂν οὖν ἄνθρωπος μάλιστα ἑαυτῶι συμφερόντως δικαιοσύνηι, εἰ μετὰ μὲν μαρτύρων τοὺς νόμους μεγάλους ἄγοι, μονούμενος δὲ μαρτύρων τὰ τῆς φύσεως· τὰ μὲν γὰρ τῶν νόμων ἐπίθετα, τὰ δὲ τῆς φύσεως ἀναγκαῖα· καὶ τὰ μὲν τῶν νόμων ὁμολογηθέντα οὐ φύντ’ ἐστίν, τὰ δὲ τῆς φύσεως φύντα οὐχ ὁμολογηθέντα (Col. 1) τὰ οὖν νόμιμα παραβαίνων εἰὰν λάθῃ τοὺς ὁμολογήσαντας καὶ αἰσχύνῃς καὶ ζημίας ἀπήλλακται... νενομοθέτηται γὰρ ἐπὶ τε τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς (Col. 2) –the translation is mine)¹⁰.

Therefore, if *mutatis mutandis* we apply these words to *The Truman Show* –and I have already recognized my heterodoxy-, it becomes quite evident that Truman has never been allowed to be “natural”, since his whole life has been conceived for others’ eyes, thus being theatrical (*théamai*) or inauthentic. And it is evident as well that Seahaven and its actors/actresses, a little town in fact, have never stopped being a mere “convention”, which has not been adopted, as Socrates desired, to build an harmonic civic life. On the contrary, the inhabitants of Seahaven know perfectly well that they are doomed to be false precisely because of all the conventions that have been adopted to create a show. From this perspective, in my opinion, Meryl and Marlon’s betrayal should never be forgiven. Indeed, wives must not turn conjugal love and friendship into a show to the extent of following the dictates of the TV advertisement: ‘Why don’t let me fix you some of this new mococoa drink? All natural cocoa beans from the upper slopes of Mount Nicaragua. No artificial sweeteners... I’ve tasted other cocoas. This is the best’. Truman becomes furious, then, and asks Meryl to tell the truth. Here is her unconscious confession: ‘Oh Thank God! How can anyone expect me to carry on under these conditions? It’s unprofessional!’. Sylvia had already said it: ‘Everything is a set’. Even Truman plays his role and, therefore, he is also false although he is by no means a professional. Marlon is; he is so unnatural –according to Antiphon- or such a prisoner –according to Plato- that, after having been deprived of his own –inner- voice, he simply repeats what the Anointed makes him say:

‘Think about it, Truman. If everybody is in on it, I’d have to be in on it, too. I’m not in on it, Truman, because, there is no “it”. You were right about one thing, though... The thing that started all this. Yes. I found him for you, Truman. That’s why I came by tonight. I’m sure he’s got quite a story to tell. Go to him’. / Chr: Easy on the fog. Stand by, crane cam.

¹⁰ Oxirrinus 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.

Crane cam. Button cam 3... And wide, kerb cam 8... Move back and fade up music. And now go in close'.

Suspicion after suspicion Truman has reached the worst conclusion: he is a prisoner. The sea is certainly for him a serious obstacle but he must overcome his hydrophobia. He knows now that he must abandon definitively Seahaven and the confusion –a sort of darkness- in which he has always lived, and finally weighs anchor on board of The Santa Maria in search of a new world. They find him very soon and the Anointed, the God and designer whose “creature” has rebelled against him, must decide whether for the first time a human being’s death will be televised or not. He is the Anointed and, as if he were a depraved Jesus Christ –*Christof*- is capable of changing a calm sea into a stormy one in accordance with his perfidious interests. The storm will be terrible but finally the Anointed will allow Truman to keep on sailing. All of a sudden, the Santa Maria stops when it crashes into the limit of the big cyclorama. We already knew that Truman was a prisoner thanks to the view –panorama- of both the big studio and Seahaven -completely surrounded by the sea that Truman is not capable of crossing –and thanks as well to the image of the unfinished bridge –a real limit- where Truman and Marlon play golf and talk sometimes. Now the true “epiphany” of the prison has taken place and, although we continue to be where we were before, that is to say, we do not yet know if the Platonic image of the cave has been somehow a source of inspiration for Andrew Niccol, the truth is that the image of the bowsprit of Truman’s sailboat crashing into the limit of the cyclorama and showing for the first time the borders that had always oppressed him is highly profitable for Classical philologists. Indeed, Truman stands up, starts walking towards the wall of the cyclorama, touches it with his hand and, suddenly, he discovers himself as being a shadow, a simulacrum, an image which is being projected on a wall, a human being illuminated by spotlights whose life has been filmed for years; to sum up, he has always been compelled to play the role that the screenwriter designs for him day after day.

The confrontation God / creature cannot be delayed any more. Christof intends to coax Truman: ‘Listen, Truman. There’s no more truth out there than in the world I created for you. The same lies, the same deceit. But in my world, you have nothing to fear... / ... / You belong here. With me’. Christof had already said to Sylvia before: ‘I have given Truman a chance to lead a normal life. The world, the place you live in is the sick place. Seahaven’s the way the world should be’. ‘... in my world’. Well, if Plato must be the reference, since he is the end of our journey, we could say that Christof commits the same error as Plato when he wrote his *Republic*. He knew both the rise and decline of Athens and, on account of his absolute disappointment, he looked for a definitive base on which a safe world could be built. He glimpsed the Idea and thought since then that our world is only a copy of an Ideal one. He even felt that he was capable of designing an ideal state. Nevertheless, the citizens’ ethical recovery, either from Athens or any other place, does not take place if the Republic belongs only to one individual. On the contrary, everybody must be allowed to take part in the very design of their political model or *politeía*, thus avoiding the risk of playing for evermore, as Truman does, an imposed role.

All the same, Plato was the end of my first road in order to proclaim a true admiration concerning an image that invites us both to abandon and abominate all kinds of prisons and shadows. And, in this respect, since Plato asked us to apply his image, let us apply it to *The Truman Show* and recognize that this hero is right when he decides not to listen to Christof’s flattering words. Indeed, leaving aside the sad condition of the prisoners of the Platonic cave, it is quite evident that there are also golden or protective caves, though an “I” without fetters or any sort of dependence is always much better than a guided life. When Truman finally leaves Seahaven through the little door on the wall of the cyclorama, we realize that, following an horizontal line, he will meet other men and women and will not “fly” metaphysically towards the

intelligible region. As said before, the applicability of an image has its own limits, and for the same reason I would like to emphasize that, in this case and very paradoxically, Truman obtains his freedom by going into the darkness but not into the definitive Light that Plato glimpsed.

The end of *The Truman Show* is certainly disappointing and shows to what extent all these people addicted to the show for thirty years have been prisoners much more than Truman himself. Everybody was glad when they saw Truman abandoning his prison, but the truth is that the two parking lot security guards, as soon as the show ends, say: 'Let's see what else is on'. No comment.

The second road to the Platonic image of the cave that I should like to propose is absolutely orthodox. It is Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970), the cinema adaptation of Alberto Moravia's homonymous novel (1951). Its main protagonist is Marcello Clerici, a man who, due to his tortured psychology, desires intensely to become normal or, in other words, to become a part of the society in which he lives following the dictates –to the extent of resigning himself to them- of the fascist *régime* or “ventennio” that ruled Italy until the fall of Benito Mussolini. Marcello Clerici's conformism is changed into collaborationism, so that the *régime*, taking advantage of the fact that he was a friend of Professor Quadri -who lives in exile in Paris and is a notable member of the resistance- accepts immediately his offer and charges him with a macabre mission. Once he arrives in Paris on his honey-moon, he will get in touch with Professor Quadri, give him confidence and, finally, obtain all the necessary data for the assassination. The Clerici arrive in Paris, then, and Marcello introduces himself as an old pupil of Professor Quadri's and asks to be received in audience. The meeting takes place and Marcello, breaking the ice, reminisces about a curious custom of Professor Quadri's:

Professor Quadri: 'It's very curious, Clerici. You come all this way only to see me?'

Marcello: 'Remember, professor. As soon as you used to enter the classroom, you shut the windows. You couldn't stand all that light and noise. Later I understood why you used to do that. All these years, you know what remained most firmly imprinted on my memory? Your voice. "Imagine a great dungeon in the shape of a cave. Inside, men who've lived there since childhood all chained and forced to face the back of the cave. Behind them, far away, a light of fire flickers. Between the fire and the prisoners, imagine a low wall, similar to that little stage on which a puppeteer shows his puppets". 'That was november 28'.

P: 'Yes, I remember'.

M: "And try to imagine some other men passing behind that little wall bearing statues made of wood and stone. The statues are higher than the wall".

P: 'You could not have brought me from Rome a better gift than these memories, Clerici: the enchained prisoners of Plato'.

M: 'And how do they resemble us?'

P: 'And what do they see, the prisoners?'

M: 'What do they see?'

P: 'You, who come from Italy, should know from experience'.

M: 'They see only the shadows that fire makes on the back of the cave that faces them'.

P: 'Shadows, the reflections of things like what's happening to you people in Italy'.

M: 'Say those prisoners were at liberty and could speak up. Mightn't they call the shadows they see reality, not visions?'

P: 'Yes, yes. Correct. They would mistake for reality the shadows of reality. Ah! The myth of the great cave! That was the graduate thesis you proposed to do for me? Did you finish it afterwards?'

M: 'You departed. I used a different theme'.

P: 'I'm truly sorry, Clerici. I had so much faith in you, in all of you'.

M: 'No, I don't believe it. If that were true, you'd never have left Rome'¹¹.

'The prisoners of Plato'. In this case, therefore, there is "confession" of the ancient reference and, on the other hand, the intention is very clear: the Platonic image helps us to create another one, thus visualizing a whole country like Italy in a cave, i.e. under the oppression of a fascist dictatorship. There is no more freedom of thought and the citizens have become subjects of a sole Truth. They have been called even to a crazy imperialist adventure, Abyssinia, as an attempt to restore the glory of imperial Rome. There were many men and women who were completely seduced by the *régime* and did not notice that, as Plato said long ago, they were contemplating only shadows, mere simulacra, while reality has always lived in places with no material or spiritual walls where Light triumphs. The asphyxiating atmosphere under a fascist *régime* is so intense that sometimes it seems to empty out a human being to the extent of "stealing" his/her will or, in other words, to the extent of resigning him/herself to the circumstances instead of fighting against them, as in the case of Marcello.

However, this efficacious and effective allusion to the Platonic image of the cave does not belong to Moravia's novel, but only to Bernardo Bertolucci's cinema adaptation. It is well known that translating always implies betrayal and that cinema adaptations are also translations. The question would be then: what are the reasons that led Bernardo Bertolucci to use Plato? And whatever the answer is, I would like to emphasize that Moravia's literary work and, more specifically, *The Conformist* shows both frequent "cavernous" images and Platonic features that justify in my opinion Bertolucci's choice. Here are, therefore, two passages that I consider highly significant:

"Volle riandare con la memoria alla prima volta che aveva avvertito la sua esistenza: alla visita alla casa di tolleranza a S... Rammentò che era stato colpito dalla luminosità della fronte di lei... la purezza che gli era sembrato di intravedere mortificata e profanata nella prostituta e trionfante in Lina. Il ribrezzo della decadenza, della corruzione e dell'impurità che l'aveva perseguitato tutta la vita e che il suo matrimonio con Giulia non aveva mitigato, adesso comprendeva che soltanto la luce radiosa di cui era circondata la fronte di Lina, poteva dissiparlo...Così naturalmente, spontaneamente, per sola forza d'amore, egli ritrovava attraverso Lina la normalità tanto sognata. Ma non la normalità quasi burocratica che aveva perseguito per tutti quegli anni, bensì altra normalità di specie quasi angelica. Di fronte a questa normalità luminosa ed eterea, la pesante bardatura dei suoi impegni politici, del suo matrimonio con Giulia, della sua vita ragionevole e smorta di uomo d'ordine, si rivelava nient'altro che un simulacro ingombrante da lui adottato in inconsapevole attesa di un più degno destino. Ora egli se ne liberava e ritrovava se stesso attraverso gli stessi motivi che gliel'avevano fatto, suo malgrado adottare"¹².

"He wanted to go back, in his memory, to the first time he had intuited her existence: to his visit to the brothel at S. ... He recalled that he had been struck by the luminosity of her forehead... the purity he seemed to perceive there – mortified and profaned in the prostitute, triumphant in Lina. He now understood that only the radiant light emanating from Lina's forehead could dissipate the disgust for decadence, corruption, and impurity that had burdened him all his life and which his marriage to Giulia had in no way mitigated... So naturally, spontaneously, by the strength of love alone, he would find

¹¹ *The Conformist*, from the novel by Alberto Moravia. A Mars Film production (1970) with Jean Louis Trintignant, Stefania Sandrelli and Dominique Sanda. An Italo-French co-production between Mars Film Produzione and Marianne productions of Paris in participation with Maran Film G.M.B.H. of Munich. Screenplay by B. Bertolucci; produced by G. Bertolucci; directed by B. Bertolucci. Color by Technicolor.

¹² Moravia, A. *Il conformista*. Milano: Bompiani (edizione da Tonino Tornitore), p. 202-3.

*through Lina the normality he had dreamt of for so long. But not the almost bureaucratic normality he had pursued all those years, but another, almost angelic kind of normality. And before this luminous and ethereal normality, the heavy harness of his political duties, his marriage to Giulia, and his dull, reasonable, ordered life revealed itself to be nothing but a cumbersome image he had adopted while he was waiting, all unaware, for a worthier destiny. Now he was liberated from all of that and he could rediscover himself*¹³.

The great impact that Lina, Professor Quadri's wife, has on Marcello, is compared here with the negative one that a prostitute also had on him in the brothel where he received the terrible orders –Moravia's choice of the place needs no comment. In my opinion, Bertolucci reads *The Conformist Platonico modo*, that is to say, Italians have become prisoners in a cave and, from this point of view, like for those who do abandon the material world in order to ascend towards the Ideal one, the “daimonic” power of *éros* that Lina incarnates –“love”, but above all “desire”- is essential. Before she appeared, everything was darkness: the bureaucratic normality that he had always pursued; his political commitments; his advantageous wedding, or his fading life ruled by the order and discipline that he held in high esteem; to sum up: shadows or simulacra – as those seen by Plato's prisoners- of something nobler and capable of provoking hope rather than conformism. He notices now that he has been a prisoner for too much time and that his main goal should be his own discharge. Or, following Bertolucci's film –and probably Moravia's novel-: he must abandon the cave, so that Lina's light and purity can dazzle him, since both are the “uranic” exaltation –she's like an angel- of a spirit –his- which is burdened by the darkness of fascism.

The second passage, if we read it in accordance with Bertolucci's adaptation -and taking into account the inclusion in the screenplay of the Platonic image of the cave- might be still more significant:

“Si trattava, pensò, di considerare finito e sepolto tutto un periodo della sua vita e di ricominciare daccapo, su un piano e con mezzi diversi... era risoluto a non permettere che il delitto commesso davvero, quello di Quadri, lo avvelenasse con i tormenti di una vana ricerca di purificazione e di normalità. Quello che era stato era stato, Quadri era morto, e, più pesante di una pietra tombale, egli avrebbe calato su quella morte la lapide definitiva di un oblio completo... Egli si era costretto volontariamente, ostinatamente, stupidamente, dentro legami indegni e in impegni ancora più indegni; e tutto questo per il miraggio di una normalità che non esisteva; adesso questi legami erano spezzati, questi impegni dissolti, e lui tornava libero e avrebbe saputo fare uso della libertà... Tutto nella vita di sua figlia, pensò, avrebbe dovuto essere brio, estro, grazia, leggerezza, limpidezza, freschezza e avventura; tutto avrebbe dovuto rassomigliare ad un paesaggio che non conosce afe né caligini... Sì, pensò ancora, ella doveva vivere in piena libertà”¹⁴.

“He would now consider a whole period of his life closed and buried, he thought, and start over from the beginning, on another level and in other ways... he was determined not to let the crime he had actually committed, his crime against Quadri, poison him with the torments of a futile search for purification and normality. Quadri was dead; and he would have liked to drop on top of that death, heavier than a tombstone, the definitive stone of complete and utter oblivion... He had voluntarily, stubbornly, stupidly bound himself in unworthy chains and to even more unworthy duties; and all this for the mirage of a normality that did not exist. But now these chains were broken, those duties dissolved, and he was free again and would know what to do with his freedom...

¹³ Translated into English by Tami Calliope. *Alberto Moravia. The Conformist. A Novel*. Hanover, New Hampshire: Steerforth Press, 1999, p. 223-3 (all the quotations in English will correspond to this edition).

¹⁴ Pp. 286-88.

Everything in his daughter's life, he thought, should be spirited and inspired, graceful, light, limpid, fresh, and adventurous; everything in it should resemble a landscape that knows neither fog nor the close oppression of heat... Yes, he thought again, she must live in full freedom"¹⁵.

Now the fascist *régime* is over and Marcello Clerici adapts his life to the new political situation. For Bertolucci –and for Moravia?– who reads *The Conformist Platonico modo*, it is easy to imagine a collaborationist “entombing” for evermore a personal history that he must abominate now. After all, it is simply a matter of thinking of a cave that, unlike the Platonic one, has no exit –or entrance– but, after having been closed with all kinds of remains such as incriminating reminders, a real crime and a good deal of remorse –i.e. a physical darkness receiving another spiritual and ethical one–, remains hidden in the very centre of his personality. Will he become free? Probably not, since Marcello knows the menacing presence of the subconscious and the inevitable duty of descending into his personal cave, thus discovering the limits, bonds, responsibilities and illusions –shadows or simulacra, then– which have always oppressed him. The cave will never disappear, but everything might be different for his daughter. As if he were that prisoner whom Plato asks us to imagine being pulled out of the cave into the light, his daughter will know the light and a wide range of antonyms of a fettered life: energy, inspiration, grace, lightness, limpidity, freshness and adventure. Asphyxiating atmospheres correspond to enclosed places, while freedom is addicted to open landscapes. Italy has abandoned its prison and Marcello hopes that his daughter will enjoy a sort of freedom which will make her both as pure and as radiant as Lina.

In 1993 Richard Attenborough directed *Shadowlands* –screenplay by William Nicholson– about the life and work of Clive Staple Lewis, who was a fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford. He was well known because of his studies in Medieval Literature and, particularly, because of *The Allegory of Love*, published by the Oxford University Press in 1936 where he analysed, for instance, the rich allegorical content of the *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. This film shows precisely Professor Lewis explaining to his students the deep allegorical meaning of the *roman*, being himself an expert in allegorical literature. Indeed, leaving aside the fact that Professor Lewis was also famous on account of his books and lectures about religion¹⁶ and the religious experience, *The Chronicles of Narnia* are a curious instance of allegorical children's literature. Asland, the good lion murdered by the witch and later resurrected¹⁷, is certainly the allegorical image of Jesus Christ and the Christian way of life. The last chapter of the last book of *The Chronicles* –the seventh one– is entitled “Farewell to Shadowlands” where we read:

‘The Eagle is right’, said the Lord Digory. ‘Listen Peter. When Asland said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here: just as our world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Asland's real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been passed drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as

¹⁵ Pp. 319-321.

¹⁶ Where the allegory as a literary exegetical instrument –for instance in *The Pilgrim's Regress*– plays an essential role.

¹⁷ Think above all of the second book of *The Chronicles of Narnia* entitled *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, London: Harper Collins, 1980.

different as a real thing is from a shadow or as waking life is from a dream ... It's all in Plato, all in Plato: bless me, what do they teach them at these schools!'¹⁸.

Professor Lewis described his personal situation –in fact, that of all human beings- as similar to that of a man who walks through a garden whose centre is protected by a series of walls. Some of them have been already overstepped, so that he turns his attention now from the garden to the Gardener, from the beauty in the world to the One who created the Beauty: God. And it was similar as well to a sea voyage. His wife –Joy Gresham, the American poetess whom he married and who died from cancer- had already reached the last harbour, while he remained in shadowlands. It is quite clear, then, that Lewis creates an allegory by imitating the *Roman de la Rose* and seeing himself as the lover of the rose who ascends towards God step by step. At any rate, we should not forget now that, as read before, he certainly knows Plato, his image and his philosophical exhortation not to mistake, as the prisoners in the cave did, the realm of appearance, i.e. shadows or simulacra, for the reality that originates them. Professor Lewis seems to maintain that life for Christians, in spite of all sorts of adversities, must be necessarily full of hope since there will be a Bright End, a real transcendence to a different place where any darkness will disappear definitively. In fact, in the first book of *The Chronicles of Narnia* we are already told that the four young protagonists arrive at a different world by going through the back of a wardrobe, so that, by means of this simple literary stratagem, we visualize the ascent from the prison or cave, from the shadows of a world which is not used to magic, towards Reality. All the same, they still live in shadowlands, in a sort of Platonic cave, in search of the final and everlasting Light¹⁹.

On the part of Attenborough, therefore, it was very effective to overprint the titles of the film on a view of Oxford in evening shadows and, after Joy's death, to show Professor Lewis comforting his stepson, both being in a dark loft –in the cave, If I may speak so-, talking and crying in front of a wardrobe which neither is magical nor will perform for them the magic action of giving Joy back to them. Their tears emphasize the sadness and human difficulty in accepting true episodes of darkness and suffering on the way towards Absolute Happiness. In fact, we see C. S. Lewis and Joy Gresham visiting on their honey-moon a marvellous valley which somehow has always remained imprinted on Professor Lewis's memory, and he feels that he has finally reached paradise and abandoned the shadows for evermore. No other place could be better for him and he does not expect anything else. But Joy, who always bears in mind that she is dying little by little, decides to remind him of the limits of the human life, since in this cave or human world there is always change and transformation –and suffering, then-, unlike that other Supreme one where the Idea remains unchanged²⁰. It will be a hard lesson, but, after Joy's

¹⁸ Lewis, C. S. *The Chronicles of Narnia 7: The Last Battle*. London: HarperCollins, 1980.

¹⁹ Lewis explains his interest in Plato in *Surprised by Joy*. London: Fount, Harper Collins Publishers, 1977: "Among ancient authors... The most religious (Plato, Aeschylus, Virgil) were clearly those on whom I could really feed... those writers who did not suffer from religion and with whom in theory my sympathy ought to have been complete –Shaw and Wells and Mill and Gibbon and Voltaire-... There seemed to be no depth in them (p. 171).

²⁰ Like the difference between "being" and "becoming" in Plato's *Timaeus* 27d-28, 3: 'Now first of all we must, in my judgement, make the following distinction. What is that which is Existent always and has no Becoming? And what is that which is Becoming always and never is Existent? Now the one of these is apprehensible by thought with the aid of reasoning, since it is ever uniformly existent; whereas the other is an object of opinion with the aid of unreasoning sensation, since it becomes and perishes and is never really existent' (Ἔστιν οὖν δὴ κατ' ἐμὴν δόξαν πρῶτον διαίρετέον τάδε· τί τὸ ὄν αἰεὶ, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν αἰεὶ, ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε; τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτα ὄν, τὸ δ' αὖ δόξει μετ' αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν, γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, ὄντως

death, again in the golden valley and accompanied by his stepson, W. Nicholson makes him say: “Twice in my life I’ve been given the choice: as a boy and as a man. The boy chose safety, the man chooses suffering. The pain now is part of the happiness then. That’s the deal”.

Albert Lewin directed in 1945 *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the cinema adaptation of Oscar Wilde’s homonymous novel. It is likely that, when he wrote the screenplay, he did not pay attention to some aspects that I am going to comment on now, but the truth is that the images he created are undoubtedly the fittest ones to illustrate them. Let us begin, however, from the very beginning. Oscar Wilde knew, of course, the Platonic image of the cave, almost being himself, on the other hand, the perfect incarnation of a Greek lover –*erastés*- who, nevertheless, did not choose the best beloved or *erómenos*. Indeed, the laws of Platonic love demanded that he educate his beloved, while, as he acknowledged in *De Profundis*, he was ruled in fact by as thoughtless a young man as Lord Alfred Douglas. It was in his dialogue *The Decay of Lying* where he explained his thesis on the nature of Art by maintaining that life imitates Art far more than Art imitates life. Here are Cyril and Vivian’s opposing points of view:

C: ‘Surely you would acknowledge that Art expresses the temper of its age, the spirit of its time, the moral and social conditions that surround it, and under whose influence it is produced’... V: ‘Certainly not! Art never expresses anything but itself. This is the principle of my new aesthetics... Of course, nations and individuals... are always under the impression that it is of them that the Muses are talking, always trying to find in the calm dignity of imaginative art some mirror of their own turbid passions, always forgetting that the singer of life is not Apollo but Marsyas. Remote from reality, and with her eyes turned away from the shadows of the cave, Art reveals her own perfection’²¹.

As we can see, Plato and his image have entered the scene: everyday life and turbid passions –dark ones, then, traditionally associated with it- will never obtain Apollo’s help –will never be bright- but rather that of Marsyas, the young shepherd who lost an unbalanced contest. For Vivian Art has nothing to do with the shadows of the cave, but with Perfection in the realm of the purest Light. Very few have denounced as did Oscar Wilde Mankind’s obsession with entering all kinds of prisons for all sorts of reasons:

‘Mankind has been continually entering the prisons of Puritanism, Philistinism, Sensualism, Fanaticism, and turning the key on its own spirit: But after a time there is an enormous desire for freedom –for self-preservation’²².

‘I approve of Moréas and his school for wanting to reestablish Greek harmony and to bring back to us the Dionysian state of mind. The world has such a thirst for happiness. We are not yet released from the Syrian embrace and its cadaverous divinities. We are always plunged into the kingdom of shadows. While we wait for a new religion of light, let Olympus serve as shelter and refuge. We must let our instincts laugh and frolic in the sun like a troop of laughing children. I love life. It is so beautiful’²³.

“Cunningham Graham, who had been in prison himself, wrote Wilde a letter full of praise, and Wilde, in thanking him, replied, ‘I ... wish we could meet to talk over the many prisons of life -prisons of stone, prisons of passions, prisons of intellect, prison of

δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν –translated by R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966).

²¹ The Project Gutenberg Etexts of Oscar Wilde.

²² Ellmann, R. *Oscar Wilde*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1987, p. 41.

²³ Pp. 328-9.

morality and the rest. All limitations, external or internal, are prisons –walls, and life is a limitation’ ”²⁴.

Consequently, we should not be surprised if O. Wilde, very conscious of the benefits of paradox, dares to propose in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* what probably nobody else would have dared to: the Platonic image of the cave as a place that both must be abandoned and entered, depending on whether we want to banish the phantoms of fear and prejudice or to choose a sort of knowledge that knows neither limits nor interdictions. Here are, then, Dorian Gray’s reflections when he has already been transformed by Lord Henry Wotton, his true *mystagogós*, concerning the art of enjoying –*aísthesis*- everything:

“The worship of the senses has often... been decried, men feeling a natural instinct of terror about passions and sensations that seem stronger than themselves, and that they are conscious of sharing with the less highly organized forms of existence. But it appeared to Dorian Gray that the true nature of the senses had never been understood, and that they had remained savage and animal merely because the world had sought to starve them into submission or to kill them by pain, instead of aiming at making them elements of a new spirituality, of which a fine instinct for beauty was to be the dominant characteristic. As he looked back upon man moving through history, he was haunted by a feeling of loss. So much had been surrendered! and to such little purpose! There had been mad wilful rejections, monstrous forms of self-torture and self-denial, whose origin was fear and whose result was a degradation infinitely more terrible than that fancied degradation from which... they had sought to escape; Nature, in her wonderful irony, driving out the anchorite to feed with the wild animals of the desert and giving to the hermit the beasts of the field as his companions. Yes: there was to be, as Lord Henry had prophesied, a new Hedonism that was to recreate life and to save it from that harsh uncomely puritanism that is having, in our own day, its curious revival. It was to have its service of the intellect, certainly, yet it was never to accept any theory or system that would involve the sacrifice of any mode of passionate experience. Its aim, indeed, was to be experience itself, and not the fruits of experience, sweet or bitter as they might be. Of the asceticism that deadens the senses, as of the vulgar profligacy that dulls them, it was to know nothing. But it was to teach man to concentrate himself upon the moments of a life that is itself but a moment. There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamoured of death, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality, this art being, one might fancy, especially the art of those whose minds have been troubled with the malady of reverie. Gradually white fingers creep through the curtains... dumb shadows crawl into the corners of the room and crouch there. Outside, there is the stirring of birds among the leaves, or the sound of men going forth to their work, or the sigh and sob of the wind coming down from the hills and wandering round the silent house, as though it feared to wake the sleepers and yet must needs call forth sleep from her purple cave. Veil after veil of thin dusky gauze is lifted, and by degrees the forms and colours of things are restored to them, and we watch

²⁴ P. 526. And his personal decline looks like a fall as well into the depths of a prison or cave: ‘The gods had given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. I amused myself with being a FLANEUR, a dandy, a man of fashion. I surrounded myself with the smaller natures and the meaner minds. I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste an eternal youth gave me a curious joy. Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation’ (The Project Gutenberg Etexts of Oscar Wilde).

the dawn remaking the world in its antique pattern... Out of the unreal shadows of the night comes back the real life that we had known... a world in which things would have fresh shapes and colours, and be changed, or have other secrets, a world in which the past would have little or no place, or survive, at any rate, in no conscious form of obligation or regret, the remembrance even of joy having its bitterness and the memories of pleasure their pain'²⁵.

In the *Republic* Plato demanded from us an effort of imagination, and now Oscar Wilde is demanding the same. Let us notice that it is not difficult to imagine the History of Asceticism in the Western World as a nightmare imprisoned in the chambers of our brains. Terror has always dominated Western citizens to the extent of abjuring their intellect. They have not known how to enjoy sensations and passions and, what it is even worse, every time they have "sought to starve them into submission", they have turned them in fact into savage and animal ones, thus adopting "monstrous forms of self-torture and self-denial". We have been prisoners for centuries²⁶. The time has arrived, consequently, to restore the passionate experience, save ourselves from puritanism and condemn both "the asceticism that deadens the senses and the profligacy that dulls them". The nightmare –i.e. ourselves- must abandon definitively the cave, not in order to start a vertical ascent towards the Intelligible region but to get in touch once again with a world, here and now, which sends us the sound of the stirring of birds among the leaves, of the wind coming down from the hills or of men going forth to their work. If so, the unreal shadows of our intellectual night will disappear and, as a consequence, we will be capable of reacting against an asceticism that never seems to die, above all in the Victorian age. Indeed, if those who preach it insist on saying that the new hedonism is a vice, a new fall for human beings into the ethical darkness, we should reply in our turn that it is worth entering this prison, as Dorian Gray does in search of a new spirituality that Albert Lewin, following O. Wilde, locates in the ethical *tenebrae* of London at night. Virtue, then, lives now in the depths and lessons must come after the experience, not before, unless we want to transform life into a premature death -although it would be absurd not to recognize that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* warns us as well of the dangers of a radical Aestheticism or unlimited *aísthesis*.

In 1985 James Ivory directed *A Room with a View*, the cinema adaptation of E. M. Forster's homonymous novel (1907). Already familiar with the reading and study of the Greek and Roman Classics at Tonbridge school, Forster deepened his knowledge of them –Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Plautus, Cicero,

²⁵ Wilde, O. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. London: Penguin Books, 1985, p. 144.

²⁶ Even Sibyl, who liked being an actress, finds out with the help of Dorian that she had been a prisoner: 'Dorian, Dorian,' she cried, 'before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life. It was only in the theatre that I lived. I thought that it was all true. I was Rosalind one night and Portia ... believed in everything. The common people who acted with me seemed to me to be godlike. The painted scenes were my world. I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real. You came... and you freed my soul from prison. You taught me what reality really is. Tonight... I saw through the hollowness, the sham, the silliness of the empty pageant in which I had always played. Tonight... I became conscious that the Romeo was hideous, and old, and painted, that the moonlight in the orchard was false... that the words I had to speak were unreal, were not my words, were not what I wanted to say. You had brought me something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection. You had made me understand what love really is. My love... I have grown sick of shadows. You are more to me than all art can ever be. What have I to do with the puppets of a play?... Suddenly it dawned on my soul what it all meant. The knowledge was exquisite to me... Take me away, Dorian -- take me away with you... I hate the stage. I might mimic a passion that I do not feel, but I cannot mimic one that burns me like fire... it would be profanation for me to play at being in love' (pp. 96-7 of Penguin Books edition).

Lucretius, Lucan, etc.- at King's College, Cambridge²⁷. It would be enough to mention *Maurice*, a novel where the homosexual *éros* is exalted –also adapted by J. Ivory- and whose protagonists fluctuate between the acceptance and the refusal of Platonic love, to verify his familiarity with Plato's work and the centuries-old tradition of Platonism.

This is in fact –I must confess it- a defence against probable accusations of heterodoxy. Indeed, neither in Forster's *A Room with a View* nor in J. Ivory's excellent adaptation is the Platonic image of the cave ever mentioned. Nevertheless, the images created by the American director –and obviously the novel upon which they are based and the Platonic features of the very same Forster- become a fit road to it. As far as I am concerned, Forster's text must be read allegorically, so that, when we see the English tourists demanding “a room with a view” in the Italian guest house where they lodge, we may suppose that they know perfectly well what they do –or, at least, this is their intuition-: they need and want to open the windows in order to receive joyfully the Mediterranean light and the spirit of the Renaissance –a Greek and Latin one, therefore-, since Florence has always been an emblem of Humanism which, unlike England, abandoned resolutely its medieval darkness. Every time British people open the windows in Florence, they open themselves, and their best option is undoubtedly to demolish the walls of their asphyxiating Victorian restraint –another sort of prison or cave.

In the *Abinger Harvest* edition of his writings, in “Notes on the English Character”, he writes: “For it is not that the Englishman can't feel –it is that he is afraid to feel. He has been taught at his public school that feeling is bad form. He must not express great joy or sorrow... The Englishman appears to be cold and unemotional because he is really slow”²⁸.

Thus becoming very soon introverted because of the repressive attitude of their masters, English prisoners' conditions are not so desperate as those ones of Plato's eternal prisoners in the cave. All the same, the consequences are very serious as well, if we pay attention to the difficulties of Lucy Honeychurch's *fiancé*, Cecil, who is “medieval like a Gothic statue”²⁹, in not resembling a man *intra domum* with a dark spirit:

(C) ‘I had got an idea... that you feel more at home with me in a room’. (L) ‘A room?’ ...
(C) ‘Yes ... I connect you with a view –a certain type of view. Why shouldn't you connect me with a room?’ ... (L) ‘Do you know that you're right?... When I think of you it's always as in a room’ ... (C) ‘A drawing-room, pray? With no view?’ (L) ‘;Yes, with no view’ ... (C) ‘I'd rather that you connected me with the open air’³⁰.

And something very similar –or even worse- is detected in Lucy's cousin, Charlotte, an emblem of the single Victorian woman, whom we see preventing Lucy from opening the window to avoid the risks of such an audacity. Rather than imprisoned in a room as Cecil is, she lives protected in her castle, thus confirming that, for some English men and women windows are not a joyful passage into the open air, but the loss of a high medieval condition that makes them remain completely feudal:

“When Lucy reached her own room she opened the window and breathed the clean night air... the lights dancing in the Arno, and the cypresses of San Miniato. Miss Barlett, in

²⁷See e. g. Gilabert, P. “Clasicismo versus medievalismo en la Inglaterra Victoriano-Eduardina; *A Room with a View* como ejemplo”. *Actas del X Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos*. Madrid: Ediciones Clásicas, 2002, pp. 445-483 –translations into Catalan and Spanish of this article are available www.paugilabertbarbera.com

²⁸ Forster, E. M. *Abinger Harvest*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936, pp. 5-6.

²⁹ P. 106 of O. Stalybrass' edition. London: Penguin Books, 1990 –all quotations will correspond to this edition.

³⁰ P. 125.

her room, fastened the window-shutters and locked the door, and then made a tour of the apartment to see where the cupboards led, and whether there were any oubliettes or secret entrances³¹.

Consequently, it is not surprising that, when the British tourists in Pensione Bertolini go for the traditional trip to Fiesole driven by a Tuscan Phaeton and a blonde Tuscan Persephone, only she is asked to get off the buggy by an English priest dressed in black, thus showing by means of the allegory and Ivory's excellent images that England has usually lived imprisoned in a medieval darkness. It seems in fact so delighted with its Hades or personal cave that, after brief periods of freedom, it returns once more to the realm of shadows³².

Having thought of eternal prisoners, Plato imagined as well that, in order for one of them to know the light, he would have to be compelled to do it because of the terrible effect of light on his eyes. And also the young protagonist of the novel, Lucy, who oscillates between dark Victorianism and the bright Renaissance of Florence still takes refuge in the night –thus imprisoning herself, if I may speak so, in the cave:

“She gave up trying to understand herself, and joined the vast armies of the benighted, who follow neither the heart nor the brain... they have yielded... to the enemy within. They have sinned against passion and truth... They have sinned against Eros and against Pallas Athene... Lucy entered this army when she pretended to George that she did not love him, and pretended to Cecil that she loved no one. The night received her, as it had received Miss Barlett thirty years before³³.”

Notwithstanding, the great humanist of *A Room with a View*, George's father, knows how to save her by speaking about “liberating the soul” –she was a prisoner, then-, darkness and muddle –her life is a shadow or simulacrum, therefore, of what could be- and, above all, speaking about the antidote against such a poisoned life: Florence and the view –she must open herself, consequently, to a new world and enter the light after having defeated the mediaevalism of fear:

‘Take an old man's word: there's nothing worse than a muddle in all the world... Ah for a little directness to liberate the soul! Your soul, dear Lucy!... I see you ruining yours. I cannot bear it. It is again the darkness creeping in'... Yet as he spoke the darkness was withdrawn, veil after veil, and she saw to the bottom of her soul... ‘Give George my love –once only. Tell him, ‘Muddle’... ‘Now it is all dark... but remember the mountains over Florence and the view’³⁴.

At the very beginning of this section devoted to Forster's novel, I recognized that I was defending myself against possible accusations of heterodoxy. It is quite evident that, in spite of my reasoning, they continue to be possible, but, on the other hand, it is difficult not to think in the case of E. M. Forster of a literary sub-conscious in which the Platonic image of the cave occupies its own place.

And, finally, I should like to turn my attention to the Charles Sturridge's excellent adaptation for TV (1981) of Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* (1945). Very seldom have images –in spite of the true advantages of human imagination stimulated by good reading- been so indispensable to illustrate an Arcadian experience, whose reminiscence will save men and

³¹ P. 34.

³² P. 79.

³³ P. 194.

³⁴ P. 222.

women in periods of sadness and disillusion. Indeed, captain Charles Ryder in the middle of World War II -and without being warned of the final destination- is sent with his company to Brideshead, where a long time ago he was immensely happy in the company of his friend and fellow student at Oxford Lord Sebastian Flyte. Following respectfully the literary *tópos* of Arcadia, E. Waugh entitles the first chapter of his novel “Et in Arcadia Ego”, a few words that, after having been adapted and translated into English, are spoken by Charles Ryder affirming in front of his corporal that, contrary to what he believes, he knows this sort of great mansion with large forests and beautiful gardens and, more specifically, he knows Brideshead –*et in Arcadia ego fui*: ‘I have been here before... I had been there before; first with Sebastian more than twenty years ago’³⁵. Brideshead is certainly not a cave but “a sequestered place, enclosed and embraced in a single, winding valley” that it is worth entering:

“Beyond and about us, more familiar still, lay an exquisite man-made landscape. It was a sequestered place, enclosed and embraced in a single, winding valley. Our camp lay along one gentle slope; opposite us the ground led, still unravished, to the neighbourly horizon, and between us flowed a stream –it was named the Bride and rose not two miles away at a farm called Bridesprings, where we used sometimes to walk to tea; it became a considerable river lower down before it joined the Avon –which had been dammed here to form three lakes, one no more than a wet slate among the reeds, but the others more spacious, reflecting the clouds and the mighty beeches at their margin. The woods were all of oak and beech, the oak grey and bare, the beech faintly dusted with green by the breaking buds; they made a simple, carefully designed pattern with the green glades and the wide green spaces –Did the fallow deer graze here still?- and, lest the eye wander aimlessly, a Doric temple stood by the water’s edge, and an ivy-grown arch spanned the lowest of the connecting weirs. All this had been planned and planted a century and a half ago so that, at about this date, it might be seen in its maturity. From where I stood the house was hidden by a green spur, but I knew well how and where it lay, couched among the lime trees like a hind in the bracken. Hooper came sidling up and greeted me with his much imitated but inimitable salute. His face was grey from his night’s vigil and he had not yet shaved. “B” Company relieved us. I’ve sent the chaps off to get cleaned up’. ‘Good’. ‘The house is up there, round the corner’. ‘Yes’, I said. ‘Brigade Headquarters are coming there next week. Great barrack of a place. I’ve just had a snoop round. Very ornate, I’d call it. And a queer thing, there’s a sort of R. C. Church attached. I looked in and there was a kind of service going on –just a padre and one old man. I felt very awkward. More in your line than mine’. Perhaps I seemed not to hear; in a final effort to excite my interest he said: ‘There’s a frightful great fountain, too, in front of the steps, all rocks and sort of carved animals. You never saw such a thing’ ”³⁶.

I am not going to comment now on to what extent this description of an artistic Nature, that has been thought, planned and even drawn, meets all the requirements of an Arcadian Nature, thus respecting completely a centuries-old literary tradition. I am interested in emphasizing mainly the image –once more the image- of a paradise that we should want and know how to enter. This is precisely what captain Ryder explains when he reminisces about the first time he met Sebastian –who in fact had invited him to a meal of Arcadian initiation- facing a kind of Socratic *daimónion* who intended to discourage him:

³⁵ Waugh, E. *Brideshead Revisited*. London: Penguin Books, p. 23 (all quotations will correspond to this edition).

³⁶ Pp. 21-22.

“That luncheon party –for party it proved to be- was the beginning of a new epoch in my life. I went there uncertainly, for it was foreign ground and there was a tiny, priggish, warning voice in my ear which in the tones of Collins told me it was seemly to hold back. But I was in search of love in those days, and I went full of curiosity and the faint, unrecognized apprehensions that here, at last, I should find that low door in the wall, which others, I knew, had found before me, which opened on an enclosed and enchanted garden, which was somewhere, not overlooked by any window, in the heart of that grey city”³⁷.

As seen before, Sebastian will lead Charles Ryder, then, to another garden, this time far from Oxford: Brideshead. At any rate, Charles Sturridge shows very well by means of images Charles’ progressive passage into Arcadia, going through, either alone or in the company of Sebastian, many significant doors such as those of Sebastian’s college and his private room, that of the Botanic Garden in Oxford-, the one in the very centre of it –a sort of *sancta sanctorum* only for “initiated” people- and, finally, the one on the site of Brideshead. They will be immensely happy there on account of not having assumed yet those responsibilities which are peculiar to adults’ lives, very often full of sadness and routine and, even for some people in unfortunate times, of tragedy and war:

“It is thus I like to remember Sebastian, as he was that summer, when we wandered alone together through that enchanted palace; Sebastian in his wheel chair spinning down the box-edged walks of the kitchen gardens in search of alpine strawberries and warm figs, propelling himself through the succession of hot-houses, from scent to scent and climate to climate, to cut the muscat grapes and choose orchids for our button-holes; Sebastian hobbling with a pantomime of difficulty to the old nurseries, sitting beside me on the threadbare, flowered carpet with the toy-cupboard empty about us and Nanny Hawkins stitching complacently in the corner, saying, ‘You’re one as bad as the other; a pair of children the two of you. Is that what they teach you at College?’ Sebastian supine on the sunny seat in the colonnade, as he was now, and I in a hard chair beside him, trying to draw the fountain”³⁸.

Nevertheless, happiness ends, so that Charles Ryder, who falls out with Sebastian’s mother, is practically expelled from Brideshead. And it is now when we find out that this marvellous Arcadia where he has lived –and that Charles Sturridge was fortunate to turn into an image thanks to a such a fitting place as Castle Howard in Yorkshire- has true cave-features:

“I was unmoved; there was no part of me remotely touched by her distress. It was as I had often imagined being expelled from school. I almost expected to hear her say: ‘I have already written to inform your unhappy father’ But as I drove away and turned back in the car to take what promised to be my last view of the house, I felt that I was leaving part of myself behind, and that wherever I went afterwards I should feel the lack of it, and search for it hopelessly, as ghosts are said to do, frequenting the spots where they buried material treasures without which they cannot pay their way to the nether world. ‘I shall never go back’, I said to myself. A door had shut, the low door in the wall I had sought and found in Oxford; open it now and I should find no enchanted garden. I had come to the surface, into the light of common day and the fresh sea-air, after long captivity in the sunless coral palaces and waving forests of the ocean bed. I had left behind me –what? Youth? Adolescence? Romance?... ‘I have left behind illusion’, I said to myself. ‘Hence-forth I

³⁷ P. 32.

³⁸ Pp. 77-78.

live in a world of three dimensions- with the aid of my five senses'. I have since learned that there is no such world, but then, as the car turned out of sight of the house, I thought it took no finding, but lay all about me at the end of the avenue"³⁹.

Once again, I must recognize that it is impossible to know whether the Platonic image of the cave, which undoubtedly has its place in E. Waugh's literary sub-conscious, was a reference or not when he conceived this other marvellously Arcadian one. All the same, in spite of having large fields, rivers, lakes, forests, gardens, flowers, fruits and a house "couched among the lime trees like a hind in the bracken", this Arcadia looks now like a dark and asphyxiating abyss where he has been a prisoner for a long time while he was waiting in fact to come to the surface and enjoy its light and freshness. I cannot verify the Platonic dependence, but I dare to suggest an underlying model which, after a free adaptation, helps him to write on golden prisons that we must want and know how to abandon. It might seem a poor conclusion for a novel that vindicates the Arcadian experience as a true human right of all men and women. They must certainly have it, if we really want them not to have a half-made personality, thus inheriting for evermore a real lack of happiness and playfulness while these should nourish them in times of spiritual drought. It might seem a poor conclusion, but E. Waugh's final goal might remain hidden, since "how ungenerously in later life we disclaim the virtuous moods of your youth"⁴⁰:

"The langour of Youth –how unique and quintessential it is! How quickly, how irrecoverably, lost! The zest, the generous affections, the illusions, the despair, all the traditional attributes of Youth –all save this- come and go with us through life. These things are a part of life itself; but langour –the relaxation of yet unwearied sinews, the mind sequestered and self-regarding– that belongs to Youth alone and dies with it"⁴¹.

As usual, E. Waugh shows a fine irony. The captain Ryder of *Brideshead Revisited* notices finally that, sooner or later, when men and women become orphans of the golden caves of their youth, they must live in a "world of three dimensions with the aid of their five senses". However, the novelist makes him also say that, after long experience, he has discovered that this world does not exist. As a consequence, I should dare to suggest that, if I am not mistaken regarding my intuition and if the Platonic image of the cave underlies Waugh's text, those judicious minds that both condemn and consider a waste of time any playful and happy youth, i.e. as a pure *simulacrum* or shadow of a true life, should recognize in their turn that they live in a false world as well. If human beings, then, are doomed to live for evermore in a cave surrounded by shadows, those of Arcadia, of a happy youth, will prepare them undoubtedly for the life to come, which is very often hard and even tragic.

³⁹ Pp. 163-4.

⁴⁰ P. 61.

⁴¹ P. 77.