

**Miquel Àngel Riera's *The Unattainable Gods* (*Els déus inaccessibles*),
or why can Platonic Western world not restore Paganism?¹**

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Since Lord Alfred Douglas, Oscar Wilde's beloved, wrote that famous poem entitled 'The Two Loves' where one could read "I am the love that dare not speak its name", or, in other words, since Victorianism, some themes inherited from Ancient Greece, truly and undeniably controversial have still become more embarrassing. M. Foucault on the first pages of his *Histoire de la sexualité* already warned of the need for true liberation³. However, love in general continues to be problematic and, although the French philosopher tried to calm down any reader of Greek pederastic texts by pointing out that even that ancient Greek society took serious precautions regarding pederastic relationships⁴, the truth is that Literature is not alien to a long tradition of condemnation.

Theoretically, writers, as creators of fictional narrations, should be allowed to approach on their own responsibility any subject freely, thus avoiding the pressure of any ethical code. Some human feelings, clearly condemned by all sort of societies and whatever their origin may be, continue to exist in spite of all sort of severe penal codes. Throughout the ages, there have been – and there still are- men in love with Beauty who have believed that it has become incarnate in adolescents' bodies and souls, a kind of beauty –to sum up- which is still free –from their point of view- of the bodily and moral decadence which is sometimes peculiar to adults. As men in love with youth, they have been and are still despised and, furthermore, are usually considered execrable corrupters, even when they remain within the limits of a non-sexual friendship⁵. Writers, then, should be allowed to turn this or any other controversial theme –we repeat that on their own responsibility- into the subject of their literary work, though everything seems to show that in this respect there are still many obstacles to overcome, and, as a consequence, that centuries-old art named Literature uses suitable methods in search of, if necessary, readers' *captatio benevolentiae*.

Indeed, M. A. Riera begins his novel with both an "introductory note" ("*nota introductòria*") and a "transcriber's conclusion" ("*cloenda del transcriptor*") which leave us perfectly set and warned. First of all, he explains that what we are going to read "is not the result of a great effort"

¹ This article was published in the *Anuari de Filologia. Studia Graeca et Latina*, volume XVI, 1993, section D, number 4, pp. 45-62 and I present it now with slight changes.

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³ Chapter. 1, volume 1, "Nosotros, los Victorianos" (We, the Victorians). Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1984, pp.7-23.

⁴ Volume II, p. 207.

⁵ I am not going to analyse now the Greek phenomenon of pederasty. M. Foucault did it (*op. cit.*, volume II, chapters. IV and V; volume III, chapter VI), and so did I in two articles which examined precisely the thesis of the French philosopher and historian ("Algunes reflexions critiques al voltant de la lectura de Michel Foucault de *l'Amatorius* de Plutarc" ("Some critical reflections on M. Foucault's reading of Plutarch's *Amatorius*"), *Universitas Tarraconensis* XII, 1988-89, pp.37-50; "L'anàlisi del fenomen pederàstic grec a *l'Histoire de la Sexualité* de Michel Foucault: les conseqüències d'una greu omissió" ("The analysis of the Greek phenomenon of pederasty in Michel Foucault's *Histoire de la Sexualité*: the consequences of a serious omission"), *Anuari de Filologia. Studia Graeca et Latina*, volume XV 1992, pp.33-48. Undoubtedly, Greek pederasty is based to a great extent upon misogynist prejudices which were predominant in a society also based upon masculine values, but now it is a question of describing feelings in order not to hide any longer any secret realm of human nature.

(“no és el resultat d'un gran esforç”), but the accurate interpretation of an “alien text” (“*text aliè*”), that is to say, of a diary which was given to him by the city-antiquarian Mr Miquel Sampol. I must confess openly that I am not much interested in knowing whether either the antiquarian or the diary are real or not –I mistrust the latter rather than the former-, but, in any case, the Majorcan writer says that the presence of a special love story in an “accounting report shows the will to camouflage himself, the will to make himself explicit and at the same time to hide himself, which aroused my curiosity and impelled me to continue the very slow task of restoring the text” (“*quadern de comptabilitat palesa voluntat de camuflatge, voluntat d'explicitar-se i simultàniament d'ocultar-se*”, la qual cosa “*deixondí la meva curiositat i m'esperonà a dur endavant la tasca lentíssima de restaurar l'escriptura*”)⁶.

Here is, then, the transcriber turned into a text-restorer, the writer skilfully moving himself away from his text. In the conclusion and with regard to the protagonist of the novel –the author of the diary- he will tell us that “the will to keep unmentioned his identity must not reach the extent of impelling him to adopt a certain hermeticism, thus hiding his condition of latinist and poet... and distorting the truth of his final stay at the residence for priests, where he died” (“*voluntat de mantenir en secret la seva identitat no devia arribar tan lluny que l'induís a adoptar posicions d'un total hermetisme amb què hauria ocultat la seva condició de llatinista i poeta... i tergiversat la veritat del seu internament final a la residència de sacerdots, on finalment morí*” (16). However, we should not be worried about his identity, since the emphasis is put in the end on the literary modelling of the character, described as a man who, “being very receptive and sensitive and amid the loneliness of a closed world where nothing happened, sick with literature, he took refuge more and more in the restrained world of books” (“*un ésser molt receptiu i sensible que, immers en la soledat d'un entorn socialment tancat on no succeïa res, es va anar refugiant més i més en el món contingut dels llibres... emmalaltit de literatura*”) (16). Therefore, bearing in mind that, with regard to the identity of Alexis –the boy with whom the priest has fallen in love-, “the transcriber has not been able to determine it... but... when he delivers to the printing house this alien story, he does it in the suspicion... that Alexis was created with the help of a necessary imaginative impulse and... he never existed” (“*no ha pogut, el copista, determinar-la... però... en donar a la impremta aquesta història aliena ho fa amb la sospita... que Alexis fou engendrat en una necessària eclosió imaginativa i que, al nivell de la realitat censable, no va arribar a existir mai*”) (16), it would be unforgivable not to notice that “fiction” has taken over the scene completely. Alexis would be in fact the medicine taken by a man “sick with literature”, whose text has been transcribed in its turn –i.e. conceived of as literature- by someone who knows very well the “symptoms of” and the “remedies for” such a serious illness.

After such a long detour, then –which is necessary in order to speak about a certain damned literature-, we might think that the artist’s pride and audacity has become definitively damaged, but the seduction exerted by the imagined –and written- text is enough not to keep to himself the final “confession”: “This is why, as if the text were mine, I have decided to offer its transcription” (“*És per això que, com si el fes meu, m'he decidit a oferir-ne una transcripció*”) (16). Consequently, everything is ready to read a text where in my opinion two kinds of “unattainable gods” should be distinguished: those who appear spontaneously in Nature, certainly full of Grace and sacred from the point of view of the protagonist, and those other ones who, being in love with an intangible Beauty, reside for instance both in the body and the soul of a grown-up and apparently restrained priest. Devoted to serve God and practising an extreme purity, those men –Alexis charges- turn also into unattainable gods and, as a consequence, into disdainers of the human dimension of *éros*.

⁶ The previous quotations correspond to the pages 15-6 of the Proa edition, “A tot vent 258”, Barcelona 1987. 2 rpr. 1992. All the rest will also correspond to this edition and the numbers in brackets refer to it. Translations into English are mine.

As usual, Plato and his constant search for the Ideal Beauty as well as its centuries-old tradition, i.e. Platonism, is the model with the help of which a certain type of “Catholic priest in love” can be imagined. In love with whom? Certainly with God –one should never forget that Christianity, as known to contemporary men and women, is mainly Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Neoplatonic, etc.-, although any metaphysical ascent has its own features, and the Platonic one, unlike the Christian, reached the Ideas after having happily coexisted with both matter and sensuality. To sum up, Pagan and Christian Platonism are not exactly the same thing and, when both meet in one person, the conflict, at least when the latter has not yet triumphed over the former, may become a tragedy.

Nevertheless, the first chapter of the novel presents an “old” priest. Like any other Platonic man who is always prone to the *anámnesis*, the story begins when he remembers his past in the course of a brief stay at the village which, several years after his leaving, wants now to render homage to him. Everything awakens his nostalgia, although, still wounded –and after so many years!- by the arrows of a special *éros*, his memory tries above all to discover some trace of that boy whom he had loved so much: Alexis. It will certainly be a fruitless search for two reasons: because he knows that Alexis left the village some years ago, and because:

“... I have felt wounded, as is natural, when I have discovered the impact of time on those who were... Alexis’s friends. No trace in them, my God... of that grace that they also shared to a certain extent; no vestige in them of those pieces of beauty in which Alexis’s one seemed to be reflected and which, as a result of its excess, he could not retain in himself. And all this decadence after only a few years!”.

“... a mi, com és natural, m'ha ferit... constatar com han assumit l'impacte del temps aquells que eren... els amics d'Alexis. Ja ni rastre en ells, Déu meu... d'aquella gràcia que en una certa dimensió ells també tenien, ni vestigis d'aquelles parcel·les de bellesa on semblaven reflectir tota la que Alexis, per una qüestió d'excés, no podia retenir damunt d'ell mateix. I tot aquest ebuscament en tan pocs anys!” (21).

It would be both absurd and pretentious to summarize now the content of Diotima’s speech in Plato’s *Symposium* or the palinode of his *Phaedrus*⁷, but it is certainly worth pointing out that the above-mentioned Platonic temper of the protagonist becomes now unquestionable. No matter if the intangible Beauty is reflected in the sensible one or if, as soon as the human beloved is seen as a god, his beauty is reflected in his mates. What really counts in the end is the definitive metaphysical ascent of a man who attains a different or superior realm, in comparison with which everything seems poor. Platonic men, when they succeed in ending their metaphysical journey, often become tragic and can no longer assume the burdens of the material world or any sort of change or transformation –in this case, young men growing old. Are these Platonic men really capable of loving? They do love Beauty, the Good, God, but if they must “descend”, they do so being totally conscious of their degradation.

In fact, the Greeks already spoke about the instability of certain masculine lovers. In pederastic relationships –as held by Pausanias in the *Symposium*- there are those who pay tribute to the Heavenly Aphrodite and others who worship the Popular Aphrodite (181b-d):

‘Now the Love that belongs to the Popular Aphrodite is in very truth popular and does his work at haphazard: this is the Love we see in the meaner sort of men; who, in the first place, love women as well as boys; secondly, where they love, they are set on the body more than the soul; and thirdly, they choose the most witless people they can find, since they look merely to the accomplishment and care not if the manner be noble or no. Hence they find themselves doing everything at haphazard, good or its opposite, without

⁷ 201d-212; 244a-257b.

distinction: for this love proceeds from the goddess who is far the younger of the two, and who in her origin partakes of both female and male. But the other Love springs from the Heavenly goddess who, firstly, partakes not of the female but only of the male; and secondly, is the elder, untinged with wantonness: wherefore those who are inspired by this Love betake them to the male, in fondness for what has the robuster nature and a larger share of mind... they love boys only when they begin to acquire some mind – a growth associated with that of down on their chins. For I conceive that those who begin to love them at this age are prepared to be always with them and share all with them as long as life shall last: they will not take advantage of a boy’s green thoughtlessness to deceive him and make a mock of him by running straight off to another’ (Ὁ μὲν οὖν τῆς Πανδήμου Ἀφροδίτης ὡς ἀληθῶς πάνδημός ἐστι καὶ ἐξεργάζεται ὅτι ἂν τύχη· κὶ οὗτός ἐστιν ὃν οἱ φαῦλοι τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐρῶσιν. ἐρῶσι δὲ οἱ τοιοῦτοι πρῶτον μὲν οὐχ ἦπτον γυναικῶν ἢ παίδων, ἔπειτα ὧν καὶ ἐρῶσι τῶν σωμάτων μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν ψυχῶν, ἔπειτα ὡς ἂν δύνωνται ἀνοητοτάτων, πρὸς τὸ διαπράξασθαι μόνον βλέποντες, ἀμελοῦντες δὲ τοῦ καλῶς ἢ μέ· ὅθεν δὴ συμβαίνει αὐτοῖς ὅτι ἂν τύχῃσι τοῦτο πράττειν, ὁμοίως μὲν ἀγαθόν, ὁμοίως δὲ τούναντίον. ἔστι γὰρ καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς θεοῦ νεωτέρας τε οὔσης πολὺ ἢ τῆς ἐτέρας, καὶ μετεχούσης ἐν τῇ γενέσει καὶ θήλεος καὶ ἄρρενος. ὁ δὲ τῆς Οὐρανίας πρῶτον μὲν οὐ μετεχούσης θήλεος ἀλλ’ ἄρρενος μόνον –καὶ ἔστιν οὗτος ὁ τῶν παίδων ἔρως- ἔπειτα πρεσβύτερας, ὕβρεως ἀμοίρου ὅθεν δὴ ἐπὶ τὸ ἄρρεν τρέπονται οἱ ἐκ τούτου τοῦ ἔρωτος ἐπιπνοί, τὸ φύσει ἐρρωμενέστερον καὶ νοῦν μᾶλλον ἔχον ἀγαπῶντες... οὐ γὰρ ἐρῶσι παίδων, ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴν ἤδη ἄρχονται νοῦν ἴσχειν, τοῦτο δὲ πλησιάζει τῷ γενειάσκειν. παρεσκευασμένοι γὰρ οἶμαί εἰσιν οἱ ἐντεῦθεν ἀρχόμενοι ἐρᾶν ὡς τὸν βίον ἅπαντα συνεσόμενοι καὶ κοινῇ συμβιωσόμενοι, ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἐξαπατήσαντες, ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ λαβόντες ὡς νέον, καταγελάσαντες οἰχήσεσθαι ἐπ’ ἄλλον ἀποτρέχοντες -translated by Lamb, W. R. M. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

Later on, we shall have the chance to ascertain that our priest is a true Platonic lover. His major desire will be to educate his beloved by remaining at his side. Notwithstanding, Platonic love, as said before, fluctuates between its need for the physical beauty in order to jump towards the Ideal and the rejection of that very same physical beauty after having attained its goal⁸. Indeed, this priest who has started telling his tortured love story with Alexis is a good example of a “metaphysical” man who, if he must continue to live in the human world, can only accept what he seems to judge most exquisite, that is, adolescent beauty, which in his opinion collects in itself the rays of the true Light. And this is the reason why, when he sees Alexis’s grown-up fellows, he exclaims: “God’s will is inscrutable. So is that of the gods... whether it is his or theirs... my reaction has been instinctively to obey it in all cases but keeping zealously my freedom to accept it or not” (“*La voluntat de Déu és insondable. També ho és la dels déus... tant si és la d'Ell com si és la d'ells... ha acabat essent en mi una reacció instintiva acatar-la sempre, però servant gelosament la meua llibertat d'acceptar-la o no*”) (22). What else can he do?:

“So I can say that I was not permitted to choose: I simply obeyed. And I did it from a choice between what I felt God demanded from me and those other things, so different, that the gods advised me to do. My behaviour was a penitent action which, though it did not solve anything at all, at least showed me to what extent the Catholic roots prevail in

⁸ I analyse all these aspects in “Amor platónico / amor estoico, principio y final de una evolución”. *Anuario de Filología* 10, 1984, pp. 27-37.

me in comparison with the paganism of which I have had to accuse myself so often. That choice, so painful, so difficult to make for anyone, was even more difficult to make for one who lived in such a sensual body as mine”.

“Així que puc dir que no em fou donat escollir: senzillament, vaig obeir. I ho vaig fer a partir d'una elecció entre allò que sentia que m'ordenava Déu i allò altre, tan distint, que m'aconsellaven fer els déus. La meua va ser una acció penitent que, si no resolgué res, almanco me demostrà fins a quin punt prevalen dins meu les arrels catòliques enfront de la paganització de què tan sovint m'he hagut d'acusar. Aquella elecció, tan penosa, tan mala de prendre per part de qualsevol, ho era més per qui habitava un cos tan sensualitzat com ja era el meu” (22).

God and gods, Catholic and pagan roots, penitent action and a very sensual body. In fact, all these oppositions are false, since neither have the gods a few moments ago have preserved him from that horrible vision nor was Paganism completely alien to radical metaphysics, thanks to which and in combination with Christianity, he, the priest, has become in my opinion an “unattainable god” who is reluctant to accept any sort of imperfection or stain. And probably for the very same reason it is highly understandable that, in the conclusion, reference is made to another episode in his life. Indeed, while travelling through southern France he took the opportunity to try to meet Alexis. He spent some time waiting for the train in the tavern of the station and, later, on his way home, he suspected that: “one of the men in the tavern, certainly with no charm... was precisely the one whom he was looking for or, as he said, he was in fact his remains bearing in mind his bodily decadence which, if it really was his man, had prevented any identification at first sight” (*“que un dels homes de dins de la taverna, mancat d'encant, a partir dels indicis que donava un tirat de fesomia, fos el que, precisament, ell cercava o, com ell deia -partint del notable esbucament físic que, si verament era ell, li havia impedit identificar-lo mitjançant la visió directa- ‘les seves deixalles’”*) (22).

These last reflections are the logical result of what has been explained so far, but, fortunately for Literature, men are usually both contradictory and unconscious of their complexity. I maintained before that our protagonist was a metaphysical man, but the truth is that he believes he possesses a soul which is completely ruled by the physical nature of his body. He spent his childhood in a little mountain-village, which enabled his sensuality to grow up, since Nature – always so pagan!- did not hide animals’ mating. And when that happened: “I looked at all this with such a great pleasure that I felt deeply that I had sinned” (*“ho contemplava amb una delectança tan profunda que me deixava la sensació d'haver comès pecat”*) (25).

If he has sinned, he must repent, but he should like to be truly pagan and, therefore, he is absolutely convinced that both the world and senses are the best guides. God and Beauty are waiting for him at the end but, in the meanwhile:

“... the messages sent by beauty reach me! If God is not hidden behind this, if God is not exactly this, what an error of Nature concerning me when it chose the armour which keeps me alive. As never before, I need, when my life is already ending, that God be not an abstract concept and that our senses be precisely the natural way to try to meet Him. What a waste of time the many who, with the help of such different instruments, search for him through the realm of the Ideas, what an inevitable and inexorable distance from him experienced by them when they are not capable of feeling His palpitations just as we feel in our hands those of a little animal!”

“... se m'apropen missatges que em fa arribar la bellesa! Si rere tot això no s'hi amaga Déu, si Déu no és exactament això, quin error comès amb mi per la naturalesa a l'hora d'elegir l'armadura que em manté dret. Més que mai em resulta necessari, ara que la vida

ja curteja tant, que Ell no sigui un pur concepte abstracte i que el camí natural per optar a trobar-lo siguin, precisament, els sentits. Quanta pèrdua de temps la de tants que amb tan distint instrumental el cerquen pel regne de les idees, quina inevitable i fatal llunyania d'Ell, la seva, quan no s'és capaç de sentir-lo glatir com un animaló viu dins les mans!" (26).

A reference to Plato's *Phaedrus* may be useful now, 249 b-c: 'Man must understand in accordance with what is called idea, arriving from many perceptions of the senses at the unity which is the result of the synthesis created by reason' (δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον συνίεναι κατ' εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῶ συναιρούμενον -translated by Fowler, H. N. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971)⁹). Our priest laments the situation he is in: "And here I am as a

⁹ cf. *Symposium* 210-211: 'He (Diotima says) who would proceed rightly in this business must not merely begin from his youth to encounter beautiful bodies. In the first place... if the conductor guides him aright, he must be in love with one particular body, and engender beautiful converse therein; but next he must remark how the beauty attached to this or that body is cognate to that which is attached to any other, and that if he means to ensue beauty in form, it is gross folly not to regard as one and the same the beauty belonging to all... his next advance will be to set a higher value on the beauty of souls than on that of the body, so that however little the grace that may bloom in any likely soul it shall suffice him for loving and caring, and for bringing forth and soliciting such converse as will tend to the betterment of the young; and that finally he may be constrained to contemplate the beautiful as appearing in our observances and our laws, and to behold it all bound together in kinship and so estimate the body's beauty as a slight affair. From observances he should be led on to the branches of knowledge, that... an turning rather towards the main ocean of the beautiful may by contemplation of this bring forth in all their splendour many fair fruits of discourse and meditation in a plenteous crop of philosophy; until... he descries a certain single knowledge... When a man has been thus tutored in the lore of love, passing from view of beautiful things, in the right and regular ascent, suddenly he will be revealed to him... a wondrous vision, beautiful in its nature... First of all, it is ever existent and neither comes to be nor perishes...' (translated by W. R. M. Lamb. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983: δεῖ... ἐνὸς αὐτὸν σώματος ἐρᾶν καὶ ἐνταῦθα γεννᾶν λόγους καλοῦς, ἔπειτα δὲ αὐτὸν κατανοῆσαι ὅτι τὸ κάλλος τὸ ἐπὶ ὀψοῦν σώματι τῷ ἐπὶ ἑτέρῳ σώματι ἀδελφόν ἐστι, καὶ εἰ δεῖ διώκειν τὸ ἐπ' εἶδει καλόν, πολλὴ ἄνοια μὴ οὐχ ἓν τε καὶ ταῦτὸν ἡγεῖσθαι τὸ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν τοῖς σώμασι κάλλος· τοῦτο δ' ἐννοήσαντα καταστῆναι πάντων τῶν καλῶν σωμάτων ἐραστήν, ἐνὸς δὲ τὸ σφόδρα τοῦτο χαλάσαι... μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τὸ ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς κάλλος τιμιώτερον ἡγήσασθαι τοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματι, ὥστε καὶ ἐὰν ἐπιεικῆς ᾖν τὴν ψυχὴν τις κἂν μικρὸν ἄνθος ἔχη, ἐξαρκεῖν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐρᾶν καὶ κήδεσθαι καὶ τίκτειν λόγους τοιούτους καὶ ζητεῖν, οἵτινες ποιήσουσι βελτίους τοὺς νέους, ἵνα ἀναγκασθῇ αὐθὲν θεάσασθαι τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τοῖς νόμοις καλὸν καὶ τοῦτ' ἰδεῖν ὅτι πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συγγενές ἐστιν, ἵνα τὸ περὶ τὸ σῶμα καλὸν μικρὸν τι ἡγήσῃται εἶναι· μετὰ δὲ τὰ ἐπιτηδεύματα ἐπὶ τὰς ἐπιστήμας ἀγαγεῖν, ἵνα... ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ πέλαγος τετραμμένος τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ θεωρῶν πολλοὺς καὶ καλοὺς λόγους καὶ μεγαλοπρεπεῖς τίκτη καὶ διανοήματα ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ ἀφθόνῳ, ἕως ἄν... κατίδη τινὰ ἐπιστήμην μίαν τοιαύτην... ὅς γὰρ ἂν μέχρι ἐνταῦθα πρὸς τὰ ἐρωτικὰ παιδαγωγηθῇ, θεώμενος ἐφεξῆς τε καὶ ὀρθῶς τὰ καλά... ἐξαίφνης κατόψεται τι θαυμαστὸν τὴν φύσιν καλόν... πρῶτον μὲν αἰεὶ ὄν καὶ οὔτε γιγνόμενον οὔτε ἀπολλύμενον). and Plutarch's *Eroticus* 765 F-766: 'Now the devices and ruses of of Love's operations on noble souls who love beauty are of the very same kind: he refracts their memories from the phenomena of this world, which are called beautiful, to the marvellous Beauty of that order world, that divine and blessed entity which is the real object of love' (ταῦτὸ δὴ τὸ ἐρωτικὸν μηχανήμα καὶ σόφισμα περὶ τὰς εὐφυεῖς καὶ φιλοκάλους ψυχάς· ἀνάκλασιν ποιεῖ τῆς μνήμης ἀπὸ τῶν ἐνταῦθα φαινομένων καὶ προσαγορευομένων καλῶν εἰς τὸ θεῖον καὶ ἐράσιον καὶ μακάριον ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐκεῖνο καὶ θαυμάσιον καλόν -translated into English by W. C. Helmbold. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969).

receiver of this sort of illness which has made me different... I have lived marked by the consciousness of being different” (“*I heus-me aquí receptor d'aquesta mena de malaltia que m'ha fet distint... he viscut travessat per la consciència de ser diferent*”) (27).

But once again Plato's *Phaedrus*, 249d-250, proves that his illness is old and very well-known:

‘But since he separates himself from human interests and turns his attention toward the divine, he is rebuked by the vulgar, who consider him mad and do not know that he is inspired. All my discourse so far has been about the fourth kind of madness, which causes him to be regarded as mad, who, when he sees the beauty on earth, remembering the true beauty, feels his wings growing and longs to stretch them for an upward flight... but it is not easy for all souls to gain from earthly things a recollection of those realities, otherwise it would not have entered into a human being, but it is not easy for all souls to gain from earthly things...’ (ἐξιστάμενος δὲ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων σπουδασμάτων καὶ πρὸς τῷ θείῳ γιγνόμενος, νουθετεῖται μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν ὡς παρακινῶν, ἐνθουσιάζων δὲ λέληθεν τοὺς πολλοὺς. Ἔστι δὴ οὖν δεῦρο ὁ πᾶς ἥκων λόγος περὶ τῆς τετάρτης μανίας -ἢ ὅταν τὸ τῆδέ τις ὄρων κάλλος, τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἀναμιμνησκόμενος, περῶνται τε καὶ ἀναπτερούμενος προθυμούμενος ἀναπτέσθαι, ἀδυνατῶν δὲ, ὄρνιθος δίκην βλέπων ἄνω, τῶν κάτω δὲ ἀμελῶν, αἰτίαν ἔχει ὡς μανικῶς διακείμενος- ὡς ἄρα αὕτη πασῶν τῶν ἐνθουσιάσεων ἀρίστη... καὶ ὅτι ταύτης μετέχων τῆς μανίας ὁ ἐρῶν τῶν καλῶν ἀραστῆς καλεῖται. Καθάπερ γὰρ εἴρηται, πᾶσα μὲν ἀνθρώπου ψυχὴ φύσει τεθέαται τὰ ὄντα, ἢ οὐκ ἂν ἦλθεν εἰς τόδε τὸ ζῶον· ἀναμιμνήσκεσθαι δὲ ἐκ τῶνδε ἐκεῖνα οὐ ῥάδιον ἀπάση...’ –translated by H. N. Fowler. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971).

Whether mad or not, here is our priest's thesis and we should compare it with what we have already read in Symposium 210-11:

“God's word is beauty... there is no true manifestation of beauty whose adoration we can curse... We can only read God through the beauty of this world... And, above all, through human beings' beauty: that one palpitating in a radiant body, that of a gesture, of a word, of a syllable pronounced in state of grace... Or also that of noble behaviour, which is the beauty of attitudes”.

“La paraula de Déu és la bellesa... No existeix, en absolut, cap autèntica manifestació de bellesa l'adoració de la qual pugui resultar maleïble... L'única lectura que podem fer de Déu la'ns ofereix la bellesa del món... I, per damunt cap altra, la que va lligada a l'ésser humà: la que glateix en un cos esplendorós, la d'un gest, la d'una paraula, la d'una síl·laba pronunciada en estat de gràcia... O, també, la d'una conducta noble, que constitueix la bellesa de les actituds” (28).

It is quite obvious, then, that what really counts is philosophy and not human love, although, for the time being, the protagonist, with such a sensual body!, mistakes the reflection of the light for the shining focus: “Alexis, a prodigious creature who assumed alone such a portion of marvel that, rather than a receiver, he was its diffuser, thus transformed into a little god” (“*Alexis, criatura prodigiosa que assumia en solitari una parcel·la tal de meravella que més que un receptor n'era un espargidor, fet així un petit déu*”) (29).

Therefore, we suspect that all the inner tensions of a man like our protagonist who is so obedient to the urges of his senses are the logical result of the logical rejection of pederasty and, obviously, his condition, since as a Catholic priest he must observe his vow of chastity. The inner fight is inevitable, but: "... in spite of the human limits that my condition as a Catholic priest imposes on me, every day I thank God for having permitted me to reach this high condition... I feel impelled to accept the heaviest burden if the objective is to crown a duty which is inherent to my sacred mission" (*"tot i les limitacions humanes que ella m'imposa, cada dia don gràcies a Déu per haver-me permès assolir l'alta condició de sacerdot... me sent empès a acceptar la més pesada de les càrregues si l'objectiu és coronar un deure del meu sagrat ministeri"*) (32-3).

Nevertheless, whatever these limits and burdens may be, his desire for also cultivating a classical temper. He is a man devoted to the study of Humanities (34). During eighteen years he will only leave his little village in order to visit Italy -Rome specifically- and Barcelona. The first journey, precisely to the spiritual centre of Catholicism, will be devoted to the study of the Latin poet Domitius Mars, and the second to the publication of a translation of his poems. Consequently, given his paganism, he is extremely receptive regarding the "epiphany" of classical beauty incarnated in Alexis.

Being a priest has certainly satisfied his expectations and he is happy in a village where he is highly considered and esteemed. Nevertheless, this religious and human peace experienced by him day after day must cause at the same time a sort of paralysis, since Alexis, the great impact, seems to save him: "In the fact of having met Alexis lies, God forgive me, the justification of my life" (*"En la coneixença d'Alexis radica, que Déu me perdoni, la justificació de la meua vida"*) (39). And, once again, the course of the events follows a true Platonic logic: a) first he sees a body: "And I see how, suddenly, that young body enters the room" (*"I veig com, de sobte, entra dins la sala aquell cos jovenívol"*) (40); b) afterwards, he feels that Alexis is the incarnation of poetry: "the incarnate grace, the brilliant voice of Domitius Mars being present in a body" (*"gràcia feta persona, la veu il·luminada de Domici Mars feta present en un cos"*) (40); c) later on, he goes on towards transcendence: "seeing how he moved forward from the nakedness of his simple gesture and my impenitent tendency to turn everything into literary transpositions, suddenly I became completely conscious that something which was transcendent was happening in the world" (*"Mirant-lo avançar des de la nuesa del seu gest senzill i de la meua impenitent tendència a fer de tot trasposicions literàries, m'investí de sobte la plena consciència d'estar succeïnt, al món, quelcom transcendent"*) (40), and d) finally, he remembers, recognizes in Alexis the eternal Grace: "Maybe he came from the distance of both space and time looking for, in spite of being unconscious of it, someone who was capable of catching a grace which, in him, was about to blossom" (*"Potser ell venia des de la distància de l'espai i el temps cercant, sense adonar-se'n, qui fos capaç de captar una gràcia que, en ell, era a punt de fer ecllosió"*) (42).

Having been conquered by the impact of another body, he discovers himself as a body: "All of a sudden my body had become redeemed from its old condition getting out of the accursed zone where I was taught to keep it relegated" (*"El meu cos de sobte s'havia redimit de la seva vella condició ancil·lar sortint de la zona maleïda on se m'havia instruït a mantenir-lo relegat"*) (44).

His conversion to Paganism had advanced (45), but, *nolens volens*, there have been many years of restraint and, that night, when the new circumstances prevent him from sleeping, he imagines: "God forgive me" – that is to say, searching for God's mercy and not a human pleasure-, bedrooms where... throughout the village conjugal rights were exercised" (*"Déu me perdoni, cambres on, potser de forma tardana, eren exercits arreu del poble uns drets conjugals"*) (45).

Everything seems to indicate, then, that he feels the urge to give an honourable dimension to such new and irrepressible impulses. In fact, he has already noticed an evident transformation which reminds us very much of Diotima's teachings:

“What kind of secret path must exist, entering the most delicate substrata of the human character, which, on being invaded by beauty through one of our extreme limits, provokes in its opposite, by a prodigious automatism, an improvement of the attitudes?... Why, I often ask myself, does an aesthetic impact make us feel that we are better?... Stimulated, from an as yet unexplored corner of my personality, by that simple and so transcendent vision which I was offered by the presence of Alexis, being completely full of that new manner of assuming beauty, on the following days I felt magnified by a power which caused a sort of feverish increasing of my will to serve the others”.

“Quin passadís secret deu existir, travessant els substrats més delicats del caràcter dels homes, que en ser per un dels extrems embeguts de bellesa se'ns provoca a l'altre, per un automatisme prodigiós, una millora de les actituds? Per què, em deman tot sovint, un impacte estètic ens fa sentir més bons?... Estimulat, des d'un indret de la meva persona que jo tenia poc explorat, per aquell espectacle, senzill i tan transcendent, que m'oferí la presència d'Alexis, amarat tot jo per aquella nova manera d'assumir la bellesa, me vaig sentir, els dies que seguiren, magnificat per una força que produïa una mena de febril potenciació de la meva voluntat de servir” (47-8).

I would like to emphasize this because the beneficiaries of these new feelings are his parishioners, to whom he feels now, as never before, very attached as their true father. And, according to Diotima as well, the noble man who meets a fair, noble and well endowed soul (*Symposium* 209b-d):

‘So when a man's soul is so far divine that it is made pregnant with these from his youth, and on attaining manhood immediately desires to bring forth and beget... and if he chances also on a soul that is fair and noble and well-endowed, he gladly cherishes the two combined in one; and straightway in addressing such a person he is resourceful in discoursing of virtue and of what should be the good man's character and what his pursuits; and so he takes in hand the other's education. For I hold that by contact with the fair one and by consorting with him he bears and brings forth his long-felt conception, because in presence or absence he remembers his fair. Equally too with him he shares the nurturing of what is begotten, so that men in this condition enjoy a far fuller community with each other than that which comes with children, and a far surer friendship, since the children of their union are fairer and more deathless. Every one would choose to have got children such as these rather than the human sort...’ (ὅταν τις ἐκ νέου ἐγκύμων ἢ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἢ θεὸς ὦν καὶ ἡκούσης τῆς ἡλικίας, τίκτειν τε καὶ γεννᾶν ἤδη ἐπιθυμῆ... ἂν ἐντύχη ψυχῇ καλῇ καὶ γενναίᾳ καὶ εὐφυεῖ, πάνυ δὴ ἀσπάζεται τὸ συναμφότερον, καὶ πρὸς τοῦτον τὸν ἄνθρωπον εὐθύς εὐπορεῖ λόγων περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ περὶ οἷον χηρῆ εἶναι τὸν ἄνδρα τὸν ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἃ ἐπιτηδεύειν, καὶ ἐπιχειρεῖ παιδεύειν. ἀπτόμενος γὰρ οἶμαι τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ ὁμιλῶν αὐτῷ, ἃ πάσαι ἐκύει τίκτει καὶ γεννᾶ, καὶ παρῶν καὶ ἀπῶν μεμνημένος, καὶ τὸ γεννηθὲν συνεκτρέφει κοινῇ μετ' ἐκείνου, ὥστε πολὺ μείζω κοινωνίαν τῆς τῶν παιδῶν πρὸς ἀλλήλους οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἴσχυσι καὶ φιλίαν βεβαιότεραν, ἄτε καλλιόνων καὶ ἀθανατωτέρων παιδῶν κεκοινωνηκότες. καὶ πᾶς ἂν δέξαιτο ἑαυτῷ τοιοῦτους παῖδας μᾶλλον γεγονέναι... -translated by Lamb, W. R. M. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983).

Therefore, we need only wait for a while to see, once our priest has started teaching Alexis, to what extent it is his pedagogy which prevails and not the pleasure of the senses.

In the meantime, the novel continues to explain the inward debate of a man who becomes more and more tortured. On the one hand, he feels the onslaught of the flesh and, on the other, ethics and all sorts of interdictions restrain him logically: “Above all, I felt I was a coward... certainly I was not happy” (*“Part damunt de tot, me sentia covard... verament no ho era, feliç”*) (51).

But, above all, it is the presence of his mother, as someone who has transmitted culture –and, consequently, norms of behaviour-, which seems to nip the possibility of any pagan licence in the bud:

“That cowardliness appeared in me as a result of the excessive control that my mother exerted over me (50)... And I was sorry to find that I, who for so long had accepted submitting to my mother as something natural –above all after my father’s death, when I was still a child-, soon after Alex rushed into my world, suddenly felt that that motherly authority, as if it had started giving clear signs of interference, bothered me for the first time”.

“Aquella covardia se'm configurà a partir del zel excessiu que entorn meu mogué la meva mare... i me dolgué constatar que jo, que tant de temps havia acceptat com a cosa natural veure'm sotmès per la meva mare -sobretot des que mon pare morí, essent jo encara infant-, des del moment precís d'irrompre Alexis dins el meu entorn, sentís de sobte que aquella autoritat materna, com si hagués començat a donar indicis d'interferència, per primera vegada m'incomodava” (54).

When a man is restrained by such clear and opposed limits, only confusion can grow: “I faced the following days open to all kinds of doubts... I was divided into two, and one half rejected (53) ... everything the other one proposed” (*“Vaig afrontar els dies següents obert a tots els interrogants”*... *“Jo ja era dividit en dos, i una meitat rebutjava, perquè sí, tot el que l'altra li plantejava”*) (55).

Divine Love/ human love, Spirit / matter, Heaven / the material world; who will be the winner? It is too early to give an answer, but it is quite clear that he will not be easily defeated by the charge of his senses; on the contrary, he fights against it in order to purify them:

“It was not love... What was happening to me was exactly that I felt seduced by grace, which, with other shades, had always happened to me. (Seductions)... I had enjoyed them many times... But always, leaving aside this time and before that new experience, they had come to me from the impact of aesthetic emotions which were not located in a living human body: from a chorale by Bach, from some verses by Vergil, from that Saint Louis by Sebastiano del Piombo that I could contemplate in Venice, emerging from the silent shadows within the hermitage of San Bartolomeo... I mused intensively the whole night. I fought energetically against that surrender which became defined and invaded me little by little, thus leaving me at the mercy of everything, like an old boat whose wooden structure was worm-eaten... I thought of that body in a distant future and... it was as if I saw it erased by the passing of time... And, when through the blinds of my room the light of a new day started infiltrating into it, all of a sudden I saw clearly that that condition of Alexis’s, that of being of a transitory beauty, was precisely the point from which the irresistible magnitude of its suggestion came”.

“Però no es tractava d'amor... Allò que em succeïa era exactament un sentir-me seduït per la gràcia, cosa que, en uns altres matisos, m'havia ocorregut sempre... De seduccions... n'havia fruïdes a voler... Però sempre, amb aquesta excepció i abans d'aquella experiència nova, m'havien vingut de l'impacte d'unes intensitats estètiques no localitzades en un cos humà viu: d'una coral de Bach, d'uns versos de Virgili, d'aquell Sant Lluís de Sebastiano del Piombo, que vaig poder contemplar a Venècia, emergint de la penombra silent dins l'esglesiola de San Bartolomeo (55)... Vaig meditar intensament tota aquella nit. Vaig lluitar amb energia contra aquell sometiment que es definia i m'anava amarant deixant-me a mercè de tot, com una vella barca amb la fusta corcada. Precipitant els fets, vaig situar mentalment aquell cos dins un futur llunyà i, amb esforç, va ser com si el veiés erosionat pels dies, musteïble que era malgrat tot. I quan per la persiana de la meua cambra començaven a filtrar-se les primeres llums del nou dia, de sobte vaig veure clar que aquella condició d'Alexis de tractar-se d'una gràcia en trànsit era el punt d'on partia, precisament, la magnitud irresistible de la seva suggestió” (56).

This final *anagnórisis* of the protagonist could have set him free, but Platonic logic and servitude are implacable. Men who fall in love with Beauty, Platonic men, love only what is free of change and remains always the same¹⁰. Any sort of transformation, like the fact of growing old, torments them so much that, if ever they are seduced by a short-lived beauty, they have only to imagine it degraded by the passing of time in order to escape quickly from what they then perceive as a true mirage.

For the time being, it is quite evident that Alexis's beauty and grace are, so he says, overwhelming and that the priest who contemplates them has fallen completely in love with them, to the extent of being surprised by the fact that in the village: “Nobody, unlike me, had been... wounded... I already felt so seduced by the suggestion of his grace that I found it only logical that, on seeing him, everybody would react like me” (*“ningú n'havia quedat, com a mi em passava, mínimament ferit... me sentia ja tan sotmès a la suggestió de la seva gràcia que sols me semblava lògic que a la vista d'ell tothom reaccionàs com jo ho havia fet”*) (58).

He started seeing himself –and Diotima had explained the same many centuries earlier- as a human being who is pregnant with beauty and who, thanks to Alexis, gives birth to what he carries inside: “Observing that Alexis's grace had not caused any impact on the others, I concluded that, for something like that to happen, the collaboration of somebody who, like me, was open to it was necessary” (*“Observant que la gràcia d'Alexis no havia causat el menor impacte a l'altra gent, vaig concloure que per configurar-se necessitava la col·laboració d'algú que en fos receptiu, com jo resultava ser-ho”*) (58).

And here is the unexpected fact: Alexis, that god endowed with endless grace comes to see the priest in order to ask him for some French lessons. Suddenly, if he does not restrain himself, he might give free rein to a good deal of irrepressible energy, but:

¹⁰ See Plato *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 διαιετέον τάδε· τί τὸ ὄν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε; τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, ἀεί κατὰ ταῦτα ὄν, τὸ δ’ αὖ δόξει μετ’ αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν, γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν –translated by R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966).

“That sudden dependence on him that I felt for three days and a half was nice but, at the same time, bearing in mind that I was a priest, was also both unworthy and unsuitable ... amid an undefined sense of guilt... I was glad to find that that firm resistance of mine was real and caused by the good armour of my religious spirit”.

“Aquella dependència sobtada envers ell sentida per mi durant tres dies i mig, alhora de ser-me plaent m'havia semblat des de la meua condició de sacerdot indigna i impròpia (62)..... enmig d'un cert aire confós de culpabilitat que m'envaïa, vaig sentir la satisfacció de comprovar que aquella certa resistència meua era ben autèntica i produïda per la bona armadura del meu ànim religiós” (63).

Little by little, we realize that, if ever the pupil, that is the god, fell in love with his teacher, he would undoubtedly find another unattainable god in front of him.

Later on, this whole process will be analyzed in detail, but the ascent from concrete beauties towards the abstract Beauty or original source is fundamental -let us listen remember once more Diotima's words in *Symposium* 210-211. If these words are applied, then, to our story, we shall find that, *mutatis mutandis*, this priest in a little village has just discovered exactly the same Diotima discovered, in this case with the help of Alexis's mates, to whom he had never paid attention before:

“And now it turned out that those creatures whom I had known since they were born, who had received the sacraments from my hands, had suddenly assumed... different portions of a single ideal of beauty that, until Alexis had awakened my sensitivity, I must have considered alien to them. Contemplating them from this new perspective... setting them free of their endless agitation, I saw them as beautiful”.

“I ara resultava que aquelles criatures que havia vist néixer, sacramentats tots per mi, de sobte havien assumit, cadascun pel seu vent, porcions diverses d'un sol ideal de bellesa que jo, fins que la sensibilització provocada en mi per Alexis m'havia deixondit, devia haver considerat cosa aliena a ells. Contemplats des d'aquesta perspectiva nova, aglapint-los al vol un a un com alliberant-los, per un instant i per afavorir la meua percepció, de la seva agitació infinita, els vaig veure bells” (68).

Alexis's mates and, above all, Alexis are the possessors of a superior Beauty which uses them as mere reflectors. It does not matter that the priest affirms that Alexis's grace is far more important than his beauty, and that absolute Beauty belongs to another world which corresponds to the Christian God rather than the pagan gods:

“My God, the true one, mine, forgive the way in which I try to be expressive: it had nothing to do with God, it had to do with the gods. Alexis moved himself, modulated his voice, caught things, blinked and, as a whole, was alive in such a special way that everything was overwhelmed by the reality he offered. His reality could be more easily imagined in the pagan heaven... than in the Christian one, where supreme beauties are much more located in the other world”.

“Que me perdoni el vertader, el meu, aquesta manera que tenc d'intentar ser expressiu: allò no era cosa de Déu, era cosa dels déus. Existia en Alexis una forma de moure's, una manera de modular la veu, un estil d'agafar les coses, de parpellejar i, en conjunt, de ser viu, que la realitat que oferia ho ultrapassava tot. Era així que resultava més imaginable situada en el cel pagà, connivent a tenir la seva eclosió a cals homes, que en el cristià, on les belleses supremes estan més situades a l'altre món” (76).

No matter at all, indeed, because his most metaphysical temper appears time after time to the extent of speaking once again of “concept”, “intangibility”, “superior sphere”, etc.:

“To verify the existence, in a body and in front of me, of that grace made me happy even if it was considered only as a pure concept or an intangible vibration... to find that... it existed as a human attribute, changed those lines of thought, among the most important ones, which ordered my life. That was true! Alexis’s grace was so natural that he seemed to be foreign to it: it was as if the grace I could observe in him existed by itself, and he, who belonged to a superior sphere where the one adored by human beings is held in low esteem as being insufficient and too common, did not care”.

“Verificar l’existència en un cos i al davant meu d’aquella gràcia que ja me donava goig només considerada com un pur concepte, vibració intangible que, de tota l’audició, de la contemplació d’un color, d’un volum o una línia, comprovar que... allò existia com a atribut humà, me capgirà plantejaments que eren part entre els més importants que endreçaven la meua vida. Allò era veritat! Duia Alexis amb tanta naturalitat la seva gràcia que semblava aliè a ella: era com si la que jo podia observar-li existís per ella mateixa i ell, pertanyent a una esfera superior on la que adoram els humans és poc considerada per insuficient o per massa habitual, no en fes ni el més mínim cas” (77).

Therefore, it is quite obvious that, unfortunately for the priest, Beauty likes to become incarnate. And true pagans, the Greek ones, understand immediately that this fact invites them to enjoy it, but he, in spite of his hidden desires, is not pagan. “To pray was the only refuge... I introduced into those linguistic meetings a progressive religious fervour to the extent of turning them into a sort of hybrid thing which, depending on the state of my spirit, tended to make his piety grow in him rather than his knowledge of the French language” (80) (“*L’únic refugi era l’oració... vaig introduir dins aquelles trobades de motivació lingüística un progressiu enfervoriment religiós fins a convertir-les en una mena de cosa híbrida que, segons el meu estat d’ànim, es decantava més cap a fer-li créixer la pietat que els coneixements de francès*”).

And the truth is that not even Alexis seems to be pagan or, at least, since, after his first meeting with his father confessor, he continues to be: “a pure soul which... had never felt the need to make reference to the devils of the flesh” (82) (“*ànima pura que, per alleugerir la seva consciència, no havia tengut necessitat de fer referències als dimonis de la carn*”).

Amid such an intense spiritual peace, the confession of his metaphysical temper is already inevitable. Or, in other words, the protagonist understands perfectly well what has been extremely important for the Western world, that is to say, that from a certain time onwards and thanks to Plato’s legacy in Western culture, God and the gods cannot be clearly distinguished:

“What was happening to me had nothing to do with the world of flesh. Alexis was a phenomenon affecting my life and subduing me in a non-sexual way. It was not, consequently, a temptation... it was a gravitation, a suck of my will which clearly came from a further away than Alexis in spite of being focused in his person. And my answer was simply the one which, when all human resistance has been conquered, is given before supreme charm. Grace: this is the key-word that I do not dare to write in capital letters, as I should, because I cannot help, at the moment in which I am going to do it, having a feeling which is similar to invading a sacred camp, thus committing sacrilege. But, my God and plural gods, all of them being the reference to the armour which keeps my life upright, are not Grace and grace one and the same thing?”.

“Allò que me succeïa no tenia res a veure amb el món de la carn. Alexis era un fenomen que incidia dins la meua vida, sotmetent-me, d’una forma asexualada. No era, per tant, una temptació... era una gravitació, una succió de la meua voluntat que es veia clar que venia

de molt més lluny que Alexis, però que es polaritzava en la seva persona. I la meua resposta era senzillament la que, mansfermada tota la resistència de l'home, es dona davant l'encant suprem. La gràcia: aquesta és la paraula clau que no m'atrevesc a escriure en majúscula, com caldria, perquè no puc evitar, a l'instant d'anar a fer-ho, una sensació com d'invadir un camp sagrat i cometre sacrilegi. Però, Déu meu i déus plurals, referència tots plegats de l'armadura que manté erecta la meua vida, no són la Gràcia i la gràcia una única i la mateixa cosa?" (87-8).

The peace, our priest's spiritual peace, certainly does not last the rest of his life. The boy grows up and discovers the world. He discovers himself, his body and the others' bodies. One day, while the priest is helping someone who is about to die, Alexis leads a group of boys and girls on the occasion of one of their frequent excursions. Free from the control of their father confessor, they all take a bath completely naked in a small lake. Alexis is already pagan enough to talk about it later with an innocent smile on his face, but the priest, leaving aside a few moments of perverse envy on account of not having been there, discards any pagan licence and opts for a severe reprimand. Indeed, in spite of having learnt to accept the presence in this material world of the divine Grace, he wants it to be pure and immaculate. Therefore, being reluctant to accept anything vulgar or "pandemic", he has no other option but to fall into a logical disappointment and stigmatize Alexis:

"The annoying exposure of those irreversibly accomplished facts caused in me the same destroying effect as if he had dropped a bit of poison... It must not have been, then, the first time something like that had happened. Enabling those lapses, making them easy, there must have been in them a great number of disturbing sensations, provocative images, lustful thoughts which, coming from who knows where, had become deeply rooted in him, accompanied him wherever he went and, without showing themselves but transformed into an invisible part of his luggage, had arrived with him when I saw him getting out of the coach".

"L'exposició pertorbadora d'aquells fets irreversiblement consumats, me provocà el mateix efecte anorreant que si m'hi hagués deixat caure unes gotes de verí (102)... No devia ser, doncs, aquella la primera vegada que succeïa allò. Fent possibles aquelles caigudes, propiciant-les devia habitar dins ells un cúmul de sensacions pertorbadores, d'imatges incitants, pensaments lúbrics, que procedents qui sap d'on havien arrelat dins ell, anaven amb ell onsevulla que anàs, i que, sense així demostrar-ho, convertits en part invisible del seu equipatge, havien arribat amb ell quan jo l'havia vist baixar del cotxe de línia" (104).

As a good Platonic pedagogue, the priest sees Alexis as a soul which has fallen into the prison of matter, of flesh and, as a consequence, in need of purification: "Full of pain... I decided that my admonition should not reach him directly but through a broader catechesis aimed at bringing about an ethical renewal in all the young people of the village" ("Travessat de dolor... vaig decidir que la meua admonició no li hauria d'arribar per línia directa i sí a partir d'una catequesi de més ample abast, orientada a fer una neteja espiritual entre tota la joveua del poble") (106).

It is certainly a firm decision but the writer knows that, from Greek novels onwards, fluctuations, doubts and all kind of obstacles are the suitable means to create the always necessary tension. When everything seemed to announce a resolute attitude, we see on the contrary that the protagonist doubts as never before and fights furiously against the dogmas of his conscience:

“At that moment, full of contradictory feelings, I felt that the concept of sin was for me more indefinite than ever before. Was it truly a sin to continue that most fleeting contact? –he is referring to the custom of having his hand kissed by the boy, but this time after several days. Might it rather be... a timid succedaneum, an infinitesimally small advance on the supreme joy of the senses which some day to touch God would represent?... And, if the fact of loving Alexis made me feel better, if to confirm his existence was for me the supreme act of the assumption of beauty in this world, and it was true that the fuller of Alexis I felt the closer to God I felt as well, how could I not to rebel against that hesitation of my soul provoked by some doctrinal schemes which were alien to me? Indeed, any sense of obedience disappeared when I realized that, in accordance with them, it must be admitted that that prodigious thing which was happening to me was sinful and condemned by God”.

“En aquell instant, rebotint-me per dedins sentiments contradictoris, vaig sentir que se'm feia més confús que mai el concepte de pecat. Ho era, verament ho era mantenir aquell fugacíssim contacte? -fa referència al costum de donar-li a besar la mà, però, aquesta vegada, després d'alguns dies de no veure's. No era més aviat, ben al fons de tot, un tímid succedani, una bestreta infinitesimalment petita del goig suprem dels sentits que representaria poder, un dia, tocar Déu?... I, si estimar Alexis me feia sentir millor, si constatar la seva existència era per a mi l'acte suprem d'assumpció de la bellesa d'aquest món, i era tan veritat que me sentia més vora Déu com més em sentia amarat d'Alexis, ¿com no rebel·lar-me davant aquell titubeig del meu ànim provocat per uns esquemes doctrinals aliens a mi, enfront dels quals me desapareixia tot sentit d'obediència en constatar que a partir d'ells calia admetre que aquella cosa prodigiosa que me succeïa era pecaminosa i maleïda de Déu?” (111).

The fact of believing that certain contacts with matter prepare us for other ones which are more divine and, at the same time, the fact of not having confidence in the demands of a God who represses human senses reveals a real inner battle and, for the time being, we know by intuition that Heaven will lose.

Indeed, some days later, while he is going for a walk, he perceives clearly the sacred and eternal nature of pleasure:

“Everything became allied to make me feel an intense pleasure, and I was so receptive and the fact of enjoying it came to be so much my nature that, going beyond the dominions of my spirit, I felt that I was truly invading -as would happen on other occasions in my life- those of my flesh, although I had always considered it both more insensible and ignoble. And, suddenly, as if taken by an irresistible power which came from much earlier than myself, I felt subdued... and... obedient to some thing... I immolated the great treasure of my purity... since I was only an excited body shaken by pleasure and pain, and my lips, from a new eagerness, seemed to look desperately for those of that landscape in a state of grace, into which I was now integrated”.

“Tot es conjuminava a fer-me sentir un vivíssim plaer i n'era tan receptiu, fruit-lo va passar a constituir tant la meua manera de ser, que ultrapassant els dominis de l'esperit vaig sentir que invadia de ple, com d'altres vegades m'havia de passar a la vida, els de la meua carn, que jo sempre havia considerat més insensible i innoble. I de sobte, veient-me conduït per una força irresistible que procedia de molt abans de mi mateix, em vaig sentir sotmès, sacralitzat en una dimensió que encara ara veig claríssima, i quasi bé sense adonar-me'n, obeïdor a alguna cosa, vaig immolar el gran tresor de la meua puresa, fins aquell instant indemne de tantes lluites, en tant que tot jo era un cos vivíssim

trasbalsat de plaer i dolor, i els meus llavis, des d'una nova avidesa, semblaven cercar amb desesper els d'aquell paisatge en gràcia que jo havia passat a integrar” (115).

One might think now that the pure man who has accompanied us from the very beginning is about to disappear definitively but the reverse is the case. He recovers very soon his judgement and he surrenders once more to the unchanging and eternal Beauty-Grace which Alexis will never be able to incarnate: “... I was invaded by the fear of falling into sin and, pursuing my serenity through ascetic practices, whenever Alexis came, I proposed myself as a discipline the theme of the transitory condition of human beauty” (*“Adesiara m'envaïa el temor de perdre'm i cercant la serenitat per camins ascètics, en venir Alexis, com a disciplina me proposava el tema de la condició fugissera de la bella humana”*) (116).

And when this strategy also fails, he thanks God for still having a mother whose physical presence saves him from a certain fall, as when on a stormy afternoon Alexis embraces him in fright when the lightning-conductor takes a great strike:

“For a very fleeting instant I felt that his hair was caressing my face. Through my body ran an instantaneous shiver of pleasure and fear. Fortunately, it lasted only as long as it took for a scream of terror coming from my mother to reach me. That voice... arrived just at the exact moment to be able to stop an order which... being emitted from a lustful corner of my brain, started causing in me the tension of certain muscles in my arms towards the exact configuration of a circle the same size as Alexis's body”.

“Per un instant fugacíssim vaig sentir que els seus cabells acaraven la meua cara. Per tot el cos, estimbat cop en sec tot jo a ser altra vegada aquell ull desorbitat, me va recórrer un instantani calfred de plaer i temor. Per fortuna, sols durà el que trigà a arribar-me un crit d'esgarrafament que havia deixat escapar la meua mare. Aquella veu... arribà a l'instant exacte per encara ser a temps de fer recular... una ordre que emesa des d'un rerafons lasciú del meu cervell començava a produir-me la tibantor de determinats músculs dels braços cap a configurar, amb precisió, un cercle de la mateixa grandària que el cos d'Alexis” (119).

From now on he decides “to protect from everyone, even from myself, that adolescent, whose lessons would take place no longer at my home but would be given, from time to time, at his where the quiet presence of the Nurse would serve as our guardian angel” (123) (*“protegir de tothom, fins i tot de mi mateix, aquell adolescent, les lliçons al qual deixarien de tenir lloc a ca nostra per impartir-les-hi, amb una cadència més espaiada, a ca seva mateix, on la presència callada de la Dida ens servís a ambdós d'àngel tutelar”*).

The solitude which follows the death of his mother invites him to reflect on his whole life and the conclusion does not show any pagan inspiration. His sin had been precisely to have failed to make spirit and flesh enemies for evermore, not to have understood that, as long as the human soul remains in a body, it can only be its prisoner. The most metaphysical Plato often taught the Western world to feel it this way, and Christianity, as we know it –it is worth remembering once again- is much indebted to him:

“I have had too many proofs that between spirit and flesh there is a certain connivance of which we have not been warned, that both are interrelated by means of a web of secret inner galleries through which runs, beyond our control the quintessential substance which nourishes our personality... I have let my sensibility reach a fine degree of acuteness, perhaps an unhealthy one. I am convinced that, after having reached such an acute degree, the connivance between spirit and flesh becomes fatally unveiled”.

“Que entre l'esperit i la carn existeixen unes complicitats de què no hem estat advertits, que l'un i l'altra es comuniquen mitjançant tota una xarxa de galeries secretes, interiors, per on circula lluny del nostre control la substància quintaessenciada que nodreix la nostra personalitat, n'he tengut massa proves... He permès arribar la meva sensibilitat a una tan fina, i potser malaltissa, agudització. És en arribar a un nivell consemblant, pens, quan la connivència entre l'esperit i la carn queda fatalment inaugurada” (134).

Only the inevitable presence of the tangible world, of matter and flesh –inevitable even for a pure soul in a living body- can temper the metaphysical demands. The priest now takes the boys and girls of the village to the seaside for a day and, only a few minutes after their arrival, Alexis lies almost dead on the sand. The priest applies his mouth to Alexis's in order to keep him alive and he finally saves him. However, besides being a priest, he is a man in love and, as such, he does not save Alexis but kisses him:

“I was quite a desperation, a frenzied desire to deprive myself of any sign of life in order to transfer it to Alexis. I was quite an existential spasm devoted to confirming that that practice of inseminating that body with my breath would enable what at that moment I desired more than my own eternal salvation. I was the pain which is assumed in its most integral way and at the same time, I confess it, I was already quite the irreversible assumption of voluptuousness... For some time which was a whole life, I enjoyed that briefest kiss as if God did not exist and on earth there were nobody but Alexis and me”.

“Era tot jo un desesper, una ànsia frenètica de desprendre'm de tot indici de vida per transferir-la a Alexis, era un espasme existencial abocat perquè fos veritat que aquella pràctica d'inseminar aquell cos amb el meu alè fes possible la cosa que aquell moment desitjava més que la meva pròpia salvació eterna, era el dolor assumit de la manera més integral i alhora, me'n confés, l'assumpció ja irreversible de la voluptat... Durant un temps que fou tota una vida, vaig fruit aquell bes fugacíssim com si Déu no existís i damunt la terra no hi hagués ningú excepte Alexis i jo” (146-7).

If God allowed his breath to be contaminated by introducing it into a mass of worldly mud, why should a mere servant of his, a mere human creature, feel guilty of having inseminated another human being with his breath and life? But he also kissed Alexis. First, he feels full of shame and repentance: “I remember, very clearly, like a violent door-slam which has just happened in the next room, the feeling both of shame and of being guilty of scandal” (“*Record, clar com una violenta portada que s'acabàs de produir a l'habitació del costat, el sentiment de vergonya i de ser reu d'escàndol que ho sobrenedava tot*”) (150). But, after tears have set him free from the logical tension, the priest, as if he already tended to accept the sensual dimension of every human being, seems to assume the human desire for paying homage to the incarnate Grace: “Mine had been no other behaviour but that of a man who has the privilege of being a slave to grace, and that kiss was no other evidence but that of my surrender” (“*I es que la meva no havia estat sinó la conducta d'aquell que té el privilegi de ser esclau de la gràcia, ni aquell bes altra cosa que la patentització del meu sometiment*”) (154).

If only he had talked to Alexis openly, and obviously he may not do it! But, as pointed out at the very beginning with regard to Lord Alfred Douglas, there are loves which dare not speak their name. Even after enjoying and recognizing that he enjoyed that kiss, every man who has been modelled by Metaphysics must in the end remain once again under the protection of what is absolutely Perfect: “And, determined to do everything in order to keep pure the beauty of a perfect relationship, free from the need to decide anything, as automatically as I would have rescued Alexis from a fire without worrying about what could happen to me... I took my personal belongings and I left” (156) (“*I resolt a tot per tal que es mantingués intacta la bellesa*

d'una relació perfecta, sense necessitat de decidir res, amb el mateix automatisme que m'hauria empès a treure Alexis de dins un foc sense posar esment a què em podia ocórrer, aquell mateix dia a mig matí vaig recollir les meves pertinences més personals i vaig partir”).

So far, the story as preserved in a diary. There have been many pages devoted to explaining the reasons of the “deserter”. Powerful reasons since they permit that a certain consolidated Western behaviour triumphs over its eternal enemy: the world and its seductions. Notwithstanding, this world, which cannot logically be understood by a man who believes to be only its prisoner, demands mercilessly what belongs to it. Alexis, in spite of the priest, in spite of the Platonic West which despises matter and values the Spirit highly, is not only a human being whose extreme beauty and grace are worshipped by others; Alexis is also a boy who awakens both the senses and the desire of his admirers. The world, even when seen as sacred, that is, the incarnation of the divine Beauty, is not docile, nor does it lack will. It does not delegate to God or to the ideal Beauty its powers, thus fulfilling superior orders. The world, in spite of all those who are Platonic, is according to many others an eternal entity which cannot be divided into two halves or opposite poles. The Spirit must count on matter, Heaven must count on the earth, the Good must count on the Evil, otherwise human beings might suffer a true tearing of their personalities. In other words, if they opt for making enemies the two parts of a true unity, they will become doomed to escape from themselves, not to know themselves and to hate themselves.

Alexis is precisely that unaccepted but demanding half. Alexis, who does not understand the logical priest's reasons, claims for a natural enjoyment of human sensuality. Alexis, although he is extremely beautiful and full of grace, does not want to be -nor can he be- an unattainable god for his pure lover, just as his pure lover, the priest, almost wants to but cannot give up being an unattainable god for his beloved. In fact, it has to do with the classical opposition God / the world, Divine Love / human love, to love God / to love a woman –a man in this case. The Platonic temper of the Western world has almost always followed this behaviour and, as a result of an inevitable cultural legacy, Western men and women have become divided –sometimes to a great extent- into two opposite and hostile parts.

What became of Alexis after being abandoned? It would be fair to hear his reasons, that is, the reasons for what one could say his “andrerasty”. His testament or, even better, his accusation does not remain unknown, since the narrator received, two months after leaving the village, “the letter which, memorised by me before burning it, said...” (“la carta que, memoritzada per mi abans de ser cremada, deia...”) (157). First of all, Alexis, who has been hurt very much by the priest's behaviour, maintains that the fact of preserving “the beauty of a perfect relationship” (“*la bellesa d'una relació perfecta*”) (156) –because the boy knows by intuition but does not accept the adult's reasons- implies a true personal death followed by a new birth: “In future years and in another place my daring enterprise will be to start living again, far both from you and your influence” (“*A mi me queda per endavant l'aventura d'intentar en uns altres indrets començar a viure de bell nou, lluny de tu i la teva influència*”) (158). The one who loves, as he does, in flesh and soul, can no longer stand more “nasty coldness” (“*fredor fastigosa*”) (159). So, if ever the priest, the pure lover, felt impelled to look for him, it would be far more reasonable to give up pursuing a boy who in fact is dead: “Do not do it; never: from now on, in fact since several days ago, I have given up existing” (“*No ho facis mai: jo, des d'ara, des de ja fa dies, he deixat d'existir*”) (159). Those who are truly Platonic leave unmentioned their sensual weaknesses and force others to do the same, although sometimes there are some unruly human beings who are completely disposed to avenge all the Lords Alfreds Douglasses throughout the world: “The very night when I saw you for the first time, I started loving you. Here, finally, is my confession. I have just written... the only thing that I desired to say with all the words that, day after day, I have addressed to you” (“*La mateixa nit de veure't per primera vegada, vaig començar a*

estimar-te. Ja està dit. Acab de deixar escrit... l'única cosa que volia dir amb tot el conjunt de paraules que, dia rere dia, t'he dirigit") (159-60).

Just to talk! To talk! Alexis wanted and needed to talk:

"... but you had walled yourself in... in fact, little more than this could be expected from someone who, like you, lives on intangible liquors. You seem not to be stimulated by anything palpable. What matter are you made of, excited only by what is distant? Life after death, the classical world, that pine on the summit... What a nature so different from mine! I see it now! What an impossible kingdom you have represented for someone who, like me, feels subject precisely to what is present!"

"... però tu sempre emmurallat (160)... Ben mirat, poca cosa més es podia esperar de qui, com tu, viu de llecors intangibles. De res palpable sembles rebre estímuls. De quina matèria ets, que només t'excita la cosa distant? L'altra vida, el món clàssic, aquell pinotell del cim... Quina complexió més distinta a la meva, ara ho veig! Quin reialme impossible has representat per a qui, com jo, se sent precisament sotmès per la presència!" (160).

There are metaphysical men, in some way the inheritors of all the Platos –whether Greek or not- throughout History who cannot live in the present and understanding the others' immediacy: "In fact... absent-minded, superb, always distant, you never noticed what was my way of being present" ("*Ben mirat... distret, superb, sempre perdut dins la llunyania, mai veieres quina era la meva forma de ser present*")... "You, insisting on being a priest every minute... indoctrinated me. But I must tell you that I shall not be able to adopt those convictions which caused you not to realize that you and I were, mainly, one body close to another. Far from assuming them, I shall always curse them" ("*Tu, entossudit a ser sacerdot cada minut del dia, bé que m'adoctrinares. Però t'he de dir que mai podré fer meves unes conviccions que varen fer possible que no t'adonassis que tu i jo érem, part damunt de tot, un cos vora un altre cos. Molt lluny d'assumir-les les maleiré sempre*") (160-61). The priest, the pedagogue needed a pupil, he did not need someone to love, and Alexis reminds him that true pedagogy is often accompanied by love, although Love, finally and in his case, was not exhausted by pedagogy.

"I was above all an ardent body which lengthened in you... The result both of my imagination and a desperate store of courage was that embrace which –I shall never forget it- was not returned by you. It was, for my part, a passionate ascent towards the total pleasure that you in such an unfair and brutal way ended. Always ready to escape, you did not want to hold in your arms, not even for a moment and in a fatherly way, the boy who, on that occasion, could have been in fact for you a little animal scared by the storm¹¹. You will never be able to compensate me for the way I was hurt by that attitude of yours, totally resigned".

"Part damunt de tot, jo era un cos ardent que es perllongava en tu... D'aquell imaginar meu i d'un desesperat arplegament de coratge, en fou resultat aquella abraçada que -no ho oblidaré mai- no correspongueres. Fou, de part meva, una frenètica ascensió cap al plaer total que tu, de manera injusta, brutalment estroncares. I és que, tan esquerp, no et volgueres dignar a acollir dins els teus braços, ni que fos de la manera més instantània i paternal, a qui, aquell instant, bé podia passar, als teus ulls, per no ser més que una

¹¹ The novelist seems to suggest that the adolescent may be asking more than that but, at any rate, he could be satisfied with this level of physical relationship. If not, it is quite obvious that the priest had not only to avoid it bearing in mind his ethical reasons but also because of the dissuading pressure of the penal code.

bestiola humana aterrada per la tempesta. Mai me podràs compensar pel mal que me feres amb aquella actitud teva, dimitidora de tot” (162-63).

How could anyone expect any compensation from someone who resigns? How could anyone share the world with someone who does not want to inhabit it?: “I desired a world where only you and I existed”. Such a way of life “was, above all, a silly thing” (“*Vaig desitjar un món on solament tu i jo existíssim. Viure així era, part damunt de tot, un despropòsit*”) (163-4). It was certainly an absurdity because the priest, following logically an idealistic tradition, is also “dead”, thus becoming –and I simply enumerate the adjectives that the novelist assigns to him-: “cold, a killer of words and lives, walled, a taster of intangible liquors, insensitive to any sort of stimulus, absent-minded, haughty, lost in the distance, an obstinate priest, a pedagogue, incapable of reciprocity, a killer of pleasures and an escapist”.

I would not like to end without making reference to the frequent affirmation according to which Miquel Àngel Riera’s *The Unattainable Gods* shows some similarities to Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*. I do not believe it. It is quite obvious that the Beauty which becomes spontaneously incarnate in an adolescent body is an important feature of the German writer’s novel, but are there further coincidences? Von Aschenbach lets himself be seduced and, although he has a foreboding of his imminent death, he accepts it. Therefore, it is not the German reference which can really help us to understand Riera’s priest in love with Alexis. It is worth noticing that Alexis is a Greek name and that the pedagogue, in spite of being only twenty five years old, might be Socrates. The great Athenian philosopher and citizen experienced that process which goes from the need of the senses to their rejection. Socrates did believe for a long time that adolescents’ beauty was a necessary step towards the ideal Beauty that he could hardly glimpse. But the later Socrates, after a long and conscious philosophical adventure, had already learnt, abstraction after abstraction, to see the ideal Beauty as the science of Good, which can certainly be taught to any pupil, whether beautiful or not –let us remember Diotima’s words: ‘This, when once beheld, will outshine your gold and your vesture, your beautiful boys and striplings, whose aspect now so astounds you and makes you and many another, at the sight and constant society of your darlings, ready to do without either food or drink if that were any way possible, and only gaze upon them and have their company’ (ὁ εἰάν ποτε ἴδῃς, οὐ κατὰ χρυσίον τε καὶ ἐσθῆτα καὶ τοὺς καλοὺς παιδᾶς τε καὶ νεανίσκους δόξει σοι εἶναι, οὐς νῦν ὁρῶν ἐκπέπληξαι καὶ ἔτοιμος εἶ καὶ σὺ καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί, ὁρῶντες τὰ παιδικὰ καὶ συνόντες ἀεὶ αὐτοῖς, εἴ πως οἷόν τ’ ἦν, μήτ’ ἐσθίειν μήτε πίνειν, ἀλλὰ θεᾶσθαι μόνον καὶ συνεῖναι - translated by W. R. M. Lamb. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983)¹². The first Socrates is a man in love, the second is a master and, given that it is a question of an irreversible process, all his pupils, even Plato of course, will be taught to leave aside more and more their senses in favour of their intellect or *noûs*, the only suitable instrument with which to see the intangible Reality. Alcibiades, the owner of a physical beauty that Socrates already holds in a very low esteem, still believes that he has a powerful weapon with which to seduce his master, offering his body in exchange for intellectual beauty, but the great Athenian master warns him: ‘You are trying to get genuine in return for reputed beauties’ (ἀλλ’ ἀντὶ δόξης ἀλήθειαν καλῶν κτᾶσθαι ἐπιχειρεῖς - translated by W. R. M. Lamb. Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983)¹³.

¹² *Smp.* 211d.

¹³ *Smp.* 218e.

All this was explained and systematized by Plato. Christianity discovered Plato and adopted him in order to explain its Truth, a religious one and also “scientific” –that is, theological- which would be taught by Christian theologians and priests all through the centuries. Those who receive that science leave their seminaries totally conscious of what is intangible. However, as fathers and leaders of their congregations, they meet other human beings who can seem the inCARNation of divine Grace. But God is sacred, He is Spirit, and in trying to love the Spirit the body is rather an obstacle to them. It does not matter that the senses rebel and make them “feel”. If the Truth resides in another realm, if men and women must not mistake the Light for a mere reflection, their duty is to avoid it as a mirage, to renounce the immediate reality and embrace, finally, that other superior and true Reality.