

Damn Platonism! Concrete Persons' Skin, Flesh and Bodies: Three Phases of a Won Battle in Miquel Àngel Riera's poetry¹

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To Anna Torres, Joan Sebastià Martí and Jaume Joan

It is quite sure that for most of you -who are now so kind to pay attention to my words- this is not the first time you have heard me speaking about Platonism. Taking into account, furthermore, that I have been teaching “Classical Tradition” at the University of Barcelona for several years, the reverse would have been certainly astonishing. As you know perfectly well, both what is known as the Platonic temper and the wide range of images traditionally associated with it have invaded in fact all the fields of Western Culture. This is not the best moment, I am afraid, having just started my contribution, to present some illustrative examples followed by suitable comments. For the time being, it would be enough for us to remember that, century after century, Platonism has often become in the end a *modus cogitandi, dicendi et uiuendi*, although there has been much more than a general and wholehearted loyalty –or *philía*- to the great philosopher of Athens. In other words, both Plato and that somehow indeterminate Plato's legacy called Platonism –*lato sensu*, then- have awakened outstanding phobias³ which in my opinion are worthy of both an accurate analysis and comment.

Indeed, I would like to invite you today to go for a walk –an interesting one, I hope- through the anti-Platonism that I have always detected –or I think I have- in M. A. Riera's poetry⁴. It has nothing to do, of course, with an indecorous caprice to reveal well-hidden secrets but with the desire to understand the poet –and perhaps ourselves- with regard to his radical rejection of any metaphysical creed which keeps human beings away from the real world and its creatures, a sort of metaphysical creed, on the other hand –we should not forget it-, often imposed all over the centuries with intellectual and even physical violence.

First of all, however, let me express two different and confronted personal feelings: a) the great pleasure on account of having read and analysed the poems of a Majorcan poet whom I do admire –what could be more suitable in a symposium which takes place in Palma de Mallorca?-, and b) another feeling both of shame and scruple due to the presumption that I have polluted to some degree the sacred nature of poetry which, as known, has always resisted to be examined from a “scientific” point of view. Besides, being used to etymologies, I bear in mind that “analysis” implies that what should preserve both its unity and mystery is after all segmented. So, I guess for my part that our method as philologists, oscillating in this case between Philology and Philosophy, can only aim at being forgiven for its many conscious sacrileges precisely because of the paradoxical fact that everything has been done as a result of an almost religious respect. Therefore and in order not to bother you any longer with all sort of fears and regrets, let me also tell you that I will follow the edition of *Tots els poemes –All the Poems-* (1957-1981),

¹ This article was published, in Catalan, as “Maleït Platonisme! Pell, carn i cos de persones concretes: etapes d'un combat lliurat –i guanyat- en l'obra poètica de Miquel Àngel Riera”. *Actas del XIIè Simposi de la Secció Catalana i de la Secció Balear de la SEEC. Proceedings of the XII Symposium of the Catalan and Balearic Sections of the SEEC*. Palma de Mallorca, 1996, pp. 531-547.

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³ Like in the case of Socrates and Euripides in F. Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*.

⁴ Due to the fact that my analysis is confined to the perspective of the Classical Tradition, for a general view of M. A. Riera's literary work see e.g.: Díaz de Castro, F. J., 1982, 87-107.

which was published by “Edicions 62”⁵, as well as *El pis de la badia –The Flat of the Bay*, which was edited by “Columna”⁶.

To start with, according to what the very M. A. Riera emphasizes in an introductory note⁷ to *Tots els poemes*: “having been published now all my poetry-books in a single volume, I shall not worry any longer about the fact that sometimes they were published in an order which was different from the creation-order and, what irritated me most, eliminating the chronological references that I did indicate under the titles”, I felt long ago that I was obliged not only to reveal his anti-Platonism but also to explain in this respect a whole process with clear oscillations. I continue to think that this would have been the best option, but, on the other hand, I found it too daring to propose a new way of reading M. A. Riera’s poems –which by no means intends either to be dogmatic or disregard all sort of shades- and, at the same time, to defend a chronology with well-limited periods or phases. This is a challenge that I postpone for a further contribution, so that now I beg you to accept my analysis concerning what, in spite of inevitable exceptions, I think is a constant feature of M. A. Riera’s poetry. In other words, I will deal a bit shamelessly with the “claims” of *Poemes a Nai –Poems to Nai-*, *Biografia –Biography-*, *La bellesa del home –The Beauty of Man/Woman-*, *Paràbola i clam de la cosa humana –Parable and Claim of Human Nature-*, *Llibre de les benaventurances –Book of the Beatitudes-*, *Poemes ocasionals –Occasional Poems-* and *El pis de la badia –The Flat of the Bay*. I will choose a discretionary departure, sometimes moving back and forth, being quite free of worries, having already confessed the rules of my game, and above all because I take your indulgence for granted. And one further remark: with the aim of justifying my reading, it seems highly reasonable to use some concrete paragraphs belonging to M. A. Riera’s novels, since I do believe that it is precisely in them where the reader can find significant instances of the above mentioned won battle, whose main strategy I am going to present now leaving aside further prolegomena⁸.

If we consult a dictionary of philosophy, for instance *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, in order to find both a concise and brief definition of Plato’s significance and the nature of his thought, we shall read: “Preeminent Greek philosopher whose chief contribution consists in his conception of the observable world as an imperfect image of a realm of unobservable and unchanging “Forms”, and his conception of the best life as one centered on the love of these divine objects”⁹. I certainly know that you do not need to be reminded of such a definition –I beg your pardon then for this apparent didactic impulse-, but I have thought that, regarding Plato and his thought, it would be very useful to be well-located with the help of only four lines. Indeed, the true Platonic person withdraws from a mirage-world, being firmly convinced that whatever is not capable of remaining unchanged -that is to say, whatever is subdued to constant transformations- only attains the rank of *gígnesthai* (becoming)¹⁰ but not the

⁵ Barcelona, 1985. From now onwards I shall use then the abbreviation *T. P.* This edition contains an accurate preface by Xavier Bru de Sala, which is very useful as an introduction to the literary work of the Majorcan writer. It is worth mentioning as well P. Rosselló’s *L’escriptura de l’home*, 1982, and the anthology *Panorama amb home*, Barcelona: Conselleria de Cultura, Educació i Esports del Govern Balear, 1990, where several articles on different aspects of M. A. Riera’s poetry and novels can be found.

⁶ 1992.

⁷ Pp. 31-32.

⁸ For an analysis of all M. A. Riera’s novels see e.g.: Llorca, V., 1995.

⁹ *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*. Robert Audi (ed.). Cambridge: C. U. P., 1995.

¹⁰ 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 διαίρετέον τάδε· τί τὸ ὄν ἀεί, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν ἀεί, ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε; τὸ

repose of the highest Perfection. Like Narcissus, Perfection obviously falls in love with herself to the extent of not being in need of becoming anything else, above all because, in the opposite case, a process of fateful degradation would start for it unavoidably. The Platonic man exiles himself from the physical world, which in the end is a vulgar copy of the original Model, lives with a permanent feeling of transience being a bird without wings¹¹. Believing that matter is a real burden which prevents him from flying, he lives in the cave surrounded by shadows and he would like to exchange definitively his worldly home for another one which will be celestial and bright¹².

Well then, Miquel Àngel Riera rebels against this Platonic attitude or temper by means of living joyfully together with all what surrounds him and observing what is observable –the definition of *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* should now be borne in mind:

“We exist side by side with things, / like amid the sea. / ... / The cloud, the big cup, / the telegram, the Modigliani’s little picture, / the chair, the key, the Japanese tree, / everything goes around us irresistibly. / ... / Things are that way. They take us where they want / and living amid them / I tell you that it is like living / amid the sea. / ... / ..., Nai. I love you / because the providence of things, / of things, / has wanted it so”.

“*Estam entre les coses, / com enmig de la mar. / ... / El núvol, el tassó, / el telegrama, el quadret de Modigliani, / la cadira, la clau, l’arbre japonès, / tot ens revolta irresistiblement. / ... / Les coses són així. Ens duen on volen / i viure enmig d’elles / us dic que és ben igual que viure / enmig de la mar. / ... / ..., Nai. T’estim / perquè ho ha dut així la providència / de les coses, / de les coses*”¹³.

At first sight, the above mentioned objects might seem certainly banal, but paradoxically they root human beings deeply in the world and, as a consequence, they take care –they are provident– of the people who are sometimes tempted to escape –*lato sensu*– or, even worse, have often been taught to do so. Or, if it can be said taking advantage of those clear messages sent by the skin of the person we love: “Nothing is possible beyond the gospels / that you write for me through your illuminated skin” (“*Res no és possible enllà dels evangelis / que m’escrius per la pell il.luminada*”)¹⁴.

Therefore, having acknowledged and even proclaimed his adherence to whatever is concrete, it is in the concrete and through the concrete that the poet wants to save himself. Most human

μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτα ὄν, τὸ δ’ αὖ δόξη 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).

¹¹ Obviously I am referring to the palinode of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, 244a-257b.

¹² Remember, for instance, *Republic* 517b: ‘This image 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 not miss my surmise, since that is what you desire to hear... is likely if in this point too the likeness of our image holds’ (Ταύτην τοίνυν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, τὴν εἰκόνα, ὦ φίλε Γλαύκων, προσαπτέον ἅπασαν τοῖς ἐμπροσθεν λεγομένοις, τὴν μὲν δι’ ὄψεως φαινομένην ἔδραν τῆ τοῦ δεσμοτηρίου οἰκῆσει ἀφομοιοῦντα, τὸ δὲ τοῦ πυρός ἐν αὐτῇ φῶς τῆ τοῦ ἡλίου δυνάμει· τὴν δὲ ἄνω ἀνάβασιν καὶ θέαν τῶν ἄνω τὴν εἰς τὸν νοητὸν τόπον τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνοδὸν τιθεὶς οὐχ ἁμαρτήσῃ τῆς γ’ ἐμῆς ἐλπίδος, ἐπειδὴ ταύτης ἐπιθυμεῖς ἀκούειν... εἰκὸς γάρ που οὕτως, εἴπερ αὖ κατὰ τὴν προειρημένην εἰκόνα τοῦτ’ ἔχει –translated by Paul Shorey, Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970).

¹³ *Poemes a Nai VIII. T. P.*, pp. 45-6.

¹⁴ *Poemes a Nai II. T. P.*, p. 38.

beings –or at least a great deal of them- set their hopes on a future salvation. Nevertheless, there are some people as well who, having fallen in love here and now with someone as concrete as they are, have decided not to live one minute longer than their personal god: “I want / a salvation / which be equivalent to your exact / duration. / The rest / -I beg your pardon / for saying it / so clear- / I do not care / either a jot ...” (“Vull / una salvació / de la teva durada / exacta. / El demés / -perdonau / que ho digui / tan clar- / no m’interessa / ni poc ...”)¹⁵.

Consequently, the truth is that, not from his exaltation but from his love deeply rooted in a woman, his only and reasonable hope is the one which ends precisely when their bodies touch each other, while the only inconvenience of human nature is the fact of having suffered in a previous time the painful distance between you and I: “Living in the world / meant walking barefoot / along the amusing human condition / of beginning to wait for you” (“Anar pel món / era anar descalç / per la distreta condició humana / de començar a esperar-te”)¹⁶.

It must be said that, up to this moment, M. A. Riera seems to opt for an energetical and peaceful revision of what he was taught. Notwithstanding, sooner or later, just the way he was taught shows its most harmful effects on him and then neither can he nor wants to refrain from saying loud and clear that he was robbed a good deal of his life and suffered like many others the intellectual perversion, which is also a genuine spiritual one, of those masters who hated life. As a reaction, the very human beings, concrete men and women whom the poet knows and loves, will be for him the best antidote against that cruel barbarity, that awful metaphysical attitude that despises all kinds of worldly realities. Human fellows are certainly erratic and doomed to die, but even so in his opinion it is worth living among them:

“Just as the panorama has a nailed agave, / I have the memory of those days / ... / when ... / ... I was bored, / ... / hearing those ones who talked to me / about the other world, ... about another life / ... / describing for me the asphyxiating confinement camp / -you may name it heaven, hell ... / where one can practise the rite of waiting- / to which they said that life brings us unavoidably / transforming human beings into a most peculiar foetus / thrown... at an implacable birth / which is next to death. / ... / I shall sit down joyfully at your table having planned to go home late / if ... you give me cards / to be played all over life, / the life we know, the life we enjoy or kills us / ... / Let us throw stones at the name and the ending / of those who kill life in order to save life: / ... / I know what I am saying ...; / we are talking about “now”, about “here”, / ... about this life, / that one slipping away ... / ... / as for me, ... / you must know / that it is by means of you that I want to save myself”.

“Talment com el panorama duu una donarda clavada, / Jo hi duc el record dels dies / ... / quan ... / ... m’avorria, / ... / sentir aquells que em parlaven / de l’altre món... d’una altra vida / ... / descrivint-me l’ofegant camp de confinament / -digau-li cel, digau-li infern ... / on practicar el ritu de l’espera- / al qual, sense remei, deien que aboca el fet de viure / convertint l’home en un raríssim fetus / estimbat... a un naixement implacable /

¹⁵ *Biografia X. T. P.*, p. 85.

¹⁶ *Biografia XII. T. P.*, p. 90. Or if we prefer these other verses from *El pis de la badia VIII*, p. 27: “There is a space between you and I, which separates us / and at the same time joins us: ... / We move inside with safety: ... / it helps that going forward of one body in search of the other / turning the distance into a transparency / and it can be crossed by the flight of the word / ... / It is the centre of the world and the point where we exchange / the personal limits that love shapes. / ... / It is the corridor that we pollute: let us adore it, / because in it the best of ourselves takes place” (“Existeix un espai, entre tots dos, que alhora / ens separa i uneix: ... / Ens movem per dins ell segurs: ... / afavoreix l’avenç d’un cos en cercar l’altre / convertint la distància en una transparència / i es deixa travessar pel vol de la paraula / ... / És el centre del món i el punt on feim bescanvi / dels confins personals que l’amor configura. / ... / Ell és el passadís que embrutam: adorem-lo, / perquè dins ell hi ocorre el millor de nosaltres”).

a trenc de mort. / ... / m'asseuré de bon gust a la vostra taula amb plans ben concrets d'arribar tard a ca meva / si... m'oferiu cartes / de per jugar a la vida, / la vida que sabem, la que fruïm o ens mata / ... / Apedregats siguin el nom i la desinència / dels qui maten la vida per salvar la vida: / ... / Sé el que dic ...; / parlem d'ara mateix, parlem d'aquí, / ... d'aquesta vida, / d'aquesta que s'esmuny ... / ... / Quant a mi, ... / cal que sapigueu / que és de vosaltres d'on vull salvar-me”¹⁷.

In other words: we should notice that the poet has insisted on proposing a new gospel and a new salvation from the first verses, a new salvation, though, which consists in the firm desire of stoning to death all sort of heavens and hells, while sanctifying on the contrary both the world and its creatures. This new preaching –since it has paradoxically a true religious nature- attempts to attract others’ attention, to scold them if necessary, in order to create new human beings who, changing the *Book of Genesis*, will be even proud of a life, which even if it is constantly slipping away it gives them the opportunity of growing old and dying¹⁸. In accordance with this new gospel, therefore, it would also be reasonable to adopt an Heraclitean way of life –if we opt, of course, for a cultural reference which may or may not be in the poet’s mind. A way of life in which men and women, in spite of being fugacious, will “be much used to” and will “fall in love with” the uninterrupted river of life¹⁹. At any rate, everything is much more preferable to that “biocide” of the physical world, a sad “biocide” indeed which is shameless and justified, in his opinion, by appealing both to a future and uncertain complete Happiness²⁰.

¹⁷ *La bellesa de l'home III, T. P.*, pp. 101-2.

¹⁸ It is worth paying attention, for instance, to the last reflections in *L'endemà de mai –The Day after Never-* regarding En Cosme when “for him there was already nothing else to lose. Nothing else could already happen to him and he could live without limits, like a wolf. Sitting at the porch for hours ... deep in his heart there was still a hope in the old age which, having invaded him completely, would empty him out and leave him without any kind of memories becoming free for ever more. He did not know when, but it had to happen. It would not be today nor would it be tomorrow. But it would finally come and he was already seeing it, just there, far away, moving towards him. It was something inevitable: a sort of liberation, but ... it would be conferred to him when he had not enough time in the end to enjoy the perfect solitude, the day after never” (“*ja no podia perdre res més: ja res no li podia ocórrer i podia viure a l'ample, talment un llop. Hores i hores, assegut al portal, ... Al fons de tot, hi restava una esperança que consistia en la vellesa que, entrant-li ja pertot, acabaria buidant-lo definitivament de records, alliberant-lo per sempre. No sabia quan, però hauria d'ocórrer. No seria avui, potser tampoc no seria demà. Però acabaria venint i ja la veia, dins la llunyania, anant cap a ell. Era cosa segura: un alliberament, però, que ... li seria atorgat quan ja no li quedàs prou temps per, a la fi, fruir de la solitud perfecta, l'endemà de mai*” -1991, p. 235-).

¹⁹ Remember the fragment A6: “Heraclitus says... that everything flows and nothing stays fixed, and, comparing everything existing with the stream of a river, says that you could not enter twice the same river”, or B36 DK: “It is death to souls to become water, and it is death to water to become earth. Conversely, water comes into existence out of earth, and souls out of water” λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει καὶ ποταμοῦ ῥοῆι ἀπεικάζων τὰ ὄντα λέγει ὡς δις ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης –the translation is mine following the edition by H. Diels- W.Kranz. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1, 6th edn. Berlin: Weidmann, 1951, rpr. Dublin / Zurich, 1966).

²⁰ Or in the very poet’s words: “I should give one of my teeth in order to bite more life, / I should give a hand in order to remain here much longer. / I should give half of my body in order to obtain a small plot of existence, / I should give anything in order not to know that I live. / ... / The life to come in another world, I should give it too / in order to increase the volume of the one I have here” (“*Donaria una dent per mossegar més vida, / donaria una mà per ser molt més aquí. / Donaria mig cos per un pam d'existència, / donaria el que fos per no saber que visc. / ... / La vida a l'altre món també la donaria / per augmentar el cabal de la que tenc aquí*” –*The Flat of the Bay XI*, p. 33), or “They talked to us about a heaven, that we do not know where it is / and we have found another one that we have had to create for us. / ... / it gravitates towards the earth, ... / ... towards man/woman’s house / ... / it makes us feel

I do doubt that someone would dare to affirm that such an angry rebelliousness has nothing to do with anti-Platonic attitudes by alleging that, in the previous context, the true poet's enemy is only God and Christianity. In this respect, it is worth remembering that Christianity in whose bosom most Western people have been educated is really a Classical one –Greek and Roman. Furthermore, we know perfectly well that Plato's legacy –without undervaluing of course Aristotle, Plotinus, the Stoics, etcetera- is highly responsible for many effective Christian images about God or, in other words, it is also responsible to a great extent for the philosophical structure –a Greek one- of the Christian Theology. Indeed, could you ever imagine that a Majorcan poet -who was born in 1930- did not hear hundreds of sermons and preachings containing all sort of references to heaven and hell, to up and down, to ascending and falling, to the lightness of a good soul and the heaviness of a wicked one, to the light and the dark – *tenebrae*-; to sum up, to a wide range of Platonic images adopted by Christianity which would be difficult to enumerate?²¹ I can not imagine it; on the contrary, I do believe that, with regard to what we have just read or what we are going to read from now onwards, it would be even absurd not to want to identify a rich Classical legacy which was consciously incorporated by the thinkers of the new religion. And one further remark: I take the chance now to point out that it is not my intention to annoy anyone with my comments of the poet's verses and, at the same time, we shall see afterwards that the very M. A. Riera, in spite of proclaiming poetically his irritation, refrains from undesirable condemnns.

Anyway, I ought to respect the most suitable *tempus* concerning this academic journey through M. A. Riera's poetry. We had already analysed the poet's search of a new gospel; it is time now –as suggested before- to find out the way to a new Genesis:

“The beauty of man²² is that he creates beauty / ... / ... beauty is he / who pulls it out from nothing and makes it everlasting / and according to... an image, his, / which is always adorable / ... / The beauty of the world is the one man puts in it: / impure ... / ... / ... the man / creator of the world, / a sad animal / concerning whom, / when he is really a man, / I am interested / even / in his rottenness”.

“*La bellesa de l'home és que crea bellesa / ... / ... la bellesa és ell / que la treu del no-res i la fa eterna / i a mesura ... d'una imatge, la seva, / que sempre és adorable / ... / La bellesa del món és la que hi posa l'home: / impura ... / ... / ... l'home / creador del món, / trist animal trist / del qual, / quan ho és, / m'interessa / fins i tot / la podridura*”²³.

It must be acknowledged that it is not easy to find the suitable words: “humanization” of God's omnipotence; deification of human beings, the true creators *ex nihilo* according to their image²⁴. And let us pay attention, besides, to the fact that the re-establishment of a Protagorean

completely alive, just now and here” (“*Ens parlaven d'un cel que no sabem on para / i n'hem trobat un altre que ens hem hagut de fer. / ... / gravita molt en terra, ... / ... ca l'home / ... / ens fa sentir molt vius, ara mateix i aquí*” –*op. cit.* XXX, p. 77-)

²¹ It is obviously a rhetorical question, since, if we want to confirm this thesis, we should only take into account the long description in *The Unattainable Gods* of the young priest's fight, both against himself and his conscience, or those two excellent pages on which one can read another priest's reaction to Gabriela's asking for a funeral for his husband's soul (*Panorama amb dona*, 1983, pp. 50-), or even that other reaction of Gabriela's uncle, a priest too, when she was twelve years old and told him, without knowing the meaning of the word, that what she likes most is fucking (p. 69). At any rate, see e. g.: P. Rosselló Bover, “La religió i l'obra de Miquel Àngel Riera”, in *Panorama amb home*, *op. cit.*, pp. 33-48, where there are, by the way, several references to the fact of falling down and to the Light.

²² In fact, we must read man/woman all the time and in all the poems.

²³ *La bellesa de l'home I. T. P.*, pp. 97-8.

²⁴ Cf. with: “I adore the human beings on account of the fact that they are capable to create, on account of the fact that from this side they are little gods and I feel the necessity of sharing this creative fact and this

man/woman, who is the measure of everything²⁵, disregards both a perfect God and ideal forms in order to welcome the impure beauty which finally becomes an essential part of a total coherence. The ideal peak, either heaven or the Beauty-Good, has been consciously eliminated from a traditional ethical map, Classical and essentially Platonic, where the vertical lines seem now abusive and also seem to disturb a renewed ethical geometry.

M. A. Riera -he confesses it openly-, prefers “Men who are brothers / ... / who are the god in whom I believe” (“*Homes germans / ... / que sou el déu en qui crec*”²⁶), prefers to write “the man’s gospel according to man” (“*l’evangeli de l’home segons l’home*”²⁷), though he knows that, if he wants to succeed, he should overcome a philosophical vice –as ancient as Greek- which is called abstraction:

“It is necessary / to speak searching concretion, / moving away from abstractions ... / ... / humanity. / To say that we love it and, besides, to claim it / it is a terrible style / not to settling up with man / ... / I claim / all the needs / of our capacity for love / for the man himself, / the lonely man / who is old enough to need us / ... / A man we can count / finally rescued / from his job of being nothing / amid the large human sea / we have him / in front of us / and we can / copulate with him, / bleed him, / serve him, / touch him, / prostitute him, / ... / he offers us the only handle / with which one can catch / seriously / those abstractions / amid which / we have him / -you have him- / lost. / ... / If we give him / our hand / just once, / if we give it, I say, / to him who is man himself / unitary and concrete, / only / to help him / to walk over a puddle, / all over our arm / we shall feel / that the heat goes up ... / ... / Then / we shall be allowed / ... / to speak about humanity / without offending”.

“*És necessari / parlar en concret, / tot allunyant-nos / d’abstraccions ... / ... / humanitat. / Parlar d’estimar-la i, al damunt, fer-ne bandera / és un terrible estil / de no passar comptes amb l’home / ... / Jo reclam / totes les urgències / de la nostra capacitat d’amor / cap a l’home en pèl, / l’home solitari / que té l’edat concreta de necessitar-nos / ... / L’home numerable / finalment rescatat / de l’ofici de no ser res / enmig de la mar gran humana / el tenim / al davant / i el podem / copular, / sagnar, / servir, / palpar, / prostituir, / ... / ens ofereix l’ansa única / per on agafar / seriosament / les abstraccions aquelles / enmig de les quals / el tenim / -el teniu- / aperduat. / ... / Si li donam la mà / just que sigui una vegada, / si li donam, dic, / al que en pèl és home / unitari i concret, / sols que sigui / per aidar-lo / a passar un bassiot, / pel braó / sentirem / que ens puja*

marvellous ceremony of creating *ex nihilo*” (“*Jo adoro el ser humà en tant que és capaç de crear, en tant que des d’aquesta dimensió és un petit déu i em sento desitjós de ser partícip d’aquest fet creatiu i d’aquest ceremonial meravellós de crear del no-res*”) in “Conversant amb Miquel Àngel Riera”. M. Forasté i Giravent, “L’escriptura com a empresa total”, *Panorama amb home*, p. 71.

²⁵ Cf., for instance, Sextus Empiricus. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 1, 216-219: “Protagoras also holds that ‘Man is the measure of all things’, of existing things that they exist, and of non-existing things that they exist not; and by ‘measure’ he means the criterion, and by ‘things’ the objects, so that he is virtually asserting that ‘Man is the criterion of all objects’, of those which exist that they exist, and of those which exist not that they exist not. And consequently he posits only what appears to each individual, and thus introduces relativity” (Καὶ ὁ Πρωταγόρας δὲ βούλεται πάντων χρημάτων εἶναι μέτρον τὸν ἄνθρωπον, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν, ‘μέτρον’ μὲν λέγων τὸ κριτήριον, ‘χρημάτων’ δὲ τῶν πραγμάτων, ὡς δυνάμει φάσκειν πάντων πραγμάτων κριτήριον εἶναι τὸν ἄνθρωπον, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ οὐκ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν. καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τίθησι τὰ φαινόμενα ἐκάστω μόνα, καὶ οὕτως εἰσάγει τὸ πρὸς τι -translated by R. G. Bury, *Loeb Classical Library*. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967).

²⁶ *La bellesa de l’home IV. T. P.*, p. 104.

²⁷ *La bellesa de l’home VI. T. P.*, p. 108.

l'escalfor / ... / Just llavors / ens serà permès, / ... / parlar de la humanitat / sense ofendre"²⁸.

Here is in my opinion a personal *ars amandi*, according to which a true natural way of living or simply a bit of tenderness –if it has not been abolished by all sort of cultural constraints- are enough to create human happiness. Anyway, a new creed must be adopted, whose followers must deny energetically that people are worth of love only if they can find an excellent Archetype under which they can protect themselves in search of their dignity²⁹.

Consequently, this might be the right moment for a little parenthesis –an advantageous one, I hope- in order to attempt to grasp the deep meaning of the last novel of the Majorcan writer: *Els déus inaccessibles*³⁰ –*The Unattainable Gods*. Obviously, I am not going to be so naïve as to assert that abstraction is exclusively a Platonic intellectual habit. It is certainly not. However, it should be recognized on the other hand that the Platonic process of soul-ascending towards the Beauty-Good is now highly significant regarding what I would like to explain. What is the main theme of *The Unattainable Gods*? A real Platonic one, indeed, since it deals with the personal and religious conflict that a priest in a little town of Majorca must solve on account of having fallen in love with a young parishioner, Alexis, whom he considers both the true and spontaneous incarnation of the Absolute Grace.

Needless to say, this is a delicate theme, although M. A. Riera undertakes it with intelligence, tact and above all intellectual courage. Alexis' final confession reveals that he always wanted the priest to notice that they both also had a bodily side and that he needed to receive from his educator and father confessor a bit of bodily tenderness –an innocent one. Notwithstanding, the pure friendship with which the priest treats him –since he has had to fight, and painfully, against flesh-temptation- provokes both Alexis' frustration and resentment. As it can be perfectly imagined, the priest is not a character like those in Plato's *Symposium* or *Phaedrus* but the truth is that he behaves as such. Let us remember for instance, concerning the *Symposium*, that the lover –*erastés*- must move from the beauty of a personal body towards the beauty of many other bodies in order to discover by means of this simple abstraction process its common origin. Afterwards, he must move –ascend- from the bodily beauty towards the beauty of the behaviour-rules and laws in order to arrive in the end at the summit, at the everlasting and unchanging Beauty-Good. Or, if we prefer to choose a significant paragraph of Plato's *Phaedrus*: '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 ἀνθρώπων συνίεναι κατ' εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἓν λογισμῶ συναϊρούμενον -translated by Fowler, H. N. *Loeb Classical Library*. London: William Heinemann Ltd., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971)³¹. To sum up: I would like to emphasize that,

²⁸ *La bellesa de l'home VII. T. P.*, pp. 109-12.

²⁹ It is worth remembering now what the priest says in *The Unattainable Gods*, p. 26: "I find it necessary much more than ever before, now when my life gets scarce so much, that He (God) be not a pure abstract concept and that the logical way to have some option to find him be, precisely, our senses" ("*Més que mai em resulta necessari, ara que la vida ja curteja tant, que Ell (Déu) no sigui un pur concepte abstracte i que el camí natural per optar a trobar-lo siguin, precisament, els sentits*").

³⁰ As you can read *in extenso* in my article: "Els déus inaccessibles de Miquel Àngel Riera, o el perquè l'Occident Platònic no pot restaurar el paganisme" ("M. A. Riera's *The Unattainable Gods* or why Platonic Western can not re-establish Paganism"), *AFB XVI*, 1993, pp. 45-62.

³¹ 249b-c, *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

when the priest falls in love with Alexis, he does follow, step by step, an authentic Platonic process. First of all, he sees a body: “And, suddenly, I see that young body entering the room” (“*I veig com de sobte, entra dins la sala aquell cos jovenívol*”³²). Secondly, he considers him as the incarnation of Grace: “Grace transformed into a human being, Domitius Mars’ illuminated voice appearing in a body” (“*La gràcia feta persona, la veu il·luminada de Domici Mars feta present en un cos*”³³). Thirdly, he moves towards Transcendence: “When I saw him moving forward from the nakedness of his simple gesture and my impenitent tendency to create 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 meva impenitent tendència a fer tot de transposicions literàries, m’investí de sobte la plena consciència d’estar succeïnt, al món, quelcom transcendent*”³⁴). And finally, he recognizes that through Alexis he is able to discover the eternal Grace: “Perhaps he came from the space and time-distance in search... of the one who was capable of grasping a sort of grace which was

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 ὄψων σώματι τῷ ἐπὶ ἐτέρῳ σώματι ἀδελφόν ἐστι, καὶ εἰ δεῖ διώκειν τὸ ἐπ’ εἶδει καλόν, πολλὴ ἄνοια μὴ οὐχ ἔν τε καὶ ταῦτόν 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 ὦν τὴν ψυχὴν τις κἂν σμικρὸν ἄνθος ἔχη, ἐξαρκεῖν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐρᾶν καὶ κήδεσθαι καὶ τίκτειν λόγους τοιούτους καὶ ζητεῖν, οἵτινες ποιήσουσι βελτίους τοὺς νέους, ἵνα ἀναγκασθῇ αὐθραῖσθαι τὸ ἐν τοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι καὶ τοῖς νόμοις καλὸν καὶ τοῦτ’ ἰδεῖν ὅτι πᾶν αὐτὸ αὐτῷ συγγενές ἐστιν, ἵνα τὸ περὶ τὸ σῶμα καλὸν σμικρὸν 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 ἂν... κατὶδῇ 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 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’ (ταῦτό δὴ τὸ ἐρωτικὸν μηχανήμα καὶ σόφισμα περὶ τὰς εὐφύεις καὶ φιλοκάλους ψυχὰς· ἀνάκλασιν ποιεῖ τῆς μνήμης ἀπὸ τῶν ἐνταῦθα φαινομένων καὶ προσαγορευομένων καλῶν εἰς τὸ θεῖον καὶ ἐράσμιον 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).

³² *Els déus inaccessibles*, p. 40.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

about to blossom in him” (“*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*”³⁵).

As a result, the *denouement* of such experiences in which abstraction has played such a crucial role is highly predictable. The priest, by reading the Latin poets, feels intensely the mystery of pagan gods who, as known, were generous to the vindications of human senses. However, he cannot worship them because of –among other reasons like the penal code- his condition, so that, if at my turn I succeed in grasping the novelist’s intentions, there would be two kinds of unattainable gods: a) those like Alexis, who the priest considers divine incarnations in our physical world, and b) those other ones like the priest who, having fallen in love with the intangible Beauty, with a God who is too Platonic or Plotinic, and having also surrendered to an absolute Purity which in the end becomes asphyxiating, become themselves both unattainable and logical murderers of the human side of Eros³⁶.

From the point of view of the poet, the priest and Alexis are the result of ancient and contemporaneous interdictions, sad result in fact of powerful people who plan others’ life with a clear –and wicked- desire of castrating their wills. Both the priest and Alexis are doomed not to be themselves: the former cannot use his grown body in order to offer his bodily protection and tenderness to the boy, the latter cannot be sheltered in the priest’s arms although sometimes he would like to –for instance on the occasion of a lightning struck. Against all this, M. A. Riera’s poems know very well how to react, since he was as many others the victim of dictatorial principles which were meant to asphyxiate the “enemies”; in other words: M. A. Riera knows how to design the apologia for having preserved our self-identity:

“I shall not be capable of serving you if you do not serve me / if you do not let me be the one who I am ... / ... / you, little street-gods who attempt to be human beings, / ... / let me be in you performance, / the little bread-crumbs which does not disturb the anecdote / ... / abandon ... / the ancient human desire of handling others / a desire which, regarding me, / impels you to design the features / of what you want to be my love, / to sign, ... / the coordinates of my own balance, / or to throw me at the public wall / which has been urinated for a long time by the scaffold-forces / ... / Let me be mistaken alone ... / and choose accurately the perfect place / ... / Let me decide ... / as a human beast / ... / by means of which measure of human creature / I want to bleed ...”.

“*No us podré servir si no em serviu / deixant-me ser qui som ... / ... / Vosaltres, petits déus de carrer tirant a home, / ... / deixau-me ser ..., dins els vostre espectacle, / la molleta rompuda que no trastoca l’anècdota / ... / apagau ... / el vell afany humà*

³⁵ P. 42.

³⁶ See once again my article p. 47. Needless to say, this is the opposite situation from the one in which the bodies, far from the risks of becoming a concept, meet each other and interchange their chemistry: “Amid of ... existing so much, / you have been defined by the body you preferred to be / much more than remaining under the form of concept, / and when he has been next to me I have seen / the chemistry of my body changing” (“*Enmig..., de tant com existies, / t’ha definit el cos que preferies ser / molt més que mantenir-te en forma de concepte, / i amb ell arran de mi he vist que canviava / la química del meu*” –*El pis de la badia I*, p. 13-). And bearing in mind as well the opposition reality / abstraction and concept, it is also worth remembering that Gabriela (Laro’s wife and Cosme’s lover) vindicates the nobleness of “action” and condemns the wickedness of “thought”: “What suited her... were palpable things, those that are made with the help of our bodies... digging, running, looking at, washing, talking, cooking... Thinking was considered by her too soft an action, that he did not even know whether it was rather a sin or not... She saw it clear thinking of her own behaviour: good deeds one with the help of our body... On the contrary, evil is usually shaped in thought” (“*A ella, lo que li anava bé... eren les coses palpables, les que es fan amb el cos... cavar, córrer, mirar, fer la xerrameca, cuinar... Pensar ho considerava una cosa massa blana, que no sabia i tot si era un poc pecat... Ella, pel al seu ús, ho tenia ben clar: el bé, ... es fa amb el cos... En canvi, la dolentia sol ésser cosa que es congria en el pensament*” –*op. cit.*, 16-).

d'agafar el mànec dels altres / que, quan es gira a mi, / us empeny a dissenyar-me la fesomia / dels que voleu que siguin els meus amors, / a signar, ... / les coordenades del meu equilibri, / ... / o estellar-me de cara contra la paret pública / llargament orinada per les forces vives patibulàries / Deixau-me que m'equivoqui jo tot sol ... / i que acuradament esculli jo el lloc perfecte / ... / Deixau-me decidir per quin pelatge / de bèstia humana / ... / i per quin almud de persona / em vull sagnar...³⁷.

Or one further concision:

“... you, / illustrious men, perhaps gods, who take care / of governing the state, / ... / ... here is the unmanageable, / the ungrateful who touches his body and distinguishes himself as a person / and dares to tell you, illustrious men, / that you also must let him be just the way he is. And I keep on speaking ... to make you notice / the great orgasm which shakes me completely / from the action of laying / the foundation stone of myself”.

“... vosaltres, / prohoms, potser déus, que teniu a cura / el regiment de la cosa pública, / ... / ... heus aquí el rebel, / l'ingrat que es palpa el cos i es destria persona / i us gosa dir, prohoms, / que el deixeu ser com és / també vosaltres³⁸. I us seguec parlant ... per assabentar-vos / del gran orgasme que m'ho commou tot / des de l'acte de posar / la primera pedra de ser jo mateix³⁹”.

Or opting finally for making clear what has been suggested before:

“I want to present the instance of those who forbid. / I need to write the name of all those / who have attained enough power to say no / with the infinite arrogance which is peculiar to the one who is / sure of his (her) gesture as well as the exact date / of the birth of Truth: his (her) own truth. / Look at their face: They have / it marked by a terrible fatigue / since they put day after day their hand on our / unworthy backs / in search of... / a rebellious soul-disease / which must... be treated / with... a generous dose / of ... countless interdictions / ... / They do not sleep: they watch over us, / they are made of a huge motherly wrapping / ... / And they straighten us out on time, / with the elegant style which is peculiar to the one who gives orders and keeps silence / the hunchbacked forms of our character / ... / up to new lights which in fact are shadows. / Thanks to their grace, / we do not need to make the effort of / wanting, / thinking, / feeling: they do all this instead of us”.

“Vull escriure l'exemple dels prohibidors. / Necessit deixar escrit el nom de tots aquells / que han assolit la jerarquia de poder dir no / amb l'arrogància infinita del que està ... / tan segur del seu gest com de la data exacta / de naixença de la Veritat: la pròpia. / Contemplau-los la cara: tenen / la fesomia cruiada pel cansament terrible / de tant passar-nos la poderosa mà pel nostre llom in- / digne / tot cercant ... / una rebel afecció de l'ànim / que cal ... socórrer / amb el tractament d'una generosa dosi / d' ... interdiccions ... / ... / No dormen: ells vigilen, / fets una mena d'immens embolcall de mare / ... / I ens adrecen a temps, / amb l'elegant estil del que mana i calla, / les geperudeses del nostre tarannà / ... / cap a noves llums que són talment ombres. / Per la seva gràcia, / no cal fer l'esforç / de voler, / ni de pensar, / ni de sentir: ells ho fan en lloc nostre⁴⁰”.

³⁷ *Paràbola i clam de la cosa humana I. T. P.*, pp. 125-6.

³⁸ *Paràbola i clam de la cosa humana II. T. P.*, p. 128.

³⁹ *Paràbola i clam de la cosa humana IV. T. P.*, p. 133.

⁴⁰ *Paràbola i clam de la cosa humana VI. T. P.*, pp. 137-8.

These are all verses of different poems though with similar vindications. They all belong to *Parábola i clam de la cosa humana –Parable and Claim of Human Nature-*, published for the first time in Palma of Majorca in 1974. I think now that, in spite of the long time during which they probably were written, there have been in this country, both for M. A. Riera and for many others, terrible periods during which the interdictions –all sort of them- were certainly implacable. It does not matter; poems, like myths, often become that “non-temporary” realm where universal human fears and anxieties, ancient but also contemporaneous, find their place. The importance lays in the very claim⁴¹ and, as a consequence, probably on this occasion I should refrain from looking for its links regarding the anti-Platonism which is guiding my analysis of M. A. Riera’s poems. In fact, everything impels me to do it, since the proposal of a new gospel, a new salvation and a new Bible –later on I shall analyse M. A. Riera’s Book of Beatitudes- would prove that the previously mentioned arrogant owners of Truth are Christian. But even now I would like to make the remark that we are dealing with professional straighteners towards new lights which are in fact shadows, so that it would be naïve not to realize again in this case the probable influence of images –the well-known Platonic image of the cave- which have shown for centuries their great capacity of adaptation to different objectives. On the other hand, the last verses deal with those who design others’ life and take care of others’ balance, with executioners and scaffolds, etcetera. All this could take us back as well to a key cultural reference of which M. A. Riera, of course, might have never thought, although it could be now quite profitable.

Indeed, Plato lived enough time to know Athens in its best and worst historical periods; he knew both the fruits of an authentic community-sense and the consequences of the nastiest selfishness. As a result of this disappointing panorama whose most representative image is undoubtedly the Peloponesian War, his efforts to find out an unalterable base upon which a solid “house” could be built are humanly and intellectually understandable. Plato of Athens finally glimpsed the Truth and thought that his duty was to adapt it to common life turning it into a written text, a republic or politeía where everyone’s place and duties would be specified. Plato of Athens did not understand, however, that citizens’ ethical recovery never arrives if their potentialities are annihilated or, in other words, if they are excluded from the design and debate about the best laws. The intellectually mature persons, the true citizens, are not those who limit themselves to obey excellent orders but those who are committed above all to preserve their right both “to agree” and “to disagree with” others, to help them –why not, if necessary?- from their own singularity (I am sure it is not necessary to remind the Spanish readers now of the vices of the National-Catholicism, in its determination to promulgate all sort of truths –its own truths of course- and unalterable laws). From both The Old and New Testament derive many interdictions that the citizen M. A. Riera, or X or T, can blame. Notwithstanding, we should be conscious as well that the “vice” consisting in trying to regulate other people’s lives also belonged to Plato and other illustrious Classical thinkers.

At any rate, coming from his negative experiences, the poet’s adherence to a new pedagogical system is not surprising. Now, the new method, the only effective one to awaken human intelligence would be to get children used to bad manners:

“We ought to teach our sons and daughters / and we ought to practise ourselves once again / the ancient arts of cursing, / returning back to the word, which is now softened, the

⁴¹ These are for instance the adolescent’s words in *Morir quan cal* regarding his father’s advises: “Do not tell me that spending a whole summer far from the village is very good for students, while our brain rests and our blood is being aired: my brain is not tired... Above all: let me do what I want, since I have become a man concerning everything” (“*A mi que no em venguin a dir que als estudiants ens és molt bo un estiu a fora vila, fent descansar el cap i orejant la sang: no tenc el cap cansat ... Sobretot: que em deixin fer a mi, que per qualque cosa ja m’he fet un home*” –p. 10-).

ancient usage of eviscerating rottennesses ... / ... / since our tongue, imprisoned in our mouth, / is no longer a most penetrating hawk's eye / nor a phallic knife / unfolding desperately the last brightnesses, and now our mouth hangs down / ... / dripping ..., / and knows no other job but / a slug's job / which leaves our naked feet full of slimes”.

“Caldria ensenyar als nostres fills / i tornar a practicar nosaltres / les antigues arts de la maledicció, / reintegrant a la paraula, ara reblanida, el vell ús d'esventrar podridures ... / ... / perquè la llengua, acotada dins la boca, / ha deixat de ser un afinadíssim falcó / i un fàl·lic ganivet / fendidor amb desesper de claredats darreres, i ara ens cau la boca / ... / regalimada ..., / i no sap més ofici / que el mateix dels llimacs / que ens deixen la nuesa del peu tota florida de baves”⁴².

Therefore, it is quite evident that, when I chose a title for my contribution, I did not attempt to increase the audience's expectations with an effective adjective but, on the contrary, to be fair with regard to M. A. Riera's temper, who, on many occasions of poetical fury, appears ready to break all bounds and to stone to death freedom-heretics.

Just now I do realize that the parenthesis I opened may have been too long, so that it may be difficult at its turn to remember that the enumeration of the excellences of the real –not ideal-world, the fight against abstraction and the preservation of the right to disagree only aimed at vindicating the highest right, that of loving concrete persons here and, after having abandoned for ever more the unhealthy exhortation –many times a cultural one- to assassinate life: “There is nothing in the world / that justifies to keep on / living one minute longer, / that frees ourselves from the strict duty of suicide, / but love” (*“No hi ha cosa al món / que justifiqui el seguir / vivint ni un minut més, / que ens alliberi de l'estricta deure de suïcidar-nos, / si no és l'amor”⁴³*). And taking into account that, to some degree, the forbidden love of the priest and Alexis in *The Unattainable Gods* has already been analysed, I hasten to add M. A. Riera's apologia for all of them:

“I want to say too / that you must not take instances of loving affairs / to Pharisees' home so that they both analyse and diagnose them / distinguishing... their healthy molecules / from those other ones –they will say it to you solemnly-/ that must soon be eviscerated... / since they do not correspond to the idea of what is rightful / ... / do not trust and stone to death the one / who classifies love / by blessing some kinds, / and cursing the rest; / do burn in the great bonfire of your town / all the texts which deal with damned types of love / ... / Avoid the one who goes backwards / in search of enough perspective to judge loves”.

“També us vull dir / que no apropieu mai mostres de matèria amorosa / a la casa dels fariseus perquè analitzin i en facin el diagnòstic / de distingir ... les molècules sanes / d'aquelles altres que, us diran solemnes, / cal esventrar aviat ... / per no obeir els esquemes de les legitimitats / ... / desconfiau i apedregau aquell / que classifica els amors / i reparteix benediccions a uns, / malediccions als altres; / cremau a la gran foguera del municipi / tot els papers que parlin d'amors maleïts / ... / Fugiu d'aquell que dóna passa enrera / cercant perspectiva per judicar amors”⁴⁴.

These are certainly courageous words -although paradoxically they could be used to confirm the sense of guilt of those who believe that they must defend themselves. Hence the only option are the new beatitudes, a lucid transmutation of values or, saying it in a Platonic style, a conscious redemption of the shadows and the cave to the extent of turning upside down the

⁴² *Paràbola i clam de la cosa humana VII. T. P.*, p. 139.

⁴³ *Paràbola i clam de la cosa humana VIII. T. P.*, p. 140-1.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

geography of the Paradise to come: “Blessed are those who have an impossible love / or of the noble lineage that others curse. / They are dark, they fly at a low level without raising their eyes / and use just the shadowy side of the world” (“*Benaventurats aquells que tenen els amors impossibles / o de la noble estirp que els altres maleeixen. / Són foscos, volen baixos sense alçar la vista / i n’empren just, del món, la banda de les ombres*”⁴⁵).

Darkness, incapability of raising the eyes, shadows, do we not detect the poet’s urge to rescue men and women from that ascending-process both from the palinode of Plato’s *Phaedrus* and the Platonic image of the cave of his *Republic*? Is he not vindicating the ethical value of falling down?:

“Blessed is he who / always stumbles against the same stone / ... / ... The facts show him / that due to his existence / he will keep on falling flat on his face / every time incorporating new knowledge / on the technique of stumbling. / He does not change his way, but goes on and thinks: / ‘I have fallen down because I was here. I am still here. / The only one who falls down is he who has the ability to do so’ ”.

“*Benaventurat aquell / que sempre ensopega amb la mateixa pedra / ... / ... Els fets li ensenyen / que a força, ell, d’existir / seguirà donant-s’hi la morrada més bèstia / a cada vegada incorporant noves savieses / entorn a la tècnica de la travalada. / No desvia el camí, ans prossegueix i pensa: / ‘He caigut perquè hi era. Encara hi som. / Just cau aquell que està dotat per fer-ho’* ”⁴⁶.

Whatever the case is, the sort of man the poet defends refuses to give way to the temptation of renouncing to live; he simply wants to be here in order to search Beauty “using the world as a crowbar” (“*fent palanca pel món*”). And he obviously knows how to enjoy the shadows and remain here, in the realm of things, since they are an authentic springboard –could you imagine a better corrective of the Platonic legacy?

“Blessed is he who one day devoted his life / to the vital commitment of searching Beauty / using the world as a crowbar, following the trail of its mystery, / with the help of forms, sounds, words, lines, gestures, / and, one day, already without nails, because of having scratched deeply for a long time, faces desperately up to the shadows-harvest, / the only gain he has obtained ... / And, suddenly, having reached the peak of his disappointment, notices that Beauty is there, just by virtue of his searching for it”.

“*Benaventurat aquell que un jorn lliurà la vida / al compromís vitenc de cercar la bellesa / fent palanca pel món, reseguint-li el misteri, / amb formes, sons, paraules, línies, gestos, / i, un jorn, ja sense unghes, de tant gratar fondo, s’acara amb desesper a la collita d’ombres, / únic guany obtingut ... / I, cop en sec, ja al cim del descencant, s’adona que la bellesa és allí, just de cercar-la*”⁴⁷.

Therefore, leaving aside the metaphysical thinkers all over the History, it is time now for the poet to start a new and marvellous journey through the world of matter and following three essential phases: human skin, flesh and body in order to reach the boundaries of the true persons in a real world, the realm of that “you” whom we all look for and without whom suicide is –M. A. Riera *dicit*- completely justified. We have seen before that Alexis wanted the priest to be less devoted to abstraction; the very same poet has mistrusted those who go back both to examine and judge others’ loves. Consequently, let us come close to other people audaciously and, strictly speaking, their skin appears immediately: “The perfect poem is / to touch human skin” (“*El*

⁴⁵ *Llibre de les benaventurances* 10. T. P., p. 166.

⁴⁶ *Llibre de les benaventurances* 8. T. P., p. 164.

⁴⁷ *Llibre de les benaventurances* 2. T. P., p. 158.

*poema perfecte / és tocar pell humana*⁴⁸). “As far as man goes, / we do not know much more / than what tattoos say / ... published on the skin, the most delicate membrane / by means of which / he lets us know his sumptuous existence” (“*I és que de l’home, / no en sabem gaire més / del que diuen els tatuatges / ... publicats a la pell, aquest delicadíssim tel / per mitjà del qual / ens dóna a conèixer la seva sumptuosa existència*”⁴⁹).

From this addiction then to the touching of elastic and smooth skins which let him know the palpitation of human life, M. A. Riera takes up the challenge of “paganizing” Saint John’s gospel in order to correct the enormous mistake of having located the *lógos* in the beginning while it is quite evident, in his opinion, that human hands are far more useful to attain the truth of the world:

“Contemplating the world / and having the feeling of understanding it / ... / Clairvoyance that I obtain / when I follow with my fingers the trail of your skin / ... / The world is clearer / from the borders of your waist. / ... / The truth goes around me, / completely full of you / to define the world for ever more. / True satisfaction that overwhelms me / only from your skin... / Not words, but hands are the Word”.

“*Contemplant el món / i tenir la sensació d’entendre’l / ... / Clarividència suprema que em dóna / seguir amb els dits el rastre de la teva pell / ... / El món és molt més clar / des de les marjades de la teva cintura. / ... / La veritat em ronda, / rebotada de tu / cap a definir el món d’una vegada. / Vera definició que m’avassalla / sols des de la teva pell... / No les paraules, les mans són la Paraula*”⁵⁰.

We could all presume that the “paganizing” process has attained now the highest level, but there is a word, a concept, which, due to cultural reasons, resists intimating with the world of *aísthesis* (sensation, the realm of senses); it is obviously God –in its purest sense, of course- and on this occasion the poet cannot refuse to face it:

“Blessed are those who become upset by the unavoidable necessity of touching. / Their contour is all skin. They do not look at: they touch. / The beauty of the world is contact. / They rub themselves against everything. There is nothing else but what they copulate at least with their glance. / God is flesh. They are contaminated by the world. / ... / Blessed are those who are impure, because they are men. I do not understand... / the century-old anathema against flesh, / the strange paradox of the so-called forbidden pleasures, / the hierarchical catalogue of the flesh vilenesses, / its being cursed inch by inch, / ... Since it turns out that I love you beginning through / your flesh, / ... / ... all the aesthetics of the corruption which can save us / just begins / with the divine human flesh”.

“*Benaventurats aquells als qui trastorna la més indefugible necessitat de tocar. / L’entorn seu és tot pell. No miren: palpen. / La bellesa del món és el contacte. / Es refreguen amb tot. No existeixen més coses / que aquelles que ells copulen si més no amb la mirada. / Déu és la carn. El món els contamina. / ... / Benaventurats els impurs, perquè ells són homes*⁵¹. *No comprenc... / el secular anatema contra la carn, / la rara paradoxa dels gaudis anomenats prohibits, / la catalogació jeràrquica de les innobleses de la carn, / la maledicció d’ella centímetre a centímetre, / ... Perquè resulta que us estim començant per*

⁴⁸ *Paràbola i clam de la cosa humana X. T. P.*, p. 145.

⁴⁹ *Paràbola i clam de la cosa humana XI. T. P.*, p. 147.

⁵⁰ *Libre de les benaventurances 7. T. P.*, p. 163. It is worth remarking that the third chapter of Riera’s novel *Andreu Milà* begins this way: “At the beginning was pain” (“En el principi fou el dolor”). It would be quite naïve therefore not to realize a clear desire of contradicting Saint John’s gospel.

⁵¹ *Libre de les benaventurances 18. T. P.*, p. 174.

/ la carn, / ... / ... tota la estètica de la corrupció que ens pot salvar / exactament comença / a la divina / carn humana"⁵².

I am quite sure that any suspicion with regard to my previous assertion that the safest way to arrive at M. A. Riera's anti-Platonism was Christianity has now completely banished -it is not worth arguing about something evident. Anyway, the question would be: which Christianity? From my point of view both The Old and New Testament deal, above all, with fornication -in other words, with illegal sexual contacts- but not with the repression of all sorts of sensuality. Notwithstanding, Christianity, as known by Western citizens and "contaminated" by Classical Culture -that is to say, by Platonic, NeoPlatonic and Stoic philosophy-, has been traditionally addicted to purity to the extent of obsession. Not only Plato is highly responsible for this fact but also his excellent *ars scribendi* and his effective images, allegories and myths. To sum up: Plato's legacy, Platonism *stricto sensu* -and Plotinus and his legacy, of course- have too often contributed to tear Western citizens' personality, since they have been culturally impelled to ill-treat, torture and even assassinate their essential somatic nature. Concerning Plato, in spite of the dualism of his world-conception, he always thought of the ideal realm being combined with matter as a guarantee of its coherence. On the contrary, Plotinus placed the One in a so high position according to his pyramidal system that any contact of the physical world with that inexhaustible fountain was limited to receive its leftover emanations. Consequently it is needless to say consequently that, in this case, the urge to abandon definitively the realm of matter in order to attain a higher level is even more drastic.

And once more the poet discovers against all this both a simple and logical antidote:

"I love you because you exist. The clearest side / of my love, and the highest one, / is called touching you. / Marvel that I know because a body reports you: / spirit is here, transformed into your transcended skin. Your voice, your truth, what is called soul / is all muscle, blood, tendon: ... / ... / Eyelid, pore, you. Nipple, substance, / detectable dawn / devoted to the task of signing volumes / from which I know how you are and how to love you / ... / Sovereign blossoming of the human being, in you: / love / verifiable by means of a body. / I love you because you exist: you can be touched. / you exist for my hands: / the absolute purity consists in deciphering you".

*"T'estim perquè existeixes. La més clara / dimensió del meu amor, i la més alta, / es diu tocant-te. / Meravella que sé perquè et delata un cos: / l'esperit és aquí, fet ta pell transcendida. Ta veu, ta veritat, això que en dèiem ànima / és múscul tot, sang, tendó: ... / ... / Parpella, porus, tu. Mugró, substància, / borriçol comprovable / lliurat a l'estratègia de signar volums / des dels quals sé com ets i sé estimar-te / ... / Sobirana eclosió de la persona, en tu: / amor / verificable en un cos. / T'estim perquè existeixes: ets accessible al tacte. / existent a la mà: / la puresa total és desxifrar-te"*⁵³.

Adoration of what is here and now, "dactylology" of love, corporal nature of spirit, repose on substance and volume, absoluteness of the one we love and finally redemption of sensuality: it seems certainly an excellence guide to be followed, providing human beings know how to preserve their somatic nature. And one further remark: they should not be afraid to fail, since the other's epiphany is always possible except of course when men and women have been educated -even programmed- to disregard his/her arrival:

"And, afterwards, it happened: / We met each other, / we were precisely you and I, / at a place and moment which must belong, / since a sidereal time, to you and me / because... /

⁵² *La bellesa de l'home XII, T. P., p. 119.*

⁵³ *Libre de les benaventurances I. T. P., p. 157.*

I found / your hand already on the same handle, / and I noticed that I / was carrying upon my body / the precise load of loneliness / so that my emptiness had a volume which was equivalent / to the shape of your presence”.

“I després succeí: / tu i jo coincidírem, / érem tu i jo, precisament nosaltres, / a un lloc i a un instant que ens devien pertànyer / des d’un temps sideral a tu i a mi / perquè... / vaig topar / la teva mà ja posada a la mateixa ansa, / i em vaig adonar que jo / portava arrapada al cos / la càrrega precisa de solitud / perquè el meu buit tengués el volum idèntic / a la configuració de la teva presència”⁵⁴.

This is just the liberty –and expressed by means of the same image- that the priest of *The Unattainable Gods* could not allow himself, when in a stormy afternoon the lightning-conductor of his house received a great impact and Alexis, who was too scared to react “properly”, embraced him:

“I felt for one instant... that his hair was caressing my face. A shiver both of pleasure and fear ran through my whole body... Fortunately it lasted only till... my mother’s scream reached me. That voice... arrived in time... to put back... one order which, coming from the lustful base of my brain, started producing the tightness of certain muscles in order to shape ... one circle as great as Alexis’ body”.

“Per un instant... vaig sentir que els seus cabells acaraven la meua cara. Per tot el cos ... me va recórrer un calfred de plaer i temor. Per fortuna sols durà el que trigà a arribar-me un crit... que havia deixat escapar la meua mare. Aquella veu... arribà a l’instant... de fer recular... una ordre que emesa des d’un rerefons lasciú del meu cervell, començava a produir-me la tibantor de determinats músculs cap a configurar... un cercle de la mateixa grandària que el cos d’Alexis”⁵⁵.

It would be absurd to remember now that this priest is not equivalent to the Socrates of the end of Plato’s *Symposium*, and neither is Alexis’ embrace equivalent to Alcibiades’ behaviour. However, let us pay attention to the fact that the priest, like the Greek philosopher, knows perfectly well the kind of science he must teach: virtue, which asks him to abandon the adoration of any worldly copy of the celestial Grace. The priest was in the seminary for a long time and already learnt everything he needed to perform his duties. He cannot even allege that God has sent him Alexis as a crowbar by means of which he will ascend towards the divine Beauty. It is too late. He is old enough not to need human bodies’ beauty –boys’ beauty- to be upset by it – while this was at least Socrates’ experience for a long time- but an intelligent pupil who will receive his teachings. Consequently, it is quite clear that a Platonic restraint was the only option and, as you can imagine, regarding the adjective “Platonic” I am thinking now of the “Platonic love”, that cultural –but cruel- annihilation of any sensuality in human love.

M. A. Riera often appeals to gods’ vengeance to counterbalance this asphyxiating oppression but he knows at the same time that Western Culture cannot re-establish the joyful experience of sensuality precisely because of its notable Platonic essence. Anyway, he does have once more poetical arms to react:

“I am sick of being so cautious, / it is time for me to do what I want to do / ... / I do not want to behave any longer in the presence of any one. / I am sick of so many obstacles / which made me grow both blunt and scrupulous, / and come near the pleasure full of fears / as if pleasure was others’ pleasure but not mine. / I want to sin a lot... against all the commandments. / ... I say that, while living, although I am besieged with your advises, / I

⁵⁴ *Paràbola i clam de la cosa humana XIII. T. P.*, pp. 149-50.

⁵⁵ *Els déus inaccessibles*, p. 119.

want my bones to be softened / by the most lustful behaviour. / It is too late for me to go backwards and do it, / but not regarding my life to come: / I want an aurora borealis of pleasures / with which I shall experience a new sense of time. / If you do not follow me, I shall lose sight of you very soon, / if you criticize me, I shall deafen myself by singing. / I do not want to be any longer as you are ... / ... / one day you will answer in the presence of gods... for your non-enjoyed pleasures”.

“Ja n’hi ha prou de ser tan circumspecte, / és hora ja de fer el que vulgui fer / ... / davant ningú no em vull captenir més. / Ja n’estic fart de tants i tants obstacles / que en feren créixer esmús i esquiterell, / i d’apropar-me al goig ple de temences / com si el plaer fos d’altri i no fos meu. / Vull pecar molt... a contrapèl de tots els manaments. / ... dic que, mentre tingui vida, per molt que m’assetgeu amb bons consells, / vull dur la meua ossada reblanida / per la conducta més concupiscent. / No som a temps de fer-ho cap enrere, / però cap endavant sí que hi seré: / vull una aurora boreal de gaudis / amb la qual viure un nou sentit del temps. / Si no em seguïu, prest us perdré de vista, / si em criticau, cantant m’eixordaré. / No vull ser més com sou ... / ... / dels plaers no fruitos... / un dia en respondreu davant els déus”⁵⁶.

I would not like to finish my analysis being unfair to M. A. Riera’s complex personality. I have –he has- emphasized so many times the urge of cursing, of stoning to death and burning in the bonfire, that the readers could suspect that in the end well-known cultural excesses are this time substituted by the poet’s ones. If the readers have now this impression on account of my comments, I must recognize that both I have committed a serious error and failed categorically. So I hasten to add that somehow Heraclitean estimation consisting in being conscious of the necessity of changing and remembering that life is an intelligent tension between opposite poles which, sooner or later, meet each other to the extent of being indistinguishable⁵⁷. Or, if the Sophistic reference could be even more profitable: after the *lógos* must come the *antilogía*. In other words, and according to Protagoras⁵⁸ –and this would be a good ending for my contribution-: everything can be considered from at least two opposite points of view. M. A. Riera must think more or less the same, since he is clearly interested in warning us that way:

“I know just one thing: the person / with a firm criterion and a lot of believes / which sometimes I may look like, does not exist. There are muscles, / nerves, blood, tendons, cartilages / from which I think as I think.../ Their essence consists in being what they look like / and the opposite at the same time. They are: they vacillate. / They are like a landscape: sometimes they offer the image / of the apparently most steady peacefulness / and suddenly they are shaken by a lightning or a word / ... / And the change is accomplished: that clear thing which, according to them / constituted myself / turns into a dark one because of some different / orders which have suddenly started to exist”.

“Just una cosa sé: no existeix la persona / amb un criteri fet i amb un feix de creences /

⁵⁶ *El pis de la badia*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ Remember for instance the fragment B 51 DK: “They do not understand how, when it diverges, it converges with itself; harmony of the tension that goes and comes back, as in the case of the bow and the lyre” (οὐ ξυνιᾶσιν ὅκως διαφερόμενον ἐωπτόω ὁμολογέει· παλίντροπος ἀρμονίη ὅκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης –the translation is mine following the edition by H. Diels- W.Kranz. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1, 6th edn. Berlin: Weidmann, 1951, rpr. Dublin / Zurich, 1966).

⁵⁸ Seneca. *Letters* 88,43: “Protagoras declares that one can take either side on many questions and debate it with equal success –even on this very question, whether every subject can be debated from either point of view” (*Protagoras ait de omni re in utrumquam partem disputari posse ex aequo et de hac ipsa, an omnis res in utramque partem disputabilis sit* -translated by Richard M. Gummere, *Loeb Classical Library*. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1963).

*que a dies puc semblar. Existeixen un músculs, / uns nervis, una sang, uns tendons, uns cartílags / des dels quals pens com pens... / El seu ser consisteix a ser el que semblen / i alhora el seu contrari. Són: vacil·len. / Són talment un paisatge: adés donen la imatge / de la placidesa aparentment més estable / i de sobte els sacseja un llamp o una paraula / ... / I el canvi és consumat: la cosa clara que, des d'ells, / jo era / es converteix en tèrbola per capritx d'unes ordres / distintes que de sobte han començat a ser*⁵⁹.

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⁵⁹ *Libre de les benaventurances* 20. T. P., p. 176.