

**LA EXPERIENCIA PLATÓNICA EN LA INGLATERRA
DECIMONÓNICA**

Patricia Cruzalegui Sotelo

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Septem Ediciones, the University Press in Asturias (www.septemediciones.com; info@septemediciones.com) has recently published the translation into Spanish of the doctoral thesis of Patricia Cruzalegui Sotelo (Lima 1955-Barcelona 1997), *L'experiència platònica en l'Anglaterra del dinou*, published in Barcelona by PPU in 1998. As the saying goes, every translation implies betrayal and, yet, as translator my intention has been to be scrupulously faithful, convinced as I am that this is the only means by which Dr Cruzalegui's study can give the reader exactly what she wanted: precise information as well as rigorous analysis; her views on other great researchers into the English 19th century and the presentation of her own personal ideas and hypotheses; in short, all that is required of a rigorously academic work, written both entertainingly and instructively, set in the past without ignoring the present and finally, if I am allowed a touch of Platonic daring, written "beautifully".

I believe I am not mistaken if I suggest that while Dr. Cruzalegui discusses a number of distinguished 19th century Englishmen such as J.S. Mill, W. Pater and, above all, George Grote, all of who were convinced that the best Plato—or the binomial Socrates-Plato—is that of the dialogues of search and inquiry, of doubt and of Protagoric relativism, Dr Cruzalegui herself construes a thesis where the final "criterion" is present—solidly constructed as a result of her excellent university formation, but where there are also numerous nuances, doubts and ideas

which formulate her own particular hypotheses. In short, she presents a piece of work, which is full of interesting suggestions, allowing the reader to free him/herself of the frequent torment of resignedly passive reading.

As translator, I naturally gave thought to whether I should translate the large number of texts that appear in English in this thesis. As a result, I decided not to translate them, not only because they were the intrinsic quotations of an academic study, but basically because they were the very link and tool, both skilful, ingenious and entertaining, of Dr Cruzalegui's analysis. Hence, the multiple references full of English quotations whose conciseness or semantic scope should not be adulterated. In this case, I have also been faithful to what Dr Patricia Cruzalegui always thought: the formation and preparation of the reader, contrary to what is often believed, should never be doubted. It is true that, when she analyses romantic Platonism the meaning of the terms are enriched with a poetic "extra" that puts us all to the test, but for this, we have meticulous explanations to guide us at all times.

Another of the outstanding characteristics of this study is Dr Cruzalegui's evident intention of not simply presenting us with prominent characters of the British 19th century intelligentsia in her "approximation to" and "assimilation of" the Platonic inheritance, but of reconstructing them in their social, political and cultural context —*lato sensu*— in a masterly way. Just as it is usual to evaluate the quality of a film by its setting and atmosphere, so Dr Cruzalegui also manages to project, stimulated by studious reading, the clear image of an extensive cultural period or a specific event, of both characters and their circumstances —as Ortega would say, of cultural movements and trends together with their causes and consequences, to the point of even describing the atmosphere of a literary evening from whence many a famous page of Victorian 19th century Platonism has derived.

To create an atmosphere is not, of course, an end in itself but merely a means. The real objective of Dr. Cruzalegui is to offer the reader the possibility of being present, through a leap in time, at brilliant and complex intellectual discussions among the great. If, thanks to her patient research, she announces that we are to attend a conversation between the British Greek historian *par excellence* G. Grote, and the most erudite and specialized of German critics, Zeller, for example, this is exactly what she means, we will attend the debate sitting in the first row, provided with all the necessary information, origins and background, without being deprived of her own and at times daring personal evaluation. Or we may personally experience, page after page, what might be called an interior dialogue of the great Victorian translator of Plato, Benjamin Jowett, bringing to light the self-corrections, revisions and all types of changes introduced in his three editions of the dialogues, without the distinguished don of Balliol College ever suspecting that

a persevering 20th century scholar like Dr. Cruzalegui would reveal serious contradictions that he had never discovered. This does not mean that we cannot perceive that beyond the inescapable obligations of academic criticism, the researcher can feel great fascination for his/her subject of study.

What are the contents of this thesis? It is surprising that Dr Cruzalegui did not tire of this self-imposed challenge of a "loving" analysis of a whole century of British Platonism. Others, without doubt, would have abandoned the project or simply would never have set themselves such a task or, at least, they would have drastically reduced the initial objectives. But the previous works of Dr Cruzalegui, especially her minor dissertation on "The Romantic Platonism of Shelley" supervised by Dr. José María Valverde, helped to forge what she already was, an untiring researcher, immune to discouragement, the very incarnation of a Platonic lover of knowledge.

Hence, we are presented with the results in this book that we are now reviewing:

a) Thanks to Dr Cruzalegui we are able to verify that a part of 19th century intelligentsia contributed to "romanticising" Plato, creating a Platonism stripped of rationalism and marked by enthusiasm and divine inspiration, as in Plato's *Phaedrus*. This created alarm in those who, in a positivist, empirical and utilitarian country such as England, thought that without the counterbalance of Aristotelian philosophy, the Platonists would become authentic visionaries. This is, in fact, the Platonism of Thomas Taylor, the first great translator of Plato who, with one foot still in the 18th century, reinvented Plato, according to Dr Cruzalegui, transforming him into a mystagogue or initiator of select minds and subtle sensitivities. The translator of Proclus and Ficino, himself known as "the English Ficino" and "the Modern Pletho" —alluding to the Byzantine philosopher— he created a neoplatonic Plato, who instead of investigating, pontificates, using obscure and complicated language apt for only a small circle of initiates. The romantic Platonism of Coleridge derived, to a large extent, from Thomas Taylor, whose philosophical Platonic thought was integrated into the world of poetic imagination. The romantic Platonism of Wordsworth too, while referring to a reminiscence of truths that the soul knew before incarnation, indicates a degree of intuitive Platonism: the Platonic *anamnesis*, which he absorbed indirectly thanks to his close relationship with Coleridge. Shelley's romantic Platonism also derives from Thomas Taylor, being a true paradigm of both poetry and reason achieving the ideal of Novalis, that is, the conception of philosophy as "a poem of intelligence" in a way that the Platonic image of the cave, for example, inspires or underlies many of his most famous poetic images.

b) Led by Dr Cruzalegui, we observe what I would describe as the "sophistization" of Plato which was presented by Grote in his *History of Greece*

and, above all, in *Plato and Other Companions of Sokrates*, that is, the sophists Protagoras, Hippias, Prodicus, Critias, etc. Grote's eulogies are restricted, in this case, to Socrates and Plato, investigators and seekers of the truth, untiring participants in dialogues, professionals of doubt and Protagoric relativism, supporters of *logos*, understood as an intellectual manifestation and of its contrary, *antilogia*, the necessary counterpoint to dogmatic temptation. Thanks to this thesis where the importance of Grote's studies is presented, paradoxically we come into contact with a more dogmatic and authoritarian Platonism, which abandons constant investigation as if it were intellectual paralysis, offering a model of an ideal state enthroning the Law. As we well know, the influence of Plato on Western culture has been enormous, so Dr. Cruzalegui guides us through the abundant criticism of Plato's thought up to K. Popper in *The Open Society and its Enemies*, and even opens Pandora's box by considering the cultural influence of eugenics, as presented by the great Athenian philosopher, on the Nazi madness of the Second World War.

- c) As a result of Dr Cruzalegui's long and frequent stays in Oxford, London etc, and her decisive plunge into the marshes of the *Jowett Papers* of Balliol College, the innumerable documents of the great Victorian translator of Plato, we are able to attend one of the most relevant and influential intellectual events of 19th century England: "the Victorianization" of Plato or the deliberate will to transform him into the referent and model of moral education without, according to Jowett, the excessive dogmatism of theology, and so shaping, with his help, the best ruling class of an Imperial England who believed they had been called to carry out the lofty mission of civilizing.
- d) To Dr Cruzalegui's investigative subtlety we owe the clear understanding of the not so subtle or refined "sensual Platonism" of W. Pater, of his erotic aesthetics, that of *Plato and Platonism*, where he expounds his conviction that the senses, as well as the soul, have mysteries to reveal, which implies a turn in the assessment of Platonic philosophy, leading us away from the abstraction of the spirit to the deliberate and subtle voluptuousness of sensibility. The genius of Plato consisted in combining the spiritual dimension of philosophy with its other aesthetic and erotic dimension.
- e) Thanks to this intelligent thesis we see with absolute clarity the enormous contradiction that those who lived in the masculine world of the colleges suffered from. Both students and teachers were to ignore the homoerotic exaltation of the Platonic dialogues that they read in the lecture room: *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, etc in order to avoid *the unspeakable vice of the Greeks*, when it was more than evident that the most respectable pedagogical institutions in the country, from public schools to university colleges

promoted "homosociability" fostering many sincere cases of "homoeroticism"—real love and esteem among students or among students and teachers—bringing about inevitable cases of "homosexuality", which was what, paradoxically, was to be avoided. A complexity which the contemporary world has acknowledged thanks to, in most cases, film versions of novels. I refer to such well known films as Lindsay Anderson's *If*, Marek Kaniévka's *Another Country*, James Ivory's *Maurice*, Charles Sturridge's *Brideshead Revisited*, even Richard Attenborough's *Shadowlands* and, of course, Gracia Querejeta's *El último viaje de Robert Rylands* (*The Last Journey of Robert Rylands*) among others.

- f) Thanks to this thesis, we are able to verify that those who are most familiar with the misogynist nature of the Greek discourse on pederasty and naturally the Platonic dialogues which are so significant in this field, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, commit the same error that Plato himself committed in *The Republic*, where he established that women should receive the same education as men, although he really considered them inferior and incapable of reaching the same degree of intellectual excellence as men. Few women have been so praised as the celebrated, distinguished, venerable and chaste—despite motherhood—Victorian woman, who is purely and simply castrated of all sensuality, and considered inept for intellectual discussion and action, barred from being the real companion and friend of man. Let us not forget that V. Woolf had to prove her worth among her Bloomsbury companions and that Charlotte Barlett, the genuinely Victorian governess in E.M. Forster's *A Room with a View* explains to her cousin Lucy Honeychurch that men venerate and honour women when they have prepared them a good dinner, although women, of course, would prefer a little less devotion and more authentic consideration.
- g) Thanks to this book, we can understand the Platonic dissidence of the great Oxonian humanist John Addington Symonds, frustrated and hurt by the demands of the castrating purity of "classical Platonic love" which he discovers painfully to be responsible for the implacable "murder" of the human dimension of *eros*. His own experience of homosexuality, though late in life, allows him to finally treasure the long desired physical and spiritual experience of love, indivisible in its two-fold manifestation.
- h) And finally we must thank Dr Cruzalegui for dealing with Oscar Wilde who was, in so many aspects, Platonic himself. We have the opportunity of putting aside the well known scandal to delve into the interiors of Wilde's personal examination of conscience in *De Profundis* and listen to the sincere lamentations of the notorious aesthete for not having carried out, as the Greek lover he felt he was, the pedagogical duties of being able to lead his beloved

Lord Alfred Douglas along the pathway of virtue. His was the love that finally dared to speak its name, despite the consequences, but Wilde had failed to carry out his most basic duties.

In short: in my opinion an excellent study in the field of "Classical Tradition" that, while concentrating on a specific subject and country, offers an approach and style which stimulate general interest.

STREETWALKING THE METROPOLIS. WOMEN, THE CITY AND MODERNITY

Deborah L. Parsons

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(by Teresa Gómez Reus. University of Alicante)

Deborah L. Parsons's analysis of the literary representations of women in the modern city is a welcome contribution to a line of enquiry that for the last fifteen years has sporadically explored the possibilities and implications of the *flâneuse*; that is, the female counterpart of the *flâneur*, a conceptual figure related to the characteristics of the modern artist, his modes of observation, and the public spaces he portrays. Parsons has taken up the gendered approach that art historians and cultural sociologists such as Griselda Pollock (1988) and Janet Wolff (1990) initiated in the wake of the 1980s to expose the masculine bias of the canonical versions of modernism, and to reveal the subtle techniques women artists used to assert their differing perspectives on the urban experience. Pollock's study of Impressionist artists concentrated on the socio-sexual division of the nineteenth century to argue that women painters such as Berthe Morisot and Mary Cassat, restricted in their freedom of the city, either represented their alienation through interstitial spaces that imply tension between the inside and the outside, or offered unconventional angles of public places, like gardens and embankments, as sites of enclosure. Wolff's seminal "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity" also employed the concept of separate private/public spheres as evidence for the exclusion of women from the socially fluid world of the streets. Although she noted the presence of public women in Baudelaire's city—the prostitute and the *passante*—, she regarded them as diametrically opposed to the