

Miguel de Unamuno and Heraclitus: from ‘The Eternal Elegy’ (‘La elegía eterna’) to ‘The Cut Flower’(‘La flor tronchada’)¹

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Abstract: The aim of this brief article is to demonstrate and analyze the influence of Heraclitus’s thought on some of the poems written by Miguel de Unamuno, in particular ‘La elegía eterna’ and ‘La flor tronchada’. At times –as in ‘La elegía eterna’– Heraclitus merely serves as a sort of a walking stick, an aid to his efforts to poetically reveal his anxieties. On other occasions –as in ‘La flor tronchada’– he genuinely needs Heraclitus’s philosophy to illustrate his view of human life and its relation to God as unending warfare.

Key words: Miguel de Unamuno’s poems, Heraclitus, Greek philosophy, classical tradition, The eternal Elegy, The Cut Flower, La elegía eterna, La flor tronchada

Since Miguel de Unamuno was a Professor of Classical Greek Language at the University of Salamanca, the impact on his work and more specifically on some of his poems of the thought of Heraclitus should not come as a surprise to anyone. It is evident that his unquestionable ability to read this author's extant fragments in the original made him a privileged interpreter of them. Furthermore, if he considered them worthy of being integrated into the poetic transcription of his anxieties, it must be because either he identified with them or –to make a less bold leap of logic– he often noticed that they were very useful for his purposes. My contribution will end with the analysis of ‘The Cut Flower’ (‘La flor tronchada’ -1899), but before approaching it I would like to dedicate my attention to another poem entitled ‘The Eternal Elegy’ (‘La elegía eterna’ - 1899-1900). I do this because it seems the most appropriate way to show to what extent the relationship with the classics, even in the case of a professional scholar of the Greek tradition like Unamuno, is always as diverse as it is biased. In other words, the fact that he drew upon the thought of Heraclitus does not mean that Unamuno always assumed his wisdom, but rather that the Greek philosopher was for him occasionally a true source of inspiration –as in the case of ‘The Cut Flower’– while on other occasions he merely served as a poetic prop, and such use is occasionally suggestive of a tremendous distance between them. Let us read first, then, Unamuno’s plaintive song in ‘The Eternal Elegy’ (‘La elegía eterna’):

“Oh time, time, cruel tyrant! / Oh terrible mystery! / The past does not come back, / does not return any longer / old story! / Old, yes, but always the same, / frightening! / Always present... / ... / The undone conscience, / of the succession of time / what is left? / What of the light if the mirror broke? / ... / Fierce Saturn, / oh Time, Time! / Lord of the World, / of your children executioner, / of our slavery supreme tie! / Once more the complaint, / once more the eternal plaintive song / that never ends, / about how everything sinks and nothing remains, / that time passes away / irreparable! / Irreparable! / Irreparable! / Do you hear it? / Irreparable! / Irreparable! Yes, never forget it! / Life? / Life is to die constantly, / is like the river / in which the same waters / never settle / and it is always the same. / In the glass of the fluent lymphs / are reflected the poplars of its bank / which on the lymphs

¹ Unamuno, 1997; all the quotations correspond to this edition and the numbers in brackets refer to it. Article published in *Homenatge a Montserrat Jufresa* (E. Vintró; F. Mestre; Gómez, P, eds.). Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, Col·lecció Homenatges, nº 38, 2012, 101-116.

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tremble / and not even for a moment this trembling image / is supported by the same water. / What is the past? Nothing! / Nothing is also the future you dream of / and the instant that passes away / mysterious transition of emptiness / to emptiness again! / It is a rushing stream which runs / from nothingness to nothingness. / Every sweet hope / once touched / as if by magic or enchantment / becomes a memory, / a memory that moves away / and finally gets lost, / gets lost forever. Oh Time, Time! / My soul repeats, yes, repeats / the same old stuff, / the sad litany, / the endless dirge, / the old elegy, / about how time runs away / and the stream does not go up its course. / The ouch! with which complaints the one who suffers / an old grief, / is always the same, / the old moan; / our comfort is to repeat it / in a constant rosary, like the rain / once and another, and a hundred times... / Oh Time, Time, / cruel tyrant! / Oh terrible mystery! / Inflexible rack of the human spirit! / How poor are the words...! / In order to talk to us about the thirst of eternity / our language is not enough, / is very miserable... / Terrible thirst, / thirst that withers forever the soul / which contemplates the ocean / immense ocean! / which our thirst does not quench, / only fills the view, / immense ocean of bitter waves! / Images? / They hinder the moan / the deep nakedness, / they drown in nicely-turned phrases / the lonely deep and strong note... / But images, yes, diverse strains / which attenuate the melodic motive... / ... / It is the elegy that silence intones, / silence, the language of what is eternal, / while the eternity / lives as a slave of time... / Did you break your watch to pieces? It is not enough! / Go to bed... this is something reliable, / sunk forever / in deep sleep, / you will have conquered time, / your implacable enemy! / Yesterday, today and tomorrow! / Chain of pain / with links of anxiety... / With your twitching hands you catch / the horse's mane, / you don't want to let it go / and he runs, and runs more / he runs frantically, the more you hold tight / with a more crazed gallop! / Do not mutter to me like that / fierce Saturn! / draw to a close at once, your hours / implacable enemy! / cease the constant grinding / stop right now! / I want to sleep the sleep of time, / I want finally, having surrendered, / to melt into eternity / where there are yesterday, today and tomorrow, / a single mode of existence / alien to time passing; / where the sweet memory joins hope / and fuses with her; where in a calm lake become eternal / of the rivers flowing by / their never motionless nymphs, / where the soul rests / and finally has a comforting bath / where Saturn dies; / where time is won".

“¡Oh tiempo, tiempo, /duro tirano! / ¡Oh terrible misterio! / El pasado no vuelve, / nunca ya torna / ¡antigua historia! /Antigua, sí, pero la misma siempre, / ¡aterradora! / Siempre presente... / ... / La conciencia deshecha, / de la serie del tiempo / ¿qué es lo que queda? / ¿Qué de la luz si se rompió el espejo? / ... / Feroz Saturno, / ¡oh Tiempo, Tiempo! / ¡Señor del Mundo, / de tus hijos verdugo, / de nuestra esclavitud lazo supremo! / Una vez más la queja, / una vez más el sempiterno canto / que nunca acaba, / de cómo todo se hunde y nada queda, / que el tiempo pasa / ¡irreparable! / ¡Irreparable! ¡Irreparable! ¿Lo oyes? / ¡Irreparable! / ¡Irreparable!, sí, nunca lo olvides! / ¿Vida? La vida es un morir continuo, / es como el río / en que unas mismas aguas / jamás se asientan / y es siempre el mismo. / En el cristal de las fluyentes linfas / se retratan los álamos del margen / que en ellas tiemblan / y ni un momento a la temblona imagen / la misma agua sustenta. / ¿Qué es el pasado? ¡Nada! / Nada es tampoco el porvenir que sueñas / y el instante que pasa / transición misteriosa del vacío / ¡al vacío otra vez! / Es torrente que corre / de la nada a la nada. / Toda dulce esperanza / no bien la tocas / cual por magia o encanto / en recuerdo se torna, / recuerdo que se aleja / y al fin se pierde, / se pierde para siempre. ¡Oh Tiempo, Tiempo! / Repite, mi alma, sí, vuelve y repite / la cantinela, / la letanía triste, / la inacabable endecha, / la elegía de siempre, / de cómo el tiempo corre / y no remonta curso la corriente. / El ¡ay! con que se queja el que padece / de antigua pena, / es siempre el mismo, / el lamento de siempre; / repetirlo es consuelo, / en rosario incesante, como lluvia / una vez y otra

y ciento... / ¡Oh Tiempo, Tiempo, / duro tirano! / ¡Oh terrible misterio! / Potro inflexible del humano espíritu! / ¿Qué pobres las palabras...! / La sed de eternidad para decirnos / el lenguaje no basta, / es muy mezquino... / Terrible sed, / sed que marchita para siempre el alma / que el océano contempla / ¡inmenso océano! / que nuestra sed no apaga, / sólo la vista llena, / ¡océano inmenso de ondas amargas! / ¿Imágenes? Estorban del lamento / la desnudez profunda, / ahogan en floeos / la solitaria nota honda y robusta... / Pero imágenes, sí, acordes varios / que el motivo melódico atenúen... / ... / Es la elegía que el silencio entona, / el silencio, lenguaje de lo eterno, / mientras esclava vive / la eternidad del tiempo... / ... / ¿Hiciste añicos el reló? ¡No basta! / Acuéstate a dormir... es lo seguro, / ¡hundido para siempre / en el sueño profundo, / habrás vencido al tiempo, / tu implacable enemigo! / Ayer, hoy y mañana! / Cadena del dolor /con eslabones de ansia... / Con las manos crispadas te agarras / a la crin del caballo, / no quieres soltarla / y él corre y más corre, / corre desbocado / cuanto tú más la aprietas / ¡con más loco paso! / No así me masculles en tu boca / ¡feroz Saturno! / acaba, acaba presto, ¡de tus horas / implacable enemigo! / cesa el moler continuo / ¡acaba ya! / Quiero dormir del tiempo, / quiero por fin rendido / derretirme en lo eterno / donde son el ayer, hoy y mañana, / un solo modo / desligado del tiempo que pasa; / donde el recuerdo dulce / se junta a la esperanza / y con ella se funde; / donde en lago sereno se eternizan / de los ríos que pasan / las nunca quietas linfas, / donde el alma descansa / sumida al fin en baño de consuelo / donde Saturno muere; / donde es vencido el tiempo” (pp. 215-218).

That the answer to the central question of the poem is inspired by Heraclitus seems unquestionable³. Images have been very useful to visualize philosophical ideologies –let us consider, for instance, the significance of the image of the cave in Plato’s philosophy– but Heraclitus’s creativity, if we were to compare Plato and Heraclitus in this field, is not inferior to that of the great Athenian philosopher. In effect, everything appears to indicate that the image of the river, of the fluent course of its waters along with the permanence of the river as such, was one of the visual walking sticks on which Heraclitus rested. He thus proclaimed the greatness of *Phýsis* –that is, of Nature or Life sprouting spontaneously (*phýo*)– conceived as the constant change caused by a war of opposites or a multiple opposition of contraries⁴. These, moreover, are not doomed to mutual destruction because there is a superior *Lógos* holding them in harmony and assuming them as the constitutive parts of Its essence. Unamuno develops the ancient model by paying attention not to the persons entering the stream of a river but to the trembling image of the poplars reflected in it, so that the sensation of instability, a true analogy of life, heightens as a result of the endless change of the reflecting base. Let us recall, however, the Greek philosopher’s words:

. “Heraclitus says... that everything flows and nothing remains fixed, and comparing all that exists with the stream of a river, he says that you could not enter twice the same river” (λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει καὶ ποταμοῦ ὄρηι ἀπεικάζων τὰ ὄντα λέγει ὡς δις ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης -A 6 DK; the translations are mine following the edition by H. Diels-W.Kranz. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, vol. 1, 6th edn. Berlin: Weidmann, 1951, rpr. Dublin / Zurich, 1966).

³ García Blanco, 1965, p. 110, already mentioned this influence regarding this poem in the chapter “El mundo clásico de Unamuno” (“The Classical World in Unamuno”).

⁴ Here is a clear example: “The god: day / night, summer / winter, war / peace, satiety / hunger” (ὁ θεὸς ἡμέρη εὐφρόνη, χειμῶν θέρος, πόλεμος εἰρήνη, κόρος λιμός -B 67 DK).

. “We enter and we do not enter the same rivers, we are and we are not” (ποταμοῖς τοῖς αὐτοῖς ἐμβαίνομέν τε καὶ οὐκ ἐμβαίνομεν, εἶμεν τε καὶ οὐκ εἶμεν -B 49a DK; *idem*).

. “Over those entering the same rivers now some waters now others” (ποταμοῖσι τοῖσιν αὐτοῖσιν ἐμβαίνουσιν ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ -B 12 DK; *idem*)⁵.

Nevertheless, Heraclitus’s reference to the supremacy of a sole harmonizing *Lógos*⁶ demonstrates the positive and joyful nature of his philosophical “faith”, ruling out any interpretation of his thought as a plaintive song about the fugacity of human life, eternal owing to the everlasting nature of its change or death. It is not easy, then, to assume such a philosophy –death seen as the extinction of our “ego” is not seductive– and Unamuno’s choice in his use of the elegiac mood proves this clearly. Rather than revealing the professor and thinker who can count on the help of a philosopher whom he understands and certainly admires, the poem shows man in his fragility, sharing anxiety and desperation with other human beings, although this comradeship implies in fact a true betrayal of the thought of the thinker on which he now rests⁷.

Indeed, for a true follower of Heraclitus’s philosophy, time can never be an oppressive tyrant, a frightening mystery or the rack on which the human spirit is tortured, but rather the epiphany of a vital and uninterrupted stream, a certain guarantee of our living in constant flow and change. Time is not an old story already disconnected from our conscience as if it were a ray of light running away because it does not find any mirror to be reflected in. The past, for its part, is a meaningless word; it is not a sign (*sêma*) of the only real story, that of the present that the constant and endless walking of life does not permit to be segmented. To sum up: there is neither a fierce Saturn who makes us slaves nor an executioner who kills us. But there is one Being, which is a changing Presence enveloping us and welcoming us. Heraclitus does not complain because, change notwithstanding, he always feels Life, wherein there is no hole through which Life itself can disappear and if, by analogy, he considers It a river, this is not in order to underline the trembling fugacity and instability of its flowing waters but to emphasize the fact of its being always the same in spite of the flow.

Needless to say, Unamuno understands Heraclitus, but at the moment the elegiac mood presides over him; he segments time into “the past”, “the instant passing away” and “the future that will fade away” and he surrenders to the Emptiness –but considering it paradoxically a part of nature– from which and towards which the very Emptiness or Nothingness makes the most absurd and hopeless journey. In order to not contradict the laws of Physics, the waters of a river always flow downward and never flow up their course, but the elegy is sad, it is a litany or rosary of laments, said again and again, affording only meagre consolation. If human beings understood the meaning of Heraclitus’s –in fact prophetic– words, they would know that they are themselves another epiphany to the always living fire that now burns, now extinguishes⁸, but very

⁵ On the fragments by Heraclitus, commentary and interpretation, see among others: Montes, 2011; Gianvittorio, 2010; Palau i Fabre, 2007; Mouraviev, 2006; Marcovich, 2001; García Calvo, 1999; Diano, 1994; García Quintela, 1992; Robinson, 1987; Conche, 1986; Kahn, 1981; Colli, 1980 and Bollack, 1972.

⁶ “Although this reason (*lógos*) always exists, human beings become incapable of understanding it before and after hearing it... In effect, although everything happens in accordance with this reason...” (τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδ’ ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε... –B 1 DK).

⁷ On Unamuno as a poet, see, for example: Blasco, 2004; Federici, 1974 and Alvar, 1964.

⁸ “This world, the same for all things, was not made by a god or a man but there was always, there is and there will be an always living fire which burns and extinguishes according to measure” (κόσμον τόνδε,

often they do not believe in their own eternity, and take refuge in plaintive words, insufficient and miserable, to express what becomes then a thirst not even to be quenched by an ocean. Heraclitus proclaims that it is not possible to avoid the mutability of Life, and thus the great Unamuno's betrayal of the ancient philosopher in this poem is to advise human beings to enter a deep sleep, a sort of definitive ontological lethargy, which will permit them to join eternity, thus suppressing their "yesterday, today and tomorrow". But this is not enough; he also wants stop –i. e., kill– the flowing course of the river and bathe in the unmoving lake where the flow of new waters will never run over us. This would undoubtedly be the definitive comfort or victory over the fierce Saturn, over Time.

Well then, from betrayal we pass now to agreement because 'The Cut Flower'⁹ proves that Heraclitus's thought was a great support for Unamuno in his effort to illustrate a non-peaceful idea of human existence, and above all, of God, thus leaving aside other more loving and provident views of Divinity difficult to adjust to his tragic sense of life, his existentialist desperation. Let us read, then, the poem:

“As the earth with the curved plough / so the bosom of human company / shatter without frailty opening furrows, / although the cut and wounded flowers / fall into the deep tomb / and there, rotted, serve as fertilizer, / or as nourishment for the gnawing earthworm / which eats little roots ignoring / that living the prison which winter is / a life of love waits him and a heavenly light. / Turn upside-down the clods, burying / those enjoying the sun, in the dark, / and in order to be kissed by the breeze / in turn those buried arise / in the most hidden bosoms of the earth. / When, tired, the ploughman stops / turning upside-down the earth, / sows the grain and entrusts it to Heaven, / to the mild sun and the rich rain. / So, when human company shows / its shattered bosoms / and its wounded flank / sow seeds of the Idea in it / and they will sprout lush. Those thrown by you over the teeming field / of the orderly still society / rot infertile, / or take root alone / and die under the burning light / which gives both death and life, / or are devoured by gluttonous birds, / those living on the grain / sown zealously by an alien hand. / The seed in the furrows spread / will soon delight the eyes, / an undulating lake of fresh vegetables, / splashed with red poppies / on which the breeze softly slipping / tempers the drying effect of the sun. / The ear becomes golden at its time, / its juice thickens in the form of abundant grain, / it is cut by the scythe / and once ground in the stone mill / it gives us the flower of the bread. / Dust of substantial flour / the mature ideas will also give us / when after the reaping of sharp study / from the still field where they were born / are taken to the deafening mill, / of intense popular passions / so that, later on, handled / with sour ferment harden as bread, / and with the ferment of a firm faith / become life-giving bread. / The idea imprisoned in the glass / of a logical husk / does not give people any nourishment / that in the struggle serves to sustain them. / When on the field where the ripe corn waves / resting after fertile work / you will cut the bread of life, / a food prepared both / by

τὸν αὐτὸν ἀπάντων, οὔτε τις θεῶν οὔτε ἀνθρώπων ἐποίησεν, ἀλλ’ ἦν ἀεὶ καὶ ἔστιν καὶ ἔσται πῦρ αἰεζῶσον, ἀπτόμενον μέτρα καὶ ἀποσβεννύμενον μέτρα -B 30 DK).

⁹ A poem that Unamuno loved very much as told to Joan Maragall in a letter dated on the 6th June 1900: “Now I am going to publish poems (three of them, “The Cut Flower’... have been already published by me in reviews)... It must be father’s love but I have not been so fond of anything as my poems. After my novel *Peace in war*, above all its end, I had not poured as much soul as I have poured in them” (“Ahora voy a publicar poesías (tres de ellas, “La flor tronchada”... las he publicado ya en revistas)... Será una debilidad de padre, pero en nada he puesto tanto cariño como en mis poesías. Después de mi novela *Paz en la guerra*, sobre todo su final, no había vertido tanta alma como en ellas he vertido” quoted by García Blanco, 1954, p. 19).

nature and art, / raise it towards the serene vault of heaven / filled with vital air, / as in a liturgy of pious affection, / and with your heart overflowing with confidence / bless the Lord; / bless the Father who gives us our livelihood, / the Father who irrigates our spirit / with water of piety and comfort; / bless the Lord / who distributes the rain and the hail-storm, / dews and storms / lukewarm encouragement or prolonged dry season; / bless the Lord, / eternal Source of mysterious piety / who distributes among us satiety and poverty, / reaper of men / in order to harvest their souls by cutting them / when at their time / and with struggles and works / they succeed in giving, well sieved, seed of deeper life. / Up there in the high heaven where / like clouds / set the presents that rain both for the impious man / and the pious one, / our poor piety has neither seat / nor has human justice reached it . / There justice and compassion are only one thing, / high eternal justice, / holy mystery of fathomless bottom. / Obey him with sincere and clean faith, / and when you open the furrows with the plough / turning upside-down the human beings, / when you break their compact union, / put yourselves in the hands of the all-powerful, / of the Father of Love, Sun of the souls / who creates destroying / and destroys creating, / Sovereign ploughman of the worlds / who takes the plough handle of Fate, / of eternal Justice / who like a powerful millstone grinds / the order that human beings proclaim / serving the mysterious law/ that for us keeps vigil over its foundation. / Life is fight and the plough is an arm, / an arm is the plough of the hateful idea. / Therefore, in order to fight with obstinacy, / without hate and without moral softness, / sympathizing with the damage we will cause / cutting flowers when opening the furrow, / we ask you to give us with your generous hand / Faith, Hope and Love, / Oh Father of Love, Sun of the souls, / Sovereign ploughman of the worlds / who takes the plough handle of Fate, / who creates destroying / and destroys creating, / and like a powerful millstone grinds / the order that human beings proclaim! / Love in order to fight, Sun of the souls, / receive those who fall down cut /dead in the flower without having given fruit, / and give us courage to open it, / Sovereign ploughman of the worlds! Let us love those who have been won / winning them in the fight with love! / When torn by my plough / the poor flower of the field dies / let the perfume that exhales / and with which gives fragrance to the iron that wounds it / fill my soul with brotherly piety; / let our fight be serenely settled, / like a life duty, / purged of any conscious resentment, / on a peaceful bed! / You, Lord, settled / the rotations and revolutions of the heavenly spheres / on a robust stillness; / you gave eternity as a foundation / to the unceasing course of the hours, / the solemn silence / to the serene echoes and dins / with which the air resounds, / and you turned the dark / into a sleeping bottomless sea without shore / a sea on which roll the waves of your light. / You, Sovereign Lord, / eternal Father of Love, Sun of the souls, / with the discordant collisions / of the persistent fight for the existence / interweave the connection / of cosmic harmony, / drawing calm from the hectic course, / silence from the din of battle, / eternity from fleeing time. / Love, eternal Love, / give us fruitful love towards those who have been won, / unite us in the fight of opponents / settling in peace our battles, / battles for peace! / Surrendered on the ground, / let us bless our lot when we die; / from the very endeavor of the battle / let the fighter's compassion sprout; / let us accept as the law of conscience / your highest order / to fight without truce or rest, / raising in a male manner fate / to the category of inner freedom of divine order. / Accept our prayers, / Father of eternal Love, Sun of the souls, / primordial origin of the battle / who sustains and animates the heavenly spheres , / origin of the persistent fight / that in high peace culminates, / just as from peace also initiates, / Sovereign Ploughman of the worlds / who takes the plough handle of Fate, / tireless mower of the souls, / who in the sifting of fights and works / obtains, Lord, / from a harvest of rotten substance / rich seed of deeper life, / life of eternal Love!.

“Como a la tierra con el corvo arado/así el seno a la humana compañía / desgarrad sin flaqueza abriendo surcos, / aunque tronchadas las heridas flores / caigan a la honda huesa/y allí, podridas, sirvan para abono, / o de alimento al roedor gusano / que carcome raicillas ignorante/de que al dejar la cárcel del invierno / vida de amor le espera y luz celeste. / Revolved los terrones, soterrando / los que gozan del sol, en las tinieblas, / y a recibir el beso de la brisa / a su vez suban los que están sepultos / de la tierra en los senos más ocultos. / Cuando concluye el labrador cansado / de remover la tierra, / el grano siembra y lo confía al cielo, / al sol benigno y a la rica lluvia. / Así, cuando sus senos desgarrados / muestre y el flanco herido / la compañía humana / sembrad semillas de la Idea en ella / y brotarán lozanas. Las que echéis en el campo apelmazado / de la ordenada sociedad tranquila / se pudren infecundas, / o prenden solitarias / para morir a la ardorosa lumbre/que da la muerte como la vida, / o son pasto de pájaros glotones, / los que viven del grano / que sembró con afán ajena mano. / La simiente en los surcos derramada / será pronto regalo de la vista, / lago ondulante de verdura fresca, / salpicado de rojas amapolas / en que la brisa resbalando suave / templada del sol la agostadora huella. / Dora la espiga cuando su hora viene, / cuaja su jugo en apretado grano, / siégalo la guadaña / y triturado en el molar de piedra / nos da la flor del pan. / Polvo también de sustanciosa harina / las granadas ideas han de darnos / cuando tras siega de cortante estudio / desde el campo sereno en que nacieron / las lleven al molino fragoroso, / de encendidas pasiones populares / para heñidas mas luego / con el agrio fermento en pan se yelden, /con el fermento de la fe robusta / en pan vivificante. / La idea aprisionada dentro del vaso / de cascabillo lógico / no da al pueblo alimento / que en la lucha le sirva de sustento. / Cuando en el campo en que la mies ondea / al descansar de la labor fecunda / partáis el pan de vida, / manjar que nos preparan de consuno / naturaleza y arte, / alzado hacia la bóveda serena / de aire vital henchida, / cual en liturgia de piadoso afecto, / y rebosando el corazón confianza / bendecid al Señor; / al Padre que el sustento nos regala, / Al Padre que el espíritu nos riega / con agua de piedad y de consuelo; / bendecid al Señor / que reparte la lluvia y el pedrisco, / rocíos y tormentas / tibio fomento o pertinaz sequía; / bendecid al Señor, / de piedad misteriosa eterna Fuente / que hartura y escasez nos distribuye, / segador de los hombres / para en sus trojes cosechar las almas / cuando a sazón alcancen / y en luchas y trabajos bien cernida / sacar simiente de más honda vida. / Allá en el alto cielo donde cuajan / como nubes los dones / que al impío le llueven / lo mismo que al piadoso, / nuestra pobre piedad no tiene asiento / ni llega la justicia de los hombres. / Justicia y compasión allí son uno, / alta justicia eterna, / misterio santo de insondable fondo. / Acatadlo con fe sincera y limpia, / y cuando abráis los surcos con la reja / revolviendo a los hombres, / al quebrantar su apelmazado enlace, / poneos en la mano omnipotente, / del Padre del Amor, Sol de las almas / que destruyendo crea / y creando destruye, / Labrador Soberano de los mundos / que lleva la manquera del Destino, / de la Justicia eterna / que tritura cual muela poderosa / el orden que los hombres proclamamos / sirviendo al misterioso ordenamiento / que nos tiene celado su cimiento. / Lucha es la vida y el arado es arma, / arma la reja de la odiada idea. / Para luchar, por tanto con porfía, / sin odio y sin blandura, / compadeciendo el daño que causemos / tronchando flores al abrir el surco, / te pedimos nos des con mano pródiga / Fe, Esperanza y Amor, / ¡oh Padre del Amor, Sol de las almas, / Labrador Soberano de los mundos / que llevas la manquera del Destino, / que destruyendo creas y creando destruyes / y trituras cual muela poderosa / el orden que los hombres proclamamos! / ¡Amor para luchar, Sol de las almas, / acoje a los que al surco caen tronchados / muertos en flor, sin haber dado fruto, / y danos para abrirlo valentía, / Labrador Soberano de los mundos! ¡Que amemos al vencido / venciéndole en la lucha con amor! / ¡Que al morir desgarrada por mi reja / la pobre flor del campo, / el perfume que espira / y con que aroma el hierro que la hiere / de piedad fraternal me llene el alma; / que se asiente serena nuestra lucha, / cual un

deber de vida, / sobre conciencia de rencor purgada, / sobre lecho de paz! / Tú, Señor, asentaste / los giros y revueltas de los orbes / sobre quietud robusta; / diste la eternidad por fundamento / al incesante curso de las horas, / el silencio solemne / a los serenos ecos y fragores / con que el aire resuena, / e hiciste a las tinieblas / dormido mar sin fondo y sin orillas / sobre que ruedan de tu luz las olas. / Tú, Señor Soberano, / Padre eterno de Amor, Sol de las almas, / con los choques discordes / de la lucha tenaz por la existencia / entretejes la trama / de la armonía cósmica, / calma sacando de agitado curso, / silencio del fragor de la pelea, / eternidad del fugitivo tiempo. / ¡Amor, eterno Amor, / danos fecundo amor hacia el vencido, / únenos en la lucha en los contrarios / asentando en la paz nuestras batallas, / batallas de la paz! / Que rendidos en tierra, / al morir bendigamos nuestra suerte; / que del empeño mismo del combate / brote la compasión del combatiente; / que aceptemos cual ley de la conciencia / tu altísimo mandato / de pelear sin tregua ni reposo, / elevando, viriles, el destino / a íntima libertad de orden divino. / Acoje nuestros ruegos, / Padre de eterno Amor, Sol de las almas, / origen primordial de la contienda / que a los orbes sostiene y vivifica, / de la empeñada lucha / que en alta paz culmina, / así como de paz también arranca, / ¡Labrador Soberano de los mundos / que llevas la manquera del Destino, / Segador incansable de las almas, / que en la criba de luchas y trabajos / entresacas, Señor, / de una mies de sustancia corrompida / rica simiente de más honda vida, / vida de eterno Amor! (pp. 135-140).

There is no explicit reference to the philosopher of Ephesus in this poem but, on the other hand, it is quite evident that some of his most significant fragments must be taken into account¹⁰:

- . “War is the father of everything” (πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστὶ -B 53 DK).
- . “It is necessary to know that war is common, justice is discord and everything happens according to discord and necessity” (εἰδέναι δὲ χρὴ τὸν πόλεμον ἐόντα ξυνόν, καὶ δίκην ἔριν, καὶ γινόμενα πάντα κατ’ ἔριν καὶ χρεῶν -B 80 DK).
- . “Heraclitus says that what is opposed agrees with itself and from what is discordant becomes the most beautiful harmony and everything happens according to discord” (Ἡ. τὸ ἀντίξουν συμφέρον καὶ ἐκ τῶν διαφερόντων καλλίστην ἀρμονίαν καὶ πάντα κατ’ ἔριν γίνεσθαι -B 8 DK).
- . “Couplings, entire and non-entire things, convergent divergent, harmonious inharmonious, from all things One and One from all things” (συνάψεις ὅλα καὶ οὐχ ὅλα, συμφερόμενον διαφερόμενον, συνᾶιδον διαῖιδον, καὶ ἐκ πάντων ἓν καὶ ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντα -B 10 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 ἑωυτῶι ὁμολογέει· παλίντροπος ἀρμονίη ὀκωσπερ τόξου καὶ λύρης -B 51 DK).
- . “Heraclitus says that the periodic fire is eternal (*i. e.* god) and the fate the reason that shapes what exists from the movement of contraries” (Ἡ. τὸ περιοδικὸν πῦρ αἰδίων (εἶναι θεόν), εἰμαρμένην δὲ λόγον ἐκ τῆς ἐναντιοδρομίας δημιουργόν τῶν ὄντων -A 8 DK).

¹⁰ Needless to say, following analysis of ‘The Eternal Elegy’, in my opinion the influence of Heraclitus on Unamuno’s thought is undeniable, either in the form of almost literal quotation or in the form of adaptation as in ‘The Cut Flower’.

Considering now both Heraclitus and Unamuno, one must conclude that, if war is the father of everything, the Father-God is war in his turn and, if He gives us life, life is also war. In effect, life is struggle and any fight implies the confrontation of opposed poles, forces or factions. Nevertheless, God is by no means mad and, therefore, as the *Lógos* in Heraclitus's philosophy, so He is able to and knows how to harmonize the contraries that He seems to need in his paradoxical creation / destruction.

The poem is a long comparison –“As the earth with the curved plough/so...”– in the course of which human beings are exhorted to act like God, who is certainly Lord, Father of eternal Love, Sun of the souls and eternal Source of piety, but He is above all an implacable ploughman, very conscious of the need to wound the earth in order to guarantee its renewed fertility. In other words, in the depths of the human race one must also thrust the plough and open furrows without becoming sad, just as a ploughman does not sadden when he cuts a few flowers. They will rot in the end and become fertilizer or nourishment for the earthworms which will see the outer light when winter is over. One must turn everything upside down just as the plough turns over the upper clods acquainting them with the darkness and vice-versa. We must accept the alternation of “negative / positive”, “positive / negative” because from any damage derives a benefit and any benefit must experience a spoilage. We are reminded of the image of the ploughman confident in the beneficial “sun / rain” opposition, who expects the seeds to germinate; so that one must be also confident that the seeding of Ideas in the bosom of the human company, as Unamuno's Idea of God, will be really fruitful. Any society anchored in tranquillity is in the end as infertile as the hard earth that nobody wants to cut open, where seeds either rot or are burned by the sun, the star responsible for another opposition: “death / life”.

After this initial hardness and rigor, Unamuno, passing from one pole to the other, presents the fruits of the wounded earth: undulating fields of fresh vegetables worthy of being contemplated; the chromatic contrast of the red poppies with the golden ears of grain, and all the positive things deriving from the terrible act of the scythe: the corn ground in the stone mill, the flour and the bread. So also will it occur in the case of the harvest of Ideas cut by study and ground in the stone mill of popular passions, finally fermented, that become the revitalizing bread of our society, while those living protected by the tranquillity and security of Logic, like the grain covered by its husk–prisoners in fact– are never suitable nourishment for facing life which is Struggle.

Life is struggle, and Unamuno “adores” it as Heraclitus “adored” *Lógos*, which is war. Now it is quite clear that the only being responsible for wounding in order to obtain good is a God who is as loving as he is unmerciful. Humans must behave like Him and, once they have fulfilled their duty, the poet encourages them to rest for a while in order to bless the Father, who gives them their after bread a constant and wise succession of contraries: “rain and hail-storm, “dews and storms”, “lukewarm encouragement and prolonged dry season”, “satiety and poverty”¹¹; to sum up, God is a reaper of men, who wants a good harvest of human souls after many struggles and hard work –and not generous fatherly care– that will have guaranteed their maturity.

These human beings, behaving like God, may think that their possibilities of making ethical mistakes are proportional to the imperfection of their justice. However, Unamuno knows what is the model to be imitated, the divine, so that it is necessary to leave aside any doubts or fears, and to reap again and again in order to overturn men

¹¹ Let us remember now that other fragment from Heraclitus: “It is thanks to disease that health is pleasant, thanks to hunger, satiety, thanks to weariness, rest” (νοῦσος ὑγίειν ἢ δὲ καὶ ἀγαθόν, λιμὸς κόρον, κάματος ἀνάπαυσιν –B 111 DK).

and women as if they were clods, thus injuring their welfare with the plough. In other words, they must behave like the Father of Love and Sun of the souls who –oh divine paradox and contradiction –that is, He opposing Himself– “creates destroying and creating destroys”.

Life is struggle and the plough the arm with which human beings can put an end to the order that they proclaim. They must do it without hate or moral softness but cutting with faith and hope as many flowers as needed and relying on the love of the One who takes the plough handle of Fate. Their success will depend on knowing whether to accept the divine and eternal lesson of the opposites, which is to know how “to wound and love”, how to combine “rigor and mercy”, how to turn the struggle into a paradigm of “serenity and peace”. Unamuno’s God can be favourably compared with Heraclitus’s *Lógos*, the cause of universal harmony, that unites the powerful opposites, thus fixing the rotations and revolutions of the heavenly spheres, builds eternity with the unceasing course of the hours, makes the echoes and dins –with which the air resounds– have need of a solemn silence at the same time, covers the sea of the darkness with the waves of his light, and interweaves cosmic harmony with the persistent struggle for existence. Consequently, only He can make us love those who have been defeated, uniting with them in the fight of opponents, being compassionate despite preserving a fighting spirit, and converting the battles into peace.

Heraclitus says that “war is the father of everything” and Unamuno says in his turn that the “Father of eternal Love” is the “primordial origin of the battle”, the first and last peace where the struggle for Life begins and ends. However, he does not want to say this using the rigorous language of philosophy and reason, but rather by drawing on the feelings arising from the image of a ploughman and reaper, certainly a singular one, who with the help of a sieving of fights and work knows how to obtain “from a harvest of rotten substance rich seed of deeper life, life of eternal Love”.

Of course, readers can agree or not with Unamuno’s view of God and human beings, but if they read ‘The Cut Flower’ from the perspective of the Classical Tradition– confirming that Unamuno is intellectually indebted to Heraclitus– I believe they will discover in it a great coherence with the main thesis of *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida en los hombres y los pueblos (On the Tragic Feeling of Life in the Human Beings and Nations)* and with *Tratado del amor de Dios (Treatise on God’s Love)*¹², that is, with the most existentialist, desperate or agonizing aspect of his personality. Indeed, Unamuno became obsessed with defending the most human and logical desire: to preserve –once we are dead– the identity of our personal and non-transferable “I”:

“And they come and... tell us that nothing disappears, that everything is transformed and changes, that the smallest piece of matter is not annihilated... and there are people who want to look for comfort in this fact... I do not worry either about my matter or my power, because they are not mine if I am not myself... it is not to bath myself in the great Whole, in Matter and in the infinite and eternal Powers or in God that I long for, it is not to be possessed by God but to possess Him, to become God without giving up being the I who is telling you this now...”.

“Y vienen y... nos hablan de que nada se pierde, de que todo se transforma, muda y cambia, que ni se aniquila el menor cachito de materia... y hay quien pretende buscar en esto consuelo... Ni de mi materia ni de mi fuerza me inquieto, pues no son mías mientras no lo sea yo mismo... no es anegarme en el gran Todo, en la Materia y la Fuerza infinitas y eternas o en Dios, lo que yo anhelo, no es ser

¹² For both works I will use the edition by Nelson Orringer and the numbers in brackets refer to it. See Unamuno (2005).

poseído por Dios sino poseerle, hacerme yo Dios sin dejar de ser el yo que ahora os digo esto...” (*Tratado del amor...* p. 573).

Unamuno was against theological rationalism –especially in its scholastic form. According to reason he was, then, an atheist but, in spite of not being able to prove his existence, he “felt” God and he needed Him in order to explain the goal of existence. Endowed with a romantic and anti-intellectual sensibility, he felt God in his heart but he felt Him absent as if He were a mysterious and hidden power and, as a consequence, he believed in Him in desperation. One could say that in this sense his love or *éros* (desire) for God is Platonic¹³ because it is desire for what he lacks, although he does not want at the same time to become dissolved in Him. Therefore, if God is both the final plenitude and rest and he wants to preserve his “I”, his suffering is inevitable given that the feeling of lacking something which is essential to him will never abandon him. However, the fulfilment of this desire implies in its turn that God must refuse to become One with his creatures, so He will suffer on account of being subjected to the same feeling of lack¹⁴:

. “And this great I into which I want to put the Universe, what is it but God? And because I aspire to Him I love Him, and given that I suffer for being Him, He also suffers for being me... A tremendous stream of pain pushes some human beings towards others and makes them love each other and look for each other and try to complete each other by being each one himself/herself and the others”.

. “Y ese vasto Yo, dentro del cual quiero meter al Universo, ¿qué es sino Dios? Y por aspirar a El le amo, y como yo sufro por ser El, El también sufre por ser yo... Una tremenda corriente de dolor empuja a unos seres hacia otros y les hace amarse y buscarse y tratar de completarse y de ser cada uno él mismo y los otros” (*Tratado del amor...* p.592).

. “Because God reveals Himself to us because he suffers and because we suffer; because he suffers he demands our love, and because we suffer, He gives us his suffering and covers our anguish with infinite and eternal anguish”

. “Porque Dios se nos revela porque sufre y porque sufrimos; porque sufre exige nuestro amor, y porque sufrimos nos da el suyo y cubre nuestra congoja con la congoja eterna e infinita” (*Del sentimiento...* p. 219).

. The one who does not suffer and does not suffer because he does not live is the *ens realissimum*, is the *primum movens*, is that impassive entity which, being so, is nothing but a pure idea. The category does not suffer but neither lives nor exists as a person”.

. “El que no sufre, y no sufre porque no vive, es ese lógico y congelado *ens realissimum*, es el *primum movens*, es esa entidad impassible y por impassible no más que pura idea. La categoría no sufre, pero tampoco vive ni existe como persona” (*Del sentimiento...* p. 220).

. “Although we believe it by authority, we do not know how to have a heart, stomach or lungs while we do not feel their pain... And this occurs with spiritual pain; we do not feel the soul until we feel its pain”.

. “Aunque lo creemos por autoridad, no sabemos tener corazón, estómago o pulmones mientras no nos duelen... Y así es con el dolor espiritual; tampoco sentimos al alma hasta que no nos duele” (*Tratado del amor...* 594-5).

¹³ . *Symposium* 200e: ‘Is not love –*éros*- in the first place the desire for anything and, secondly, for what it happens to be lacking?’ (ἔστιν ὁ Ἔρως πρῶτον μὲν τινῶν, ἔπειτα τούτων ὧν ἂν ἔνδεια παρῆ αὐτῶ; - the translation is mine following the edition by J. Burnet, 1991).

¹⁴ On Unamuno’s religious and philosophical thought , see e.g.: García Nuño 2011; Perrot, 2005; Morón, 2003; Ribas, 2002; Abellá, 1997; Cerezo, 1996; Edery, 1977; Cancela, 1972; Agüero, 1968 and Fernández, 1966.

If, despite the evident differences with the fragments cited above, we now reread ‘The Cut Flower’, very probably we will understand much better that the Unamuno’s divine plough man and reaper cannot be a tranquil being, that is, the highest expression of an impassive inner peace, but a being who, after having given freedom to men and women because of love, did himself harm with the creation. From then on –and because of the errors arising from this freedom– He must do harm with the plough just as human beings must do themselves harm in their quest for an ethical maturity that, in their case, is always precarious. With this brief contribution, then, I hope to have shown how, with the help of the opposites that neutralize the original, eternal war, Unamuno succeeds in tempering *graeco –i. e. heracliteo– modo* his always desperate and at the same time hopeful spirit.

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