

Platonic Shadows and Lights in Luis Cernuda's Poetry: Their Didactic Use¹

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By creating his well-known myths and images, Plato made clear the limitations of the philosophical language. What very often could not be expressed by means of the much pondered conjunction of all sort of logical reasonings, as well as the presence in his dialogues of concepts with a meaning increasingly precise and accurate, was expressed in its turn with the help of other means which were much closer to the popular imagination and wisdom such as images and myths. It would be absurd and, above all, useless to present now their hierarchical ranking on account of their impact and use in a biased way all over the Western Culture. Indeed, if we take into account two very different examples: the ascension of the fallen souls and the skilful guiding of the indomitable horse of the palinode of Plato's *Phaedrus* (244-257b) and the three genres-myth of the Aristophanes' speech of Plato's *Symposium* (189d-193d) –better known as the androgynous-myth-, we shall confirm that they have been the images thanks to which we have visualized both the metaphysical trance towards God, which was commented on by Marsilio Ficino in 1496³, and the human search, constant and often anguished, for a lost personal half in *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, a recent and odd instance –perhaps even scandalous for some sensibilities- of Classical Tradition in the American underground cinema⁴. At any rate, the impact of the Platonic image of the cave is unquestionable, since it has become a classical reference –and “Classical” in this case- upon which many calls to the necessary dissipation of all kinds of shadows: personal, collective, intellectual, religious, political, etcetera, have been based in order to attain finally the light⁵ –*lato sensu*- or, on many other

¹ This article was published in the *Actes del XIV Simposi de la Secció Catalana de la S.E.E.C. Ciència, Didàctica i Funció Social dels Estudis Clàssics*. Barcelona: PPU, 2004, pp. 219-232.

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³ See, e. g. M. J. B. Allen's study: *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1981.

⁴ *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. Direction and screenplay by John Cameron Mitchell, cinema adaptation of an *off-Broadway rock theatre hit*, produced by Killer Films (2001).

⁵ It is worth remembering now, for instance, Oscar Wilde's reflections on the nature of Art which, like in the case of Plato, are presented under the form of a dialogue: (C): 'Surely you would acknowledge that Art expresses the temper of its age, the spirit of its time...'. (V): 'Certainly not! Art never expresses anything but itself. This is the principle of my new aesthetics... Of course, nations and individuals... are always under the impression that it is of them that the Muses are talking, always trying to find in the calm dignity of imaginative art some mirror of their own turbid passions, always forgetting that the singer of life is not Apollo but Marsyas. Remote from reality, and with her eyes turned away from the shadows of the cave, Art reveals her own perfection' (The Project Gutenberg Etext of *Intentions*). Or think as well of the smuggler's words in Rodolf Sirera's *La caverna* which is inspired in Plato's cave: 'Vivim massa temps tancats entre les ombres, i ja no sabem si nosaltres, i els que són amb nosaltres,

occasions, to exhort to descend and know the shadiest depths –*lato sensu* as well-, having taken advantage paradoxically of the adaptation-capacity of very same image to different goals and sensibilities⁶.

The terms of the first chapters of the seventh book of Plato's *Republic* are as explicit as imperative: 'imagine' (ἀπεικασσον) (514a), so that, after having built mentally the image, the interlocutor is prepared to receive the next order: 'look at' (ιδεῖ) (514b) and ὄρα (514b) those permanent prisoners who are doomed to the also permanent contemplation of shadows instead of being able to grasp the essence of everything, that is to say, the Reality. The details of such an imaginative act are unnecessary, but, on the contrary, it is worth remembering the last exhortation (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...' (Ταύτην τοίνυν, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, τὴν εἰκόνα, ὦ φίλε Γλαύκων, προσαπτέον ἅπασαν τοῖς ἔμπροσθεν λεγομένοις, τὴν μὲν δι' ὄψεως φαινομένην ἔδραν τῆ τοῦ δεσμοτηρίου οἰκήσει ἀφομοιοῦντα, τὸ δὲ τοῦ πυρὸς 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 ἀμαρτήσῃ τῆς γ' ἐμῆς ἐλπίδος, ἐπειδὴ ταύτης ἐπιθυμεῖς ἀκούειν... -translated by Paul Shorey, *Loeb Classical Library*. London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1970).

And now, using the image and its applicability, the thesis –which is presented, however, as an hypothesis- gains in verosimilitude and comprehension:

'in the intelligible world the last thing to be seen and hardly seen is the idea of good, and that, when seen, we must reach at the conclusion that this is indeed the cause for all things of all that is right and beautiful, giving birth in the visible world to light, and the author of light and itself in the intelligible world being the real source of truth and reason, and that the one who is to act wisely in private or public must look at this'. 'I do

continuem sent persones, o hem esdevingut ombres també. I per això... ens cal posar tothom a prova: les ombres i nosaltres. I destriar què és cadascú, desencadenar els que han romàs encadenats davant el mur, preguntar-los si encara els sembla més real l'ombra projectada que allò que la projecta... i si volen continuar vivint en aquest món subterrani, o volen sortir a la llum' (Els textos del Centre Dramàtic, nº 7. Barcelona: Lumen, 1995, 95-6; cf. Plato, *R* 515c-d i 516 a-b) ('We live imprisoned among shadows for too much time, and we don't still know [...] whether we keep on being persons or we have become shadows as well. And this is the reason why [...] everybody must be tested, both the shadows and we, in order to be clearly distinguished. We must unchain those who have remained chained in front of the wall, ask them whether the shadow which is reflected in this wall is for them more real than what projects it [...] and whether they want to continue to live in this underworld or they prefer to go out into the light').

⁶ As we can deduce, for instance, from these other O. Wilde's reflections in his *De profundis*, that is to say, the long letter that he wrote in prison for Lord Alfred Douglas: "The gods had given me almost everything... But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. I amused myself with being a *flâneur*, a dandy, a man of fashion. I surrounded myself with the smaller natures and the meaner minds. I became the spendthrift of my own genius, and to waste an eternal youth gave me a curious joy. Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in the search for new sensation" (London: Penguin Classics, 1986, 151-2).

believe it as well’, he said, ‘so far as I am able’. ‘Come, then’, I said, ‘think of it and do not be astonished that those who have attained this high region do not desire anymore to occupy themselves with the affairs of men, but their souls strive to remain there for evermore. For it is likely this way if you think of it according to the above mentioned image (*eikóna*)’ (517c-d) (ἐν τῷ γνωστῷ τελευταία ἢ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα καὶ μόγις ὁρᾶσθαι, ὀφθεῖσα δὲ συλλογιστέα εἶναι ὡς ἄρα πᾶσι πάντων αὕτη ὀρθῶν τε καὶ καλῶν αἰτία, ἐν τε ὁρατῷ φῶς καὶ τὸν τούτου κύριον τεκοῦσα, ἐν τε νοητῷ αὕτη κυρία ἀλήθειαν καὶ νοῦν παρασχομένη, καὶ ὅτι δεῖ ταύτην ἰδεῖν τὸν μέλλοντα ἐμφρόνως πράξειν ἢ ἰδίᾳ ἢ δημοσίᾳ. Συνοίωμα, ἔφη, καὶ ἐγώ, ὄν γε δὴ τρόπον δύναμαι. Ἰθι, τοίνυν, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ, καὶ τὸδε συνοιήθητι καὶ μὴ θαυμάσης ὅτι οἱ ἐνταῦθα ἐλθόντες οὐκ ἐθέλουσιν τὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πράττειν, ἀλλ’ ἄνω ἀεὶ ἐπείγονται αὐτῶν αἰ ψυχαὶ διατρίβειν· εἰκὸς γάρ που οὕτως, εἴπερ αὖ κατὰ τὴν προειρημένην εἰκόνα τοῦτ’ ἔχει –*idem* regarding the translation).

The image, therefore, the comparison of images and, finally, their applicability have had unquestionable didactic effects, to the extent of asking ourselves whether by means of it Plato has made the others understand or even Plato’s mind has needed the image, much more than the philosopher of Athens could ever imagine, to conceive the idea. Leaving aside this sort of questions to which it is impossible to answer, my brief analysis of Luis Cernuda’s poetry aims simply at showing to what extent the Platonic image of the cave and, even more, its century-old philosophical and literary legacy of shadows and lights, as well as the also famous images of the palinode of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, continue to be for the Sevillian poet the most fitting way to teach the others about a very personal poetic universe. And, at the same time, he shows himself as a good pupil of Plato since he has been poetically enriched because of the beauty and effectiveness of his admired philosopher’s “icons”⁷. After all, the aim of our meeting in Vic is to debate about “Science, Didactic and Social Function of The Classical Studies”, so that, taking the chance of the celebration of the centenary of Luis Cernuda’s birth (1902-1963), I thought it would be appropriate to render a little homage to him, emphasizing this time the fact that the well-known topic of shadows and lights of his poetry, which is clearly Platonic in my opinion⁸,

⁷See, e.g.: Ancet, J. *Les images et les mythes dans la poésie de Luis Cernuda* (unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Lyon, 1966 and Bruton, K. J. *The Developing Expressions in the Poetry of Luis Cernuda: The Role of Image and Symbol*. University of London, 1980.

⁸ Cernuda is a writer with an excellent knowledge both of Plato and his influence on British Literature: S. T. Coleridge, P. B. Shelley, R. Browning, etc. Concerning this aspect, see e.g.: Otero, C.-P. “Cernuda y los románticos ingleses”. *Quimera* (Barcelona), number 15 (January 1982), pp. 33-38 in *Studies in Honor of José Rubia Barcia*. Johnson, R. and Smith, P. C. (eds.). Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982, pp. 125-140, as well as *Prosa Completa I*. Madrid: Siruela, pp. 315, 328-9, 334, 403-5 y 485. As a general introduction to Cernuda’s literary work and its themes: Martínez Nadal, R. *Españoles en la Gran Bretaña. El hombre y sus temas*. Madrid: Hiperión, 1983. At any rate, I should say if this Platonic influence appears after he read the English Romantics, or I should state precisely when he read Plato’s dialogues. This is not, however, the aim of my contribution and, on the other hand, I should like to recall that Cernuda, like many others, before he reads Plato’s dialogues as the result of his studying the English Romantics, the Spanish Classics, German Idealism, etcetera, is “invaded” by a great deal of Platonic images simply on account of having been educated as a catholic. Indeed, it is well known that Catholicism is, for instance, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic and Neo-Platonic. In other words, Cernuda is educated with the help of many references to heaven and hell, to the brightness of the former and the *tenebrae* of the latter, to the fall, to the brightness of goodness and the darkness of sin, to the necessity of having an angelic spirit, to Light = God. In this respect, therefore, it is worth remembering now ‘El poeta y los mitos’ (*O, PC*, 560-1): “Bien temprano en la vida, antes que leyese versos algunos, cayó en tus manos un libro de mitología. Aquellas páginas te revelaron un mundo donde la poesía, vivificándolo

teaches us very much –it is didactic, therefore- about his torn personality between reality and desire⁹.

Indeed, Plato and Luis Cernuda's reality and desire are brought into harmony in a well-known passage of 'Palabras antes de una lectura'¹⁰, though in this case the implicit reference to the Socrates' pupil underlies in the German Idealism and, specifically, in Fichte's idealism, since the German philosopher was for him a real master concerning the art of distinguishing truth from appearance:

“El instinto poético se despertó en mí gracias a la percepción más aguda de la realidad, experimentando... la hermosura y la atracción del mundo circundante. Su efecto era... la exigencia... de salir de mí mismo, anegándome en aquel vasto cuerpo de la creación. Y lo que hacía aún más agónico aquel deseo era el reconocimiento tácito de su imposible satisfacción. A partir de entonces comencé a distinguir una fuente simultánea y opuesta dentro de mí: hacia la realidad y contra la realidad. El deseo me llevaba hacia la realidad que se ofrecía como si sólo con su posesión pudiera alcanzar certeza de mi propia vida. Mas como esa posesión jamás la he alcanzado sino de modo precario, de ahí la corriente contraria, de hostilidad ante el irónico atractivo de la realidad. Puesto que, según parece, ésa o parecida ha sido también la experiencia de algunos filósofos y poetas que admiro, con ellos concluyo que la realidad exterior es un espejismo y lo único cierto mi propio deseo de poseerla. Así pues, la esencia del problema poético, a mi entender, la constituye el conflicto entre realidad y deseo, entre apariencia y verdad, permitiéndonos alcanzar algún vislumbre de la imagen completa del mundo que ignoramos, de la “idea divina del mundo que yace al fondo de la apariencia”, según la frase de Fichte”.

Consequently, if there is a real opposition reality / desire which, however, makes him attain a brief glimpse of the complete image of the world, we should deduce conclusively that even the poet lives blindly on account both of being a permanent prisoner –like those of the Platonic cave- in a shadowy world and longing for an imminent but ever postponed release. And, probably for the same reason, when Cernuda remembers the final contemplation of the idea, of a genuine Platonic idea, in this case the idea “Music”, he continues “to glimpse” something different, to feel still in an “obscure” way, to listen to the music in the lonely “shadow” of a

como la llama al leño, transmutaba lo real. Qué triste te apareció entonces tu propia religión. Tú no discutías ésta, ni la ponías en duda, cosa difícil para un niño; mas en tus creencias hondas y arraigadas se insinuó, si no una objeción racional, el presentimiento de una alegría ausente. ¿Por qué se te enseñaba a doblegar la cabeza ante el sufrimiento divinizado, cuando en otro tiempo los hombres fueron tan felices como para adorar, en su plenitud trágica, la hermosura? Que tú no comprendieras entonces la casualidad profunda que une ciertos mitos con ciertas formas intemporales de la vida, poco importa... ”. It is true that he seems to despise Christianity, but it was also Christianity –that is to say, the Platonic content of Christianity- that lent him the images with which later he would build his poetic identity.

⁹ Or quoting the very Cernuda's verses: “Tus ojos son los ojos de un hombre enamorado; / Tus labios son los labios de un hombre que no cree / En el amor”. “Entonces dime el remedio, amigo, / Si están en desacuerdo realidad y deseo” (‘Música cautiva’, *DQ, PC*, 498, 1-4). Let me say now that I find completely unnecessary to mention here some important references concerning the general bibliography on Cernuda, which, on the other hand, can be easily found in the volume III of Siruela-edition, *Prosa II*, pages 849-922, although I'll refer to some specific books because of their significance with regard to some key points I'll deal with. At any rate, on Classical Tradition in Luis Cernuda's poetry, see e.g.: Nogueras, E. J. *Tradición clásica y poesía contemporánea (Microforma): tres visiones románticas de Grecia: Pessoa, Riba, Cernuda*. (unpublished doctoral dissertation). Granada: Servicio de Publicaciones, Universidad de Granada, 1990.

¹⁰ *Prosa Completa I*. Madrid: Siruela, p. 602.

room or in the tepid air of the “night” during May, which are all precisely actions and places marked by the darkness of a cavernous living –or simply an apparent one according to Fichte-, save some scattered moments of a bright, winged¹¹ and haloed contemplation of something definitively different:

“Entreví entonces la existencia de una realidad diferente de la percibida a diario, y ya oscuramente sentía cómo no bastaba a esa otra realidad el ser diferente, sino que algo alado y divino debía acompañarla y aureolarla” (‘La poesía’, *O, PC*, 553)¹²; “Lo que en la sombra solitaria de una habitación te llamaba desde el muro, y te dejaba anhelante y nostálgico cuando el piano callaba, era la música fundamental, anterior y superior a quienes la descubren e interpretan, como la fuente de quien el río y aun el mar sólo son formas tangibles y limitadas” (‘El piano’, *O, PC*, 555-6); “A través de las ramas de acacia en flor, por el aire tibio de la noche de mayo, desde el jardín de la venta, la musiquilla venía insistente. No era la voz de la melodía inmortal, que nos persuade de que en nosotros, como en ella, algo no ha de pasar; ésta, frágil y deleznable...” (‘El placer’, *O, PC*, 570).

Therefore, the poet is conscious both of the shadowy precariousness of his living and of the dawn that he has already been able to grasp. Of course, the Light should redeem him for evermore, but, given that he is a human being who as a consequence is anchored in the physical world¹³, he is doomed to exist side by side with vulgar replicas, such as the sun or the moon,

¹¹ This would be the time, then, to remember once again the content of the palinode of Plato’s *Phaedrus* (244-257b).

¹² I’ll use in all cases the abbreviations of Siruela edition –Madrid, 1993- of L. Cernuda’s *Poesía Completa (PC)*, pages 31-6 –followed both by the page and verse number-, except those ones showing simply the abbreviation *RD* that I’ll quote as follows in order to provide easier identification: *Primeras Poesías (Pr.P)*; *Los Placeres Prohibidos (Pl.P)*; *Las Nubes (LN)*; *Vivir sin Estar Viviendo (VSEV)*; *Un Río un Amor (RA)* y *Con las Horas Contadas (CHC)*.

¹³ I am interested in emphasizing that, though I am analysing now the influence exerted by Platonism and by the Platonic image of the cave on Luis Cernuda’s poetry, I have always thought that he oscillates between idealism and materialism. In fact, he confesses to be materialist although he often deludes himself with flattering images of immortality: “Es cierto que en determinados versos yo mismo he querido engañarme con nociones halagüeñas de inmortalidad, en una forma u otra; es difícil ser siempre fiel a nuestras convicciones, por hondas que sean. La culpa tal vez pueda achacarla a cierto idealismo mío, espontáneo y cándido, que sólo con ayuda del tiempo puedo dominar y, tras la reflexión, orientar hacia lo materialista. Ya Coleridge decía que los hombres son, por nacimiento, platónicos o aristotélicos, o sea, idealistas o materialistas” (‘Historial de un libro’. *Prosa I*. Madrid: Siruela, 1994, 658). All these aspects are treated accurately in my article: “Luis Cernuda: Platonic Emotiveness versus Presocratic-Aristotelian Mind”. *ITACA. Quaderns Catalans de Cultura Clàssica*. 18 (2002) 41-55, and in Spanish in *Nostalgia de una patria imposible*. Madrid: Akal Ediciones, 2005-331-343. At any rate, here are some instances of his anchorage in the realm of senses, the four elements and the earth: “Existo, bien lo sé, / porque le transparenta / El mundo a mis sentidos / Su amorosa presencia” (*Pr.P*, VII, *PC*, 111; 1-4). “Te hubiera dado el mundo, / Muchacho que surgiste / ... / Tras la colina ocre / ... / La incierta hora con nubes desgarradas, / El río oscuro y ciego bajo la extraña brisa, / La rojiza colina con sus pinos cargados de secretos, / Te enviaban a mí, a mi afán ya caído / Como verdad tangible” (‘A un muchacho andaluz’, *IGM, PC*, 221-222; 1-2, 3, 22-26); “Yo no te conocía tierra; / Con los ojos inertes, la mano aleante, / Lloré todo ciego bajo tu verde sonrisa, / ... / Ignorándote, tierra mía, / Ignorando tu alentar, huracán o tumulto / ... / Bien sé ahora que tú eres / Quien me dicta esta forma y esta ansia; / ... / ... radiantes cuerpos / Que tanto he amado inútilmente, / No es en vosotros donde la vida está, sino en la tierra, / En la tierra que aguarda, aguarda siempre / Con sus labios tendidos, con sus brazos abiertos” (‘Los fantasmas del deseo’, *DHO, PC*, 216-7; 1-3, 7-8, 11-12, 32-35); “... Creo en la vida, / Creo en ti que no conozco aún, / Creo en mí mismo; / Porque algún día yo seré todas las cosas que amo: / El aire, el agua, las

which, in spite of being lights, are really ephemeral, in fact as ephemeral as his beloved turned out to be unfortunately, although he had set his hopes on him:

“Qué más da el sol que se pone o el sol que se levanta, / La luna que nace o la luna que muere. / Mucho tiempo, toda mi vida, esperé verte surgir entre las nieblas monótonas, / Luz inextinguible, prodigio rubio como la llama; / Ahora que te he visto sufro, porque igual que aquellos / No has sido para mí menos brillante, / Menos efímero o menos inaccesible que el sol y la luna alternados. / Mas yo sé lo que digo si a ellos te comparo, / Porque aun siendo brillante, efímero, inaccesible, / Tu recuerdo, como el de ambos astros, / Basta para iluminar, tú ausente, toda esta niebla que me envuelve” (‘Qué más da’, *Pl. P, PC*, 188; 1-12).

I have paid my attention to this poem, since no other one in my opinion could show in a better didactic way –as well as the comparison which at the same time is set forth- the very often extremely Platonic essence of Luis Cernuda’s poetry, a tireless walker in the fog -but in search of the Light-, who appears momentarily deceived by the fugacious nature¹⁴ of the one who, though he was blond and flammiferous, was only the “light” –in small letters. At any rate, Cernuda is finally saved by the *anamnesis*, a well-known Platonic stratagem which is always efficacious for the one who, like a prisoner in the fog, fights against it by means of illuminating it¹⁵; after all, the poet’s omnipotence consist in eternalizing in the poem and by means of the poem those Light’s children who fell –that is to say, who are obscure- into the miserly darkness¹⁶:

“Oh Dios. Tú que nos has hecho / Para morir, ¿por qué nos infundiste / La sed de eternidad, que hace al poeta? / ¿Puedes dejar así, siglo tras siglo, / Caer como vilanos

plantas, el adolescente” (‘El mirlo, la gaviota’, *Pl.P, PC*, 190; 35-39); “Pero, ¿quién es el hombre para juzgar al hombre? / La oración de la fe salva al enfermo, / Y si cayó en pecado le será perdonado. / Este cuerpo que ya sus elementos restituye / Al agua, al aire, al fuego y a la tierra / Puede la gracia sellarlo todavía con un beso” (‘Apologia pro vita sua’, *CQEA, PC*, 348; 98-103).

¹⁴ Indeed, the ephemeral nature of things and persons who are subject to the passing of time is certainly a topic in his poetry: “Escondido entre los muros / Este jardín me brinda / Sus ramas y sus aguas / De secreta delicia. / Qué silencio. ¿Es así / El mundo? ... Mas el tiempo ya tasa / El poder de esta hora; /madura su medida / Escapa entre sus rosas” (*Pr. P. XXIII, PC*, 122-3; 1-7 i 12-15); “De nuestro tiempo humano corto y débil” (‘A un poeta futuro’, *CQEA, PC*, 340; 31); “Llega un momento en la vida cuando el tiempo nos alcanza ... Quiero decir que a partir de tal edad nos vemos sujetos al tiempo y obligados a contar con él ... ” (‘El tiempo’, *O, PC*, 560); “ ... algo debe amarse / Mientras dura la vida. Pero en la vida todo / Huye cuando el amor quiere fijarlo” (‘El ruiseñor sobre la piedra’, *LN, PC*, 315; 45-7) and “ ... los hombres, hechos de esa materia fragmentaria / Con que se nutre el tiempo, aunque sean / Aptos para crear lo que resiste al tiempo, / Ellos en cuya mente lo eterno se concibe, / Como en el fruto el hueso encierran muerte” (‘Las ruinas’, *CQEA, PC*, 325; 40-44). Consequently, it is highly paradoxical in my opinion that he admires Heraclitus, the great “evangelist” of the *pánta rheî*: “Los fragmentos de filosofía presocrática que en una y otra obra conocí –he is referring to Diels’ *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* and to Burnet’s *Early Greek Philosophy*-, sobre todo, quizá, los de Heráclito, me parecieron lo más profundo y poético que encontrara en filosofía” (‘Historial de un libro’. *Prosa I*. Madrid: Siruela, 1994, 657).

¹⁵ Remember as well: “En la hora de la muerte / (Si puede el hombre para ella / Hacer presagios, cálculos), / Tu imagen a mi lado / Acaso me sonría como hoy me ha sonreído, / Iluminando este existir oscuro y apartado / Con el amor, única luz del mundo” (‘Epílogo’, *DQ, PC*, 540; 35-41).

¹⁶ Concerning this point, see e.g.: Curry, R. “Between Platonism and Modernity: The Double “Fall” in the Poetry of Luis Cernuda”. En Jiménez-Fajardo, S. (ed.). *The Word and the Mirror*, Associated University Presses, 1989, pp. 114-131.

que deshace un soplo / Los hijos de la luz en la tiniebla avara? / ... / Todo lo que es hermoso tiene un instante, y pasa. / Importa como eterno gozar de nuestro instante. / Yo no te envidio, Dios; déjame a solas / Con mis obras humanas que no duran: / El afán de llenar lo que es efímero / De eternidad, vale tu omnipotencia” (‘Las ruinas’, *CQEA, PC*, 325; 45-50, 57-62).

Luis Cernuda is undoubtedly sincere; there are many moments, nevertheless, in which, being suspiciously comparable with the fallen souls of the palinode of Plato’s *Phaedrus* –with their image, then-, having lost the wings of the innocence and having also welcomed an absolute nihilism, he falls like a fallen leaf or a dead birth and becomes obscure, becomes a shadow, adopting in this case the image of the cave or, what would be the same, opening his eyes because of his own experience to the huge distance that Plato already placed in his *Timaeus* between what “is” and what “becomes”¹⁷:

“Desde niño, tan lejos como vaya mi recuerdo, he buscado siempre lo que no cambia, he deseado la eternidad¹⁸. Todo contribuía alrededor mío, durante mis primeros años, a

¹⁷ *Timaeus* 27d-28, 3: ‘Now first of all we must, in my judgement, make the following distinction. What is that which is Existent always and has no Becoming? And what is that which is Becoming always and never is Existent? Now the one of these is apprehensible by thought with the aid of reasoning, since it is ever uniformly existent; whereas the other is an object of opinion with the aid of unreasoning sensation, since it becomes and perishes and is never really existent’ (Ἔστιν οὖν δὴ κατ’ ἐμὴν δόξαν πρῶτον διαίρετέον τάδε: τί τὸ ὄν αἰεὶ, γένεσιν δὲ οὐκ ἔχον, καὶ τί τὸ γιγνόμενον μὲν αἰεὶ, ὄν δὲ οὐδέποτε; τὸ μὲν δὴ νοήσει μετὰ λόγου περιληπτόν, αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτα ὄν, τὸ δ’ αὖ δόξει μετ’ αἰσθήσεως ἀλόγου δοξαστόν, γιγνόμενον καὶ ἀπολλύμενον, ὄντως δὲ οὐδέποτε ὄν –translated by R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library. London: William Heinemann Ltd. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1966).

¹⁸ Bearing in mind his Heraclitean “faith”, his intention of stopping the stream of the river –*lato sensu*, as usual- seems at least astonishing. First of all he complains about life which, as a river, not only cannot be stopped but also takes from human beings what they most love: “Placer, amor, mentira, / Beso, puñal, naufragio, / A la luz del recuerdo son heridas / De labios siempre ávidos; / ... / Voces al fin ahogadas con la voz de la vida, / Por las heridas mismas, / Igual que un río, escapando; / Un triste río cuyo fluir se lleva / Las antiguas caricias, / El antiguo candor, la fe puesta en un cuerpo. / No creas nunca, no creas sino en la muerte de todo” (XVI de *DHO, PC*, 215-6; 14-18, 22-28); afterwards, he surrenders to the ecstasy of adoring the “remanso”, whose calm and quiet surface, for him an image of a stopped time which is an everlasting instant, succeeds in hiding life when passing from its prime towards its decadence and sure death: “Te hubiera dado el mundo, / ... / Eras tú una verdad, / ... / Y olvidando que sombra y pena acechan de continuo / ... Quise por un momento fijar tu curso ineluctable” (‘A un muchacho andaluz’, *IGM, PC*, 221-222; 1,29,32,34), “Otros podrán hablar de cómo se marchita y decae la hermosura corporal, pero tú sólo deseas recordar su esplendor primero, y no obstante la melancolía con que acaba, nunca quedará por ella oscurecido su momento. Algunos creyeron que la hermosura, por serlo, es eterna (*Como dal fuoco il caldo, esser diviso – Non può’l bel dall’eterno*), y aun cuando no lo sea, tal en una corriente el remanso nutrido por idéntica agua fugitiva, ella y su contemplación son lo único que parece arrancarnos al tiempo durante un instante desmesurado” (‘El enamorado’, *O, PC*, 577), and finally he stabs the stream –in short, he stops it- that dares to rub out the footprints of his beloved: “Estaba tendido y tenía entre mis brazos un cuerpo como de seda. Lo besé en los labios, porque el río pasaba por debajo. Entonces se burló de mi amor... Lo besé en las espaldas, porque el agua sonaba debajo de nosotros. Entonces lloró al sentir la quemadura de mis labios... Besé su huella; mis lágrimas la borraron. Como el agua continuaba fluyendo, dejé caer en ella un puñal” (‘Estaba tendido’, *Pl.P, PC*, 179) –for a more accurate treatment of this aspect, see the above mentioned article, but remember above all the fragments A6, B 49a *DK*: “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” (λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει καὶ ποταμοῦ ῥοῆι ἀπεικάζων τὰ

mantener en mí la ilusión y la creencia en lo permanente: la casa familiar inmutable, los accidentes idénticos de mi vida¹⁹... Pero terminó la niñez y caí en el mundo²⁰... Todo desaparecía, poniendo en mi soledad el sentimiento amargo de lo efímero²¹. Yo solo parecía duradero entre la fuga de las cosas²²... ¡Dios!, exclamé entonces: dame la eternidad... Fue un sueño más, porque Dios no existe. Me lo dijo la hoja seca caída, que un pie deshace al pasar. Me lo dijo el pájaro muerto, inerte sobre la tierra el ala rota y podrida. Me lo dijo la conciencia, que un día ha de perderse en la vastedad del no ser. Y si Dios no existe, ¿cómo puedo existir yo? Yo no existo ni aun ahora, que como una sombra me arrastro entre el delirio de sombras²³, respirando estas palabras desalentadas, testimonio (¿de quién y para quién?) absurdo de mi existencia” (‘Escrito en el agua’, *O, PC*, 614-5).

“Fall” and “decadence”, “decaying” and “falling”, into the realm of shadows of course, are a topic in Luis Cernuda’s poetry. So had it to be certainly for the one who, having fallen in love with the beauty of perfect bodies²⁴, confirms afterwards with desolation that the passing of time²⁵, hit after hit, chisels the ugliness or decrepitude which, in a world marked by the tension

ὄντα λέγει ὡς δις ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης) / “We dive and we do not dive into the same rivers, we are and we are not” (ποταμοῖς τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐμβαίνομεν τε καὶ οὐκ ἐμβαίνομεν, εἶμεν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶμεν –the translations are mine).

¹⁹ Another topic in Luis Cernuda’s poetry: “¿Cuántos siglos caben en las horas de un niño? Recuerdo aquel rincón del patio en la casa natal... Allí, en el absoluto silencio estival... he visto cómo las horas quedaban inmóviles, suspensas en el aire, tal la nube que oculta un dios, puras y aéreas, sin pasar” (‘El tiempo’, *O, PC*, 560).

²⁰ Cf. with: “Esto, de haber sido posible, es lo que hubiera preferido: volver atrás, regresar a aquella región vaga y sin memoria de donde había venido al mundo... Intentaba forzar sus recuerdos, para recuperar conocimiento de dónde, tranquilo e inconsciente, entre nubes de limbo, le había tomado la mano de Dios, arrojándole al tiempo y a la vida” (‘La eternidad’, *O, PC*, 556).

²¹ On other occasions, however, he fights against any kind of tedium and accepts at the same time the inevitable experience of death: “Estoy cansado de estar vivo, / Aunque más cansado sería el estar muerto; / Estoy cansado del estar cansado / Entre plumas ligeras sagazmente, / Plumaz del loro aquel tan familiar o triste, / El loro aquel del siempre estar cansado” (‘Estoy cansado’, *RA, PC*, 152; 9-14); “Morir es duro, / Mas no poder morir, si todo muere, / Es más duro quizá” (‘Desolación de la Quimera’, *DQ, PC*, 528; 24-6).

²² Indeed, when he will grow old, he will continue to complain about the loss of those he has loved. In order to recuperate them the poet will run the risk of going down into the most terrible of the caves, that is to say the hell, but neither he is Orpheus nor gods are compassionate any more: “Tras la fatiga de un viaje nocturno, al final de la madrugada... Tus lágrimas brotaron entonces amargamente, pues que estabas solo y nadie sino tú era testigo de tanta debilidad, en honor de lo perdido... ¿No era posible recobrar en otra vida los momentos de dicha, que tan breves han sido en este existir... ¿No será posible reunirte para siempre con la criatura que tanto quieres?... Si no es posible, ¿qué razón tiene el vivir, cuando aquello en que se sustenta es ya pasado? Como Orfeo afrontarías los infiernos para rescatar y llevar de nuevo contigo la imagen de tu dicha, la forma de tu felicidad. Pero ya no hay dioses que nos devuelvan compasivos lo que perdimos, sino un azar ciego que va trazando torcidamente, con paso de borracho, el rumbo estúpido de nuestra vida” (‘Regreso a la sombra’, *O, PC*, 611-12).

²³ Cf. with: “Como cuando el sol enciende / Algún rincón de la tierra, / Su pobreza la redime, / Con risas verdes lo llena, / Así tu presencia viene / Sobre mi existencia oscura / A exaltarla, para darle / Esplendor, gozo, hermosura. / Pero también tú te pones / Lo mismo que el sol, y crecen / En torno mío las sombras / De soledad, vejez, muerte” (‘La vida’, *CHC, PC*, 480-1; 1-12).

²⁴ Concerning this point, see e.g.: Frenzel Beyme, S. “La función del cuerpo en la cosmovisión poética de Luis Cernuda”. *Cuadernos del Sur* (Bahía Blanca), number. 10 (july 1968-june 1969), pp. 93-100.

²⁵ To this respect, remember now: “... radiantes cuerpos / Que tanto he amado inútilmente, / No es en vosotros donde la vida está, sino en la tierra” (‘Los fantasmas del deseo’, *DHO, PC*, 217; 34).

between opposite poles in accordance with the Heraclitus' smart vision, will never be annihilated. A beautiful body, as asserted throughout Plato's *Symposium*, reflects the glory of a higher Idea²⁶, but the fog in which the poet Luis Cernuda walks with resignation invades everything, the paradise is the only thing to vanish, and the true consolation for him, like for many others, will be the *anámnesis*²⁷:

“El tiempo, insinuándose en tu cuerpo, / ... / Aquella gracia antigua desordena / Y clava en mí una pena silenciosa. / Otros antes que yo vieron un día, / Y otros luego verán, cómo decae / La amada forma esbelta, recordando / De cuánta gloria es cifra un cuerpo hermoso. / ... / Así mi pena inculta es nueva ahora. / Nueva como lo fuese al primer hombre, / Que cayó con su amor del paraíso, / Cuando viera, su cielo ya vencido por sombras, decaer el cuerpo amado” (‘Amando en el tiempo’, *CQEA, PC*, 370; 1, 3-8 i 12-16).

Cernuda, then, looks at himself in Plato, as shown by the fact that the images of Plato's *Phaedrus* and the image of the cave of his *Republic* are complementary, just in the same way that Cernuda thinks as well that his soul has been imprisoned in his body or simply considers that he is certainly a “prisoner among changing walls”, dispossessed of everything but full of desire:

“Con tal vehemencia el viento / Viene del mar, que sus sonos / Elementales contagian / El silencio de la noche / ... / Mas no es él quien en desvelo / Te tiene, sino otra fuerza / De que tu cuerpo es hoy cárcel, / Fue viento libre, y recuerda” (‘El viento y el alma’, *VSEV, PC*, 398; 1-4, 9-12); “Adolescente fui en días idénticos a nubes, / Cosa grácil, visible por penumbra y reflejo, / Y extraño es, si ese recuerdo busco, / Que tanto, tanto duela sobre el cuerpo de hoy. / ... / Aquél fui, aquél fui, aquél he sido; / Era la ignorancia mi sombra. / Ni gozo ni pena; fui niño / Prisionero entre muros cambiantes; / ... / Sueño luego ... / Cuando la muerte quiera / Una verdad quitar de entre mis manos, / Las hallarás vacías, como en la adolescencia / Ardientes de deseo, tendidas hacia el aire” (*DHO, PC*, 205-6, VII 1-4, 7-10, 12-16).

But he has not only fallen and become a prisoner; if we pay attention to those Cernuda's poems which show a clear romantic character, we shall confirm to what extent shadows and lights or, what would be the same, a “uranic” geometry logically marked by an ascending verticality both determines and helps him at the same time to express a desire for freedom after having abominated all sort of slaveries and decadences:

“Hermosas y vencida soñáis, / Vuelos los ciegos ojos hacia el cielo, / Mirando las remotas edades / De titánicos hombres, / Cuyo amor os daba ligeras guirnalda / Y la olorosa llama se alzaba / Hacia la luz divina, su hermana celeste. / ... La vida no era un delirio sombrío. / ... / Eran tiempos heroicos y frágiles, / ... / Hoy yacéis, mutiladas y oscuras, / Entre los grises jardines de las ciudades, / Piedra inútil que el soplo celeste no

²⁶ For instance: “Cierta que la hermosura humana, según el tópico platónico, no es sino reflejo de la divina” (‘Helena’, *O, PC*, 610).

²⁷ The *anámnesis* is not the final solution, but that other Platonic stratagem consisting in ignoring concrete things to grasp the archetypal Beauty: “Aquellos seres cuya hermosura admiramos un día, ¿dónde están? Caídos, manchados, vencidos, si no muertos. Mas la eterna maravilla de la juventud sigue en pie, y al contemplar un nuevo cuerpo joven, a veces cierta semejanza despierta un eco, un dejo del otro que antes amamos... un impotente dolor nos asalta, comprendiendo, tras la persistencia de la hermosura, la mutabilidad de los cuerpos” (‘Sombras’, *O, PC*, 583).

anima, / Abandonadas de la súplica y la humana esperanza./ ... / Mas no juzguéis por el rayo, la guerra o la plaga / Una triste humanidad decaída; / Impasibles reinad en el divino espacio. / Distraiga con su gracia el copero solícito / La cólera de vuestro poder que despierta. / En tanto el poeta, en la noche otoñal, / bajo el blanco embeleso lunático, / Mira las ramas que el verdor abandona / Nevarse de luz beatamente, / Y sueña con vuestro trono de oro/ Y vuestra faz cegadora, / Lejos de los hombres, / Allá en la altura impenetrable” (‘A las estatuas de los dioses’, *IGM*, 246-48; 1-7, 13, 23-28, 36-48).

This time the poet, far from the fog –or, if I may say so, far from the cave and still with his wings-, appears finally illuminated by the light, although he has banished completely neither the prison nor the darkness, since he is only under the charming white light of the moon –a little heavenly body, after all- in an autumnal evening. Consequently, he continues to be obscure and sad, just in the same way that the statues of pagan gods, which are now obscure, fallen and mutilated, dream with melancholy of remote and magnificent ages when there was place neither for decadence nor for a degenerating human race. Indeed, life was then not obscure nor men and women were “imprisonable”; on the contrary, the earth was inhabited by titans and heroes, and the “flame” by means of which human beings honoured gods ascended energetically towards Uranus. The poet, on account of being precisely a poet, still glimpses in heaven their blinding faces, and who knows if we are saved from their anger thanks to the one who was abducted to heaven by Zeus, that is to say, by Ganymedes²⁸.

Cernuda will proclaim time after time, in parallel to his confessions of materialism, the gospel of Uranus and, as a consequence and much more than other poets, he will transform the wings into the centre –into the image, once again- of his poetic exaltation²⁹. He is necessarily “shocked” by the image of a dead bird whose wings are already motionless, and the inquiring reader may legitimately wonder if the image is either the result of his literary baggage or the result of a personal common experience which afterwards has been “poeticized”. At any rate, I am rather interested in his insistence on the flight, the light, the light being “flooded” by shadows and the setting sun waiting for the dawn, not only because I am obviously conditioned by the line I have followed from the very beginning of my analysis, but also because I know by intuition –and I beg my reader’s pardon for this slip of academic rigour- that it is thanks to the fallen souls of Plato’s *Phaedrus* that Cernuda was able to understand and accept his limitations –in fact, the human race’s ones-, but he imagined at the same time the hope of a day after day-ascent –and who knows if even after his death-, when he will surrender again to the Nature as Mother, who is always both mysterious and inscrutable:

“Sobre la tierra gris de la colina,/ Bajo las hojas nuevas del espino,/ Al pie de la cancela donde pasan/ Jóvenes estudiantes en toga roja,/ Rota estaba tu ala blanca y negra,/ Inmóvil en la muerte.../ Aquella forma inerte fue un día el vuelo³⁰/ Extasiado en la luz,

²⁸ The confirmation of this Romantic melancholy –and in the terms in which it is presented by my analysis- will be found in the poem ‘Las Ruinas’ (*PC*, 323-26).

²⁹ Regarding this point, see e.g.: Aguirre, J. M. “El cuarto y las alas en la poesía de Luis Cernuda”. *Actas del 1er. Congreso Internacional sobre Luis Cernuda* (1902-1963). Sevilla: UIMP, 1990, pp. 121-134.

³⁰ Remember, for instance, this brief passage of Plato’s *Phaedrus* 246 d-e: ‘The natural function of the wing is to soar upwards and carry that which is heavy up to the place where dwells the race of the gods. More than any other thing that pertains to the body it partakes of the nature of the divine. But the divine is beauty, wisdom, goodness, and all such qualities’ (Πέφυκεν ἡ πτεροῦ δύναμις τὸ ἐμβριθεὲς ἄγειν ἄνω μετεωρίζουσα ἢ τὸ τῶν θεῶν γένος οἰκεῖ, κεκοινώνηκε δέ πη μάλιστα τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ θεοῦ ψυχὴ, τὸ δὲ θεῖον καλόν, σοφόν, ἀγαθόν, καὶ πᾶν ὅτι τοιοῦτον -translated by Fowler, H. N. *Loeb Classical Library*. London: William Heinemann Ltd., Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971).

el canto ardiente/ De amanecer, la paz nocturna/ Del nido allá en la cima./ Inútil ya todo parece, tal parece/ La pena del amor cuando se ha ido,/ El sufrir por lo bello que envejece, El afán de la luz que anegan sombras./ ... / Ahora, silencio. Duerme. Olvida todo./ Nutre de ti la muerte que en ti anida./ Esa quietud del ala, como un sol poniente./ Acaso es de la vida una forma más alta” (‘Pájaro muerto’, *LN, PC*, 312-13; 1-6, 9-16, 21-4)³¹.

This review of the theme of wings in Luis Cernuda’s poetry prepares us to leap towards the Light, after having left behind for evermore –that is to say, down in the real world- the darkness which is inappropriate for an increasingly “uranic” life. And, notwithstanding, the Sevillian poet’s literary work, like all the greatest ones, is complex and refuses to be simplified. The thread that I have followed till now in my exposition has shown him so “winged” and “anamnetic” that we could suspect that both his despondency and nihilist-temptation have disappeared definitively, but before the final ascension a brief stop in order to examine his hostility to memory, shadow and oblivion –to the extent of becoming completely dispossessed- will be highly revealing, once more, of that tension between reality and desire which defines him so well³²:

“Vivo un solo deseo, / Un afán claro, unánime; / Afán de amor y olvido (*Pr.P*, VII, *PC*, 112, 12-14); No quiero, triste espíritu, volver / Por los lugares que cruzó mi llanto, / ... / No quiero recordar / Un instante feliz entre tormentos; / Gozo o pena, es igual, / Todo es triste al volver. / ... / No, no quisiera volver, / Sino morir aún más, / Arrancar una sombra, / Olvidar un olvido” (XI de *DHO*, *PC*, 209-10, 1-2, 5-8, 13-16).

As seen, even in these moments of radical nihilism, Cernuda has not wanted to disregard the “shadows”; it would not be logical, however, that the one who so many times has been seduced by Plato and his images –as well as by Western Platonism- anchored himself in these shadows, unless he betrayed something which is essential to his poetic personality. Indeed, Cernuda’s intention is not to annihilate the shadows in order to know the pleasure, perhaps an even darker one, of Nothingness. Darkness must accept the light and open itself to receive it, just in the same way that a copy corresponds to –accepts, if I may say so- its original. The poem we shall read now tells us that Cernuda will suffer a true Platonic accident: he is wounded by Light but he accepts this fact not in order to disappear in the darkness of his death or grave but to transform himself into light³³, that is to say, a sort of genuine self-redemption from a dark previous status or, what it would be the same, the definitive release from the cave:

³¹ It is worth comparing it to this other poetic exaltation, which is expressed as well by means of the “wings” and which becomes a call to freedom: “Siendo joven, bastante tímido y demasiado apasionado, lo que le pedía a la música eran alas para escapar de aquellas gentes extrañas que me rodeaban, de las costumbres extrañas que me imponían, y quién sabe si hasta de mí mismo” (‘La música’, *O*, *PC*, 585). And with clear biblical connotations: “Bajo el anochecer inmenso, / ... , iba / Como un ángel que arrojan / De aquél edén nativo, / ... / Lo que en la luz fue impulso, las alas, / Antes candor erguido, / A la espalda pesaban sordamente. / ... / Ellas fueron sus alas en tiempos de alegría, / ... / Pesa, pesa el deseo recordado; / Fuerza joven quisieras para alzar nuevamente, / Con fango, lágrimas, odio, injusticia, / La imagen del amor hasta el cielo, / La imagen del amor en la luz pura” (*DHO* VII, *PC*, 205-6; 1-2, 7-10, 12-16).

³² Concerning this point, see e.g.: Bruton, K. J. “Luis Cernuda and the Poetic of Desire”. *Ibero-Romania* (Tübingen), nums. 27-28 (1988), pp. 61-78 y Ronquillo, V. “Cernuda: el amor mueve al mundo”. *El Nacional* (México D. F.), 3-I-84, 3^a. Sección, p. 4.

³³ Whenever materialism, however, wins a battle regarding the poet’s constant oscillation between the earth and the idea, his transmutation is due to reality on account of its very presence: “Pero al niño no se

“Yo no te había visto; / Miraba los animalillos gozando bajo el sol verdeante. / Despreocupado de los árboles iracundos, / Cuando sentí una herida que abrió la luz en mi; / El dolor enseñaba / Cómo una forma opaca, copiando luz ajena, Parece luminosa. / Tan luminosa, / Que mis horas perdidas, yo mismo, / Quedamos redimidos de la sombra, / para no ser ya más / Que memoria de luz” (‘Quisiera saber por qué esta muerte’, *Pl.P*, *PC*, 183-4;16-27).

Completely transformed by light-wounds, he cannot but receive the most “uranic” inspiration, the Muse Urania’s inspiration; to sum up: the beautiful end of a long walk since gradually and with the help of *poíesis* –which is also *philosophía*- has known how to open the pores of his skin to the extent of, after becoming endowed with wings like the souls of the palinode of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, taking flight towards a true life:

“Es el bosque de plátanos, los troncos altos, lisos, / Como columnas blancas pautando el horizonte / Que el sol de mediodía asiste y dora, / Al pie del agua clara, a cuyo margen / Alientan dulcemente violetas esquivas. / Ella está inmóvil. Cubre aéreo / El ropaje azulado su hermosura virgen; / La estrella diamantina allá en la frente / Arisca tal la nieva, y en los ojos / La luz que no conoce sombra alguna. / La mano embelesada que alza un dedo / Atenta a la armonía de los astros, / El silencio restaura sobre el mundo / Domando el corazón, y la tormenta / No turba el cielo augusto de su frente. / Musa la más divina de las nueve, / Del orden bello virgen creadora, / Radiante inspiradora de los números, / A cuyo influjo las almas se levantan / De abandono mortal en un batir de alas. / Conforta el conocer que en ella mora / la calma vasta y lúcida del cielo / Sobre el dolor informe de la vida, / Sosegando el espíritu a su acento / Y al concierto celeste suspendido. / Si en otros días di curso enajenado / A la pasión inútil, su llanto largo y fiebre, / Hoy busco tu sagrado, tu amor, a quien modera / La mano sobre el pecho, ya sola musa mía, / Tú, rosa del silencio, tú, luz de la memoria” (‘Urania’, *CQEA*, *PC*, 328-9; 1-30).

Therefore, in order to receive Urania properly, Nature changes itself into a golden temple which is adorned with violets; she is a star, she is light without shadows, creates a cosmos –that is to say, an order- which is ruled by the numbers she inspires; she subdues passion, establishes silence, rouses memory and, above all, endows us with wings. Where is now that previous fog!?

I have wanted to reserve for the end the apotheosis of Light. Platonic icons have had a double effect upon the poet: he has understood and hopes the others will understand as well. He has only one weapon: poetry. Images, however, have an unquestionable didactic power and sometimes they even succeed in representing universal fears and desires. Desires for light, fears of darkness! One of Plato’s legacies was the dark cave with its prisoners and shadows, but also the souls which became imprisoned in human bodies and the subsequent desire to fly. To sum up: an archetype which is more than two thousand years old, and a great deal of poets and writers who, as Cernuda and without copying it *verbatim*, have relied on it and continued to develop it:

“Cuando aquellas mañanas tu cuerpo se tendía desnudo bajo el cielo, una fuerza conjunta, etérea y animal, sutílización y exaltación de la pesadez humana por virtud de la luz, iba penetrándole con violencia irresistible. Con su presencia se acallaban los

le antojaba extraño... aquel don precioso de sentirse en acorde con la vida y que por eso mismo ésta le desbordara, transportándole y transmutándole” (‘Mañanas de verano’, *O*, *PC*, 564).

poderes elementales de que el cuerpo es cifra, el agua, el aire, la tierra, el fuego, abrazados entonces en proporción y armonía perfectas. Toda forma parecía recogerse bajo el nombre y todo nombre suscitar la forma, con aquella exactitud prístina de una creación: lo exterior y lo interior se correspondían y ajustaban como entre los amantes el deseo del uno a la entrega del otro³⁴. Y tu cuerpo escuchaba la luz. Si algo puede atestiguar en esta tierra la existencia de un poder divino, es la luz; y un instinto remoto lleva al hombre a reconocer por ella esa divinidad posible, aunque el fundamental sosiego que la luz difunde traiga consigo angustia fundamental equivalente, ya que en definitiva la muerte aparece entonces como la privación de la luz. Mas siendo Dios la luz, el conocimiento imperfecto de ella que a través del cuerpo obtiene el espíritu en esta vida, ¿no ha de perfeccionarse en Dios a través de la muerte? Como los objetos puestos al fuego se consumen, transformándose en llama ellos mismos, así el cuerpo en la muerte, para transformarse en luz e incorporarse a la luz que es Dios, donde no habrá ya alteración de luz y sombra, sino luz total e infalible. Y cuando así no sea, aun tu cuerpo desnudo al sol de esta tierra recogió y atesoró por su seno oscuro, en consolación desesperada, partículas suficientes de aquella divinidad ilusoria, hasta iluminar con ellas la muerte, si ésta ha de ser para el hombre definitiva” (*‘La luz’*, *O, PC*, 603).

As I said before, verticality predominates in this “uranic” geometry. There is certainly an inferior world, the world of matter –for instance human bodies which, in spite of being beautiful, are heavy-, and there is also another superior one, heaven, which both makes subtle and extols matter. It is a sort of light which in fact releases us from ourselves, from our heavy body. Fire, air, water and earth continue to be the four roots or elements of the universe and, as a consequence, they are the roots of our bodies which were understood as matter by Empedocles’ presocratic wisdom. Nevertheless, L. Cernuda’s idealism subordinates them to a higher Light, thus establishing an harmony which, without its help –Light’s help-, could not exist. The inferior world has been saved but, at the same time, the poet disregards any kind of “dictatorship” of the four elements on account of their overwhelming power, so that name and form correspond to one another, just in the same way that the lover’s desire corresponds to the beloved’s consent. Light, of course, is not a dictator; it is divine and, therefore, everlasting. There is always light and there will ever be, and all our fears –needless to say: “dark” fears- should disappear as a result of its presence. Notwithstanding, it is not likely to happen, since in the inferior world, which is not divine, darkness keeps on appearing, even the worst one: death³⁵. God or Light and, in their turn, life on earth and darkness become now opposite poles, but, as said before, there is always light in the physical world in spite of being a simple copy of the divine one. Can we understand it? Yes, we can because we have another image such as all kinds of physical elements transforming themselves into fire, into flame and light emerging from darkness, that is to say, another sort of stratagem that Nature offers to us in order to

³⁴ Cf. with other verses in which he expresses his desire to merge with his beloved: “Estabas en el teatro de verano... Sentado entre los suyos, como tú entre los tuyos, no lejos de ti le descubriste, para suscitar con su presencia, desde el fondo de tu ser, esa atracción ineludible, gozosa y dolorosa, por la cual el hombre, identificado más que nunca consigo mismo, deja también de pertenecerse a sí mismo. Un pudor extraño, defensa quizá de la personalidad a riesgo de enajenarse, tiraba hacia dentro de ti hacia aquella criatura con la que no sabías cómo deseabas confundirte” (*‘El enamorado’*, *O, PC*, 576); “Sabes bien, recuerdo de siglos, / Cómo el amor es lucha / Donde se muerden dos cuerpos iguales” (*‘Quisiera saber por qué esta muerte’*, *PLP, PC*, 183; 13-15) and “No le busques afuera. Él ya no puede / Ser distinto de ti, ni tú tampoco / Ser distinto de él: unidos vais, / Formando un solo ser de dos impulsos, / Como al pájaro solo hacen dos alas” (*‘El amigo’*, *VSEV, PC*, 387; 31-35).

³⁵ Concerning this point, see e.g.: Bartolomé Pons, E. “Tiempo, amor y muerte en el lenguaje poético de Luis Cernuda”. *Ínsula* (Madrid), number. 415 (June 1981), pp. 1-12.

conceive a final Light triumphing over darkness. Should we call it God? Will it be total and infallible? Perhaps not but, as far as Cernuda is concerned, the dark bosom of a naked human body under the sunlight -like a cave which is finally entered by light- is enough to give us clear signs of an illusion –or brightness in the end- with which we can illuminate death, if “death must be definitive for human beings”.

After this brief analysis of Luis Cernuda’s poetry, by means of which I have intended to reveal the Platonic nature of his repeated “shadows”, “lights”, “prisons” and “wings” –and this does not mean that the Sevillian poet copies *verbatim* the Platonic icons in which in my opinion he has found his inspiration-, I would like to add only that he knows perfectly well the risks of fixing an image. Indeed, as in the case of God for some people, images may be an illusion too, but, in spite of this, Luis Cernuda must think that his naked body under the sunlight of Poetry receives enough particles of illusion to illuminate life in this case, “if life must be full of hope for human beings”.