

MAJOR THEMES IN THE POETRY  
OF AMADO NERVO

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OF AMADO NERVO

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## PREFACE

This dissertation is concerned with a study of the major themes in the poetry of the Mexican Modernist poet, Amado Nervo. These themes are traced through the literary career of Nervo and analyzed in terms of their origins, reasons for their presence in his poetry, and the extent to which they may be assumed to reflect the personal philosophies of the poet.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most productive writers of the Spanish American Modernist movement and, for a time, one of the most devoted followers of that movement, was the Mexican poet, Amado Nervo. A man of many literary talents, he was famous also for his prose fiction, in both the novel and the short story. Also, throughout most of his productive life he either made his living or supplemented his income through the writing of newspaper columns which were published widely in Spanish America. Though his early fame in Mexico came about chiefly as a result of two novels he wrote in the early 1890's, those works were shortly eclipsed by his poetry, and it is through his poetry that he finally gained recognition throughout the Spanish speaking world.

Born in Mexico in 1870 and reared at the height of the Mexican Romantic period, Nervo was associated closely with Modernism for at least ten years. Romantic in spirit and Modernist by literary inclination, he took what he wanted from both movements and left to the world some of the tenderest and most poignantly beautiful poetry written in the Spanish language. Though subject matter for his poetry covers a broad range of topics, it is chiefly through his religious poetry and his love poetry that his fame has continued to spread. With the possible exception of some of the early love poems written by the Chilean

poet, Pablo Neruda, Amado Nervo's poems of love are the most widely read of those of any Spanish American poet.

Uniquely popular as a poet during his own lifetime, his death in Montevideo, Uruguay, in 1919, occasioned international periods of mourning, public tributes, and other ceremonies that have known no equal in Spanish America, even at the death of heads of state. When his body was transported to Mexico aboard a Uruguayan cruiser, the ship was escorted by other warships from Argentina, Cuba, and Mexico. Three hundred thousand people are said to have been present for his burial in Mexico City (15:107).

Amado Nervo's poetry has been discussed widely and read almost universally; much of it has been translated into other languages, particularly French and English. Though there was a decline in Nervo's popularity through the 1920's and the 1930's, an era in which Vanguardism in poetry was in the ascendancy in Spanish America, his works have begun to regain the popular appeal they had during his lifetime.

Though considerable space has been devoted to discussions of Amado Nervo and his works in literary histories, and there have been periodic flurries of articles written about him, few substantive studies have been done. Some of the works listed here in the review of available literature are mentioned, not because of their substance, but due to the fact that they are well known, and are listed in virtually every bibliography on Nervo.

One of the earliest of these works is one done in 1926 by Concha Meléndez (32) and titled Amado Nervo. It is brief and general in nature. The author discusses, usually without documentation, the principal themes in Nervo's works.

A 1936 study done by Esther Wellman (43), and titled Amado Nervo: Mexico's Religious Poet, is still considered to be one of the most important works on Nervo. The essence of this work is contained in its title. More a biography than a critical study, it traces the religious philosophies of Nervo and the exemplification of those philosophies in his works. Primary emphasis is placed upon Nervo's Christianity, with relatively little attention being given to religious forces outside Christian Catholicism that may have exercised influence upon the poet.

Another work that is similarly well known was written in 1937 by Alfonso Reyes (36). It is entitled Tránsito de Amado Nervo (The Presence of Amado Nervo). Like the Wellman study, it tends more to the biographical than the critical. Though this study is more penetrating than the Wellman work, it shares a fault not uncommon to works of a critical nature written in Spanish America. The author was a personal friend of Nervo, and as a result, his work seems to lack the objectivity to be found in more recent studies.

A North American, George W. Umphrey (39, 40, 41), has written extensively on Amado Nervo, with his primary attention focused on Nervo's mysticism, and on Eastern philosophies that influenced him. These studies by Umphrey are thorough, and provide an important source of reference for this dissertation, particularly in the chapter on spirituality.

One of the more recent studies to have been done on Nervo is Amado Nervo: Fraile de los suspiros (Amado Nervo: Friar of Sighs), by Pedro César Malvigne (30). It is an avowed attempt on the part of the author to psychoanalyze Nervo through his poetry, and to show that

his poetry was determined not only by obvious, visible forces exerted from without, but also by subconscious conflicts of which Neruo was, of course, unaware. The work seems generally superficial and inconclusive, and is mentioned here only for the fact that it is so recent, having been written in 1964, and for the fact that the somewhat unorthodox approach by the author will virtually guarantee its inclusion in future bibliographies on Neruo.

The latest and certainly, in the opinion of this writer, the best study on Neruo to have been done thus far is one made by Manuel Durán (15) in 1968. The title of this work is Genio y figura de Amado Neruo (The Genius and the Figure of Amado Neruo). Durán has created in this book a very perceptive study which is divided generally into discussions of Neruo's environmental background, his life, and his works. This study is unusually well documented, and almost entirely avoids resorting to generalizations. Contrary to many Spanish American literary studies which purport to be analyses of the life and works of well-known writers, Durán's study is singularly unbiased and free of either excessive eulogizing or disparagement.

Other critics who have written brief but worthwhile articles on Amado Neruo are Alfred Coester (8), Antonio Castro Leal (6), and, more recently, Luis Leal (28, 29). The first two, Coester and Castro Leal, were contemporaries of Neruo, and their studies do not, for the most part, appear to reflect the objectivity that can be produced by the passage of time.

The body of critical writing presently available that deals with Amado Neruo follows a trend which is more or less typical of Spanish American criticism. That is, it tends to expend an unnecessary amount



of energy on biographical details, to the exclusion, too often, of any detailed study of Nervo's literary production. Even the work by Manuel Durán mentioned above is guilty of this to a degree.

While a certain amount of knowledge of the life of a writer is admittedly requisite to any real comprehension of his writings, it does not necessarily follow that his life is mirrored in his works. On the contrary, there is much in the poetry of Amado Nervo that shows no discernible relationship either to his past life or to the life he was living at the time he was writing. In fact, as will be seen, there is justification for questioning whether he really believed at all times what he wrote.

It is the belief of this writer that there are not always absolutes in literature, that it is not always possible, nor desirable, to state without fear of contradiction that a given element in the works of a poet is directly traceable to a particular event in that poet's life. To attempt it, or to insist upon it, has a tendency to make the poem, which may have in it the seeds of immortality, subservient to the mortal poet. A literary work should not be restrained by being tied too closely to its author. If an author is to achieve a measure of immortality, it will come to him through his works that have become immortal. It is Don Quixote who has kept Cervantes alive for us through the centuries, and not vice versa.

Interest in the poetry of Amado Nervo, as in the works of any poet, perhaps, should lie in the recurring ideas found there, and not in the poet himself. Obviously, the two elements, Nervo and his poetry, cannot be divorced from each other; nor should they be. As is true of almost any writer, there are thematic elements in his works

that are clearly the result of incidents in his life, or of outside influences acting upon him. It is only logical, then, that his life must often be used as a point of reference in interpreting and evaluating his poetry. Yet, his poems deal with ideas that are so consistently universal in nature that they transcend the presence of the poet himself. This is true even of many of his most subjective, ego-oriented poems. A study of these ideas is the aim of this dissertation.

#### Purpose of the Study

In the relatively limited body of critical writing produced thus far which focuses attention on Amado Nervo and his works, there does not exist, to this writer's knowledge, any work devoted solely to a study of themes in his writings. It shall be the purpose of this dissertation to trace certain salient themes that are generally considered to be representative of Nervo's poetry. The study will show the presence of these themes in representative poems selected, where feasible, from a cross-section of Nervo's entire poetic production. It is intended also to discuss and draw conclusions about the possible origins of those themes in his poetry, and to show how they came to play such important roles there.

#### Procedure of the Study

The study will consist of seven chapters. The first will contain a brief survey, in annotated form, of the better-known studies devoted to Amado Nervo and his works, and will show a need for the study being undertaken here.

Chapter II will present an overview of the Modernist movement in Spanish America. The discussion will include the origins of the movement, influences that helped to shape it, and the general effects the movement had on language and literature in the Spanish speaking world. The chapter will conclude with brief statements showing Nervo's position in the movement as a whole.

The third chapter will deal with the theme of death and its implications as they are reflected in Nervo's poetry. Specific attention will be given to matters of Nervo's fear of death, the death wish, and morbid fascination with death, all three of which elements are variously alleged to be found in his poems.

Chapter IV will discuss various elements of religion and philosophy as they are shown to have been combined by Nervo into a spiritual attitude he could accommodate in his personal life. Influences of both mysticism and Buddhism will be traced through the poet's works, and conclusions will be drawn regarding their relative importance in his poetry.

Chapter V will be devoted to cosmopolitan aspects in the poetry of Nervo. Comparisons and contrasts will be made between cosmopolitanism in his poetry and that of the other poets generally in the Modernist movement in terms of both purpose and result.

The sixth chapter discusses Romantic subjectivity in general in the poetry of Nervo, its reasons for being so prominent a characteristic in a Modernist poet, and the influence subjectivity had on his poetry. The theme of love will be discussed in this chapter also, along with Nervo's attitudes toward both romantic love and love in its broadest sense.

Chapter VII will conclude the study with a summary of the findings.

Throughout the study, passages of poetry employed to serve as illustrations are followed immediately by English translations. In the discussion of the Modernist movement in Chapter II, poems by Rubén Darío and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera have been used as examples of particular Modernist characteristics. Professional translations of those poems have been used and credit has been given to the translators. In Chapter IV, translation of the poem "Raffinement," which Neruo wrote in French, was made by Jonathan C. Bookout. All other translations have been made by this writer. In those translations, no attempt has been made to retain either meter or rhyme. Rather, the aim has been to reproduce in English, as accurately as possible, the thoughts contained in the poems.

Documentation and references to source materials in the text of this study are being handled in a manner that deviates somewhat from that usually employed in other similar studies. Traditional footnotes have been eliminated here, and references are made in every case directly to the bibliography. Bibliographical entries, in addition to being listed in alphabetical order, are numbered consecutively. Citations within the text will normally be indicated by two numbers separated by a colon and enclosed within parentheses. The first of these numbers will refer the reader to the bibliographical entry; the second indicates the page or pages in that work which are being cited.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MODERNIST MOVEMENT AND AMADO

#### NERVO'S PLACE IN IT

Spanish America has traditionally followed the lead of Europe in the introduction of new literary ideas and movements. Its cultural ties have always been with Europe, almost exclusively Spain during colonial times, and since independence, essentially with France, at least in terms of literature. Literary movements that have had any impact on Spanish American writers have ordinarily had their origins in Europe--England, France, or Germany--and have normally arrived in Spanish America almost coincident with their arrival in Spain. That is, literary inspiration tended to be absorbed directly into Spanish America without first passing through Spain, and thus escaped much of the conservatism of Spain that might otherwise have modified it. This is particularly true since 1820. The period of the 1820's marks the epoch in which almost all the Spanish colonies in America gained their independence. Following the revolutionary period there began a determined de-emphasis on all things Spanish which lasted until the closing years of the nineteenth century. Spanish America turned then more than ever to France for literary inspiration. The various movements of that century, Romanticism, Realism and Naturalism principally, were brought directly into America from France. Here, the imported literary ideas were synthesized and adapted to meet local needs and desires.

There is one area in literature in which this trend of following the lead of the French was reversed. Modernism, a literary phenomenon of far reaching importance, appeared in the closing years of the nineteenth century. It must be conceded at the outset that among students of Spanish American literature a portion of its importance necessarily lies with the fact that Modernism, though influenced by French Parnassians and Symbolists, is the only literary movement to have its origins in Spanish America. However, transcending this is the fact that this movement, born in America, was to culminate in a great renovation of literary Spanish, a vastly enriched language, and a rejuvenation of literature, not only in Spanish speaking America, but on the Spanish peninsula as well. It infused the Spanish language with a vigor it had not seen since the seventeenth century, Spain's Golden Age of literature.

The term Modernism is frequently used apologetically by writers discussing the movement; it is viewed as being colorless and non-definitive. Critics and literary historians have variously credited Juan Valera, Miguel de Unamuno, and even Rubén Darío with first applying the word to the new movement which was having such a profound effect in literary circles immediately before the turn of the century. Too eclectic in nature properly to be considered a literary school, and due to the wave of renovation and innovation which it brought about, not a literary movement in the generally accepted sense of the word, Modernism was a general attitude, an attitude not unique to the Modernist writers, but one which they simply put into words.

Since it was with the writings of Rubén Darío that Europe first became aware of the new movement in Spanish America, and since it is

his name that is most often invoked in connection with almost any discussion of Modernism, he is often regarded as its originator and chief exponent. It is only for literary and historical convenience that scholars generally use Rubén Darío as a point of reference when setting time limits on the Modernist movement. The publication of Darío's Azul in 1888 is usually thought of as the beginning of the movement; it is said to have ended with his death in 1916. While no one would deny the great impetus the Nicaraguan poet gave to the movement, it is likewise impossible to ignore many other writers preceding him who contributed to its development, many of whom never knew Darío until Modernism had reached its apogee, or who had died while the movement was still in its early stages. In fact, the seeds of this phenomenal, though short-lived, movement were sprouting simultaneously and quite independently of each other in diverse parts of Spanish America.

Like any literary movement, Modernism was a mirror of the times in which it came into being. It was a reflection of a crisis created by a world tied to traditionalism and materialism trying to move into the twentieth century. Perhaps nowhere was this conservatism and preservation of the status quo more evident than in Spanish America. The upheavals of the revolutionary period had been stilled; the period of anarchism and civil wars was over. Governments were largely in the hands of economically progressive dictators such as Porfirio Díaz of Mexico, or ruling oligarchies such as those in Venezuela and Argentina. But in Europe, especially in France and Germany, new values and philosophies were emerging which were to have a deep and lasting effect on the literature of the entire Spanish speaking world. Young writers in America were absorbing the iconoclasm of Nietzsche, the pessimism

of Schopenhauer and the existentialism of Kierkegaard. In art and literature the dominant schools became Decadentism, Parnassianism, Symbolism and Impressionism. In music, Wagner was in the forefront, while the theatre was being changed by the works of Maeterlinck, Ibsen and Hauptmann (19:401).

The young artists of late nineteenth century Spanish America who felt themselves outside the current of their environment found it easy to identify with literary and philosophical ideas coming out of Europe. Having accepted these ideas, they came to believe that Spanish American literature was being smothered by outmoded conventions.

Originality of language had for some time been abandoned in favor of the belief that the value of poetry was not to be found in its artistic qualities, but in the ideas it expressed. One result of this change, that was less evident in Spanish America than in Spain, was a poetry that was more nearly a kind of compact prose, generally devoid of any imagistic language and couched in the simplest and most prosaic of terms. Another result was the Romantic poetry more typical of Spanish America, a poetry that was strident, undisciplined, riddled with clichés, and for the most part totally lacking in novelty of any kind. Typically, it was highly subjective in nature, and the emphasis was upon tragic and somber themes.

There was, then, a general discontent with the state of Hispanic letters toward the end of the nineteenth century, particularly, though not exclusively, in the field of poetry. In Spanish America, Romanticism as a movement was dying. Curiously, almost coincident with the death of Romanticism, Spanish America witnessed the publication of what has come to be regarded as almost the highest expression of



Spanish American Romantic poetry. In 1889, Juan Zorrilla de San Martín, a Uruguayan poet and sculptor, published "Tabaré," a poem of almost epic proportions dealing with the extinction of a group of Indians indigenous to the plains of Uruguay. Romanticism, however, was already an anachronism, for in the previous year Rubén Darío had published Azul in Chile, and the Modernist movement was officially ushered in.

This air of unrest, this feeling of dissatisfaction that permeated the beings of many of the young intellectuals of Spanish America in the 1880's was the ambience out of which was born Modernism. A synthesis of various influences, both European and domestic, its one objective was beauty. It soon evolved into a cult, and it was to this cult of beauty that the precursors to the movement directed their efforts. These men, José Martí, José Asunción Silva, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera and others worked, studied and experimented. It is to these men, as much as to Darío, that the world is indebted for Modernism. Resisting the excesses of Romanticism with its egocentrism, its worn-out phrases and its repetition of subject matter, these poets, who generally considered themselves aristocrats in a bourgeois society, set for themselves the common goal of the search for beauty in all its aspects. And it was through this search that they, sometimes in groups, but often individually, came under the influence of the writings that were coming out of France.

Two French schools of literary thought, Parnassianism and Symbolism, blended with certain basic elements of Romanticism to create the nucleus of the new movement in Spanish America. The writers during the developmental stages identified with and freely accepted the Romantic

tendencies to experiment, to flaunt traditional rules, and to have individual rather than universal interests.

The Parnassian school developed in France and had as its official organ an anthology, Le Parnasse-contemporain (1866), named by the French poets after the Greek home of the Muses. This school served as inspiration for a great amount of prose and poetry in the early years of the Modernist movement, writings which were epitomized in Rubén Darío's work Azul. French poets associated with the Parnassian school, and whose names were most frequently invoked by the Modernists in Spanish America are Leconte de Lisle, Théophile Gautier, and José-María Hérédia, a man who was Cuban by birth and French by inclination.

Like all new literary schools, Parnassianism was a reaction. By 1850, Romanticism in France was essentially spent. The burgeoning emphasis on science, the development of the positivist philosophy, the growing interest in social problems following the Revolution of 1848 combined to cause literature to take a new direction. There developed a tendency toward a more classic interpretation of art, one that favored sobriety of conception, refuge in the ivory tower of lofty seclusion, and above all, perhaps, an objective attitude toward life (18:6). This made, then, for an inevitable rejection of the excessive sentimentality and subjectivism of the Romantics, for the acceptance of the concept of art for art's sake, and for an objectivity and impassiveness in which the artist seeks sources outside himself, or at least in which the ego of the artist is suppressed. The Parnassians looked upon art as an end in itself, art for its own sake, as its own raison d'être. In Spanish America the most rigid adherents to the precepts of Parnassianism felt that poetry could not carry any social or political

message and still be considered as art; it could not, in short, serve two masters. Great stress was placed on perfection of form, an element so often neglected by the late Romantics. There was an attempt to elevate poetry to a level equal to that of the plastic arts. The poem too should be wrought into a tangible form, for the form was the idea given shape; it was the transposition of the arts by lapidary style.

Spanish American Modernism borrowed, then, from the French Parnassians the literary characteristics of impassivity, the cultivation of art for its own sake, perfection of poetic form and the transposition of the arts. Neither the Modernists nor the Parnassians rejected Romanticism in its entirety; in fact, the escape from reality into the ivory tower is a singularly Romantic trait. The Modernist did, however, strive to take the ego, the individual out of his work so that his inspiration could emerge, and this is particularly pronounced in some of the early Modernist writings, those of Darío and Gutiérrez Najera especially, as will be seen. To reach this goal the Modernist writer would write and rewrite, searching always for the one word he needed to express his thought in the most objective, clear, and precise manner possible, emphasizing always the proper poetic form to the end that a stanza might be visually pleasing, while at the same time describing for the mind's eye a picture of beauty. It is this selection of just the right word to express the right shade of meaning that serves better than anything else to differentiate the technique of the Modernist from that of the Romantic. The work of the Romantics was by and large the work of the moment, the result of momentary inspiration; that of the Modernists usually was the fruit of a great deal of planning, properly authenticated allusions, the exact word.

In this search for the precise word, for that one word needed to convey the poet's thought, and which search was so much a mark of the Modernists, they devoted a great deal of time to intensive studies of dictionaries of Castilian Spanish. They studied the literature of Medieval Spain and of the Golden Age, resurrecting archaic words, words that had fallen into disuse, often assigning new meanings to them. Each poet sought to be original, in vocabulary as well as in the creation of new images; clichés were studiously avoided. There was extensive borrowing from other languages, particularly from Latin, with that language furnishing roots for many new words. The result was an extensive enrichment of literary Spanish.

Inevitably, this determination for originality led, in the early days of Modernism, to an abundance of poetry that was completely esoteric in nature, comprehensible at times only to other Modernist poets, and on occasion only to the creator of the poem. Though this type of poetry was not long in vogue, it was, perhaps, a portent of much of the highly abstruse poetry that was to appear some years later in schools such as Vanguardism, Cubism, and Dadaism.

The Modernists, particularly during the early years of the movement, when they were so strongly under the influence of French Parnassianism, were not apologetic for the fact that their works were of interest or even comprehensible only to the initiated. Rather, their writings are clear reflections of their attempts at escapism and of their self-styled aristocracy. They withdrew, figuratively, and in some cases literally, from a world they considered to be crass and bourgeois, and they made no pretense, in the first years, at reaching readers outside their own literary circles. Darío himself once made

the statement that he was not a poet for the masses. He added, however, that he realized he would inevitably have to go to them, and of course he did before the Modernist movement had reached its zenith.

Symbolism, the other French element which was to have an influence on the new movement in Spanish America, is in many ways the direct antithesis of Parnassianism. Where the latter strove for realism and precision of description, where its poets employed concrete terms, and where verbs and adjectives were specific, the former sought to suggest, to connote, to evoke; where Parnassianism stressed the impersonal, the objective, the impassive, Symbolism saw the immediate, unique and personal emotional response as the proper subject of art. But since emotions are fleeting and individual, the poet turns to the use of a complex and highly private kind of symbolization in an effort to give expression to his ineffable feeling. This took the form of nuances, subtle and vague connotations--this influence coming primarily from Mallarmé--and in synaesthesia, the description of one kind of sensation in terms of another, this influence coming from Baudelaire, and through both Baudelaire and Mallarmé, from Edgar Allan Poe.

French Symbolism is important also, in the development of Modernism, in the fact that it provided a compromise between the frigid impassiveness of Parnassianism and the strident subjectivity of Romanticism. It served as a catalyst between two opposite literary ideals, and it can reasonably be conjectured that it assured the survival of Modernism.

Perhaps the most important of the Symbolists, in terms of their influence on the Modernist movement was Paul Verlaine (1844-1896). Although he had contributed to Le Parnasse-contemporain, he rejected

the specificity of the Parnassians in favor of the evocative qualities of musicality. His work, "L'Art Poétique," has come to be viewed as one of the definitive writings on Symbolism, and it is this poem that contains his famous line "De la musique avant toute chose" (Music above all). Sidney D. Braun (2:348) speaks of Verlaine's "L'Art Poétique" as expressing

. . . his poetic credo as well as his opposition to the Parnassian ideal. Removing himself from the plastic objectivity of the latter, he stressed, after music, a poetry that would include the odd-number syllable line, new rhymes, the union of the vague with the precise, the nuance, and that would evoke or suggest, but not describe, sensations, sentiments and dreams.

Stéphane Mallarmé (1842-1898) was an early Parnassian and a contributor to Le Parnasse-contemporain. He was a writer of hermetic poetry filled with inverted syntax, apposition, ellipses, and old and rare words. He wanted to create a new language in which words would have new and singular meanings. His charm is said to lie in the verbal magic of his verse, in its "incantatory" effect (31:227). It was in his interest in language, and not in his unorthodox poetic form and syntax, that he was chiefly of interest to the Spanish American poets.

Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) was to exercise an influence on the Modernists that was second only to that of Paul Verlaine. Though not actually a member of either of the French schools under discussion here, he did feel a certain affinity for the Parnassians and their efforts, and was also a contributor to Le Parnasse-contemporain. He felt the restrictions of their poetic ideals, though, and sought expression through a new kind of lyricism which the Symbolists exploited after him. He was a pessimist beset by the conflict between the purity of his ideals and his own baser instincts. His poetry, strongly

pessimistic and free of declamatory style struck a responsive chord in the Modernists; they found in him a kindred spirit. His work that was to affect the Modernists most deeply was Les Fleurs du Mal (The Flowers of Evil). His discovery of Correspondences came to have a lasting effect not only on the Modernists, but also on many of the French poets who followed him. He saw correspondence between different sensorial impressions (31:204). The Modernists translated this idea of correspondence into the belief that a word corresponds to an emotion, a memory, or a world of memories and sensations.

Here, then, are the major components--the essence of Romanticism along with French Symbolism and Parnassianism--which were blended together with the local needs and desires of Spanish American writers and became Modernism. Although as a movement it lasted less than thirty years, and never commanded the following of all writers in Spanish America, few of them were untouched by it. From the Parnassians the Modernists took the love of line and form, the plasticity of their writings; from the Symbolists they took the sense of color, of nuance, and the musical possibilities of words. These two elements were mixed with the spirit of Romanticism, a mixture that the Modernists perhaps could not have avoided even had they tried, since a tendency toward the Romantic is a characteristic common to much Spanish American literature.

Modernism very quickly settled itself into a movement with particular traits, not all of which of course are discernible in all poets, but which generally mark the writer who identified himself with the effort. Above all it was a reaction against everything prosaic, working to lift poetry out of the realm of the ordinary. There was a

universal devotion to rhythm, color, musicality, virtuosity and aestheticism. In subject matter the writers fled, especially during the first years, from the mundane, the ordinary, and escaped into their ivory towers of exoticism and cosmopolitanism. These two elements manifested themselves in a profusion of allusions to ancient Greece, to the Orient, to eighteenth century France, and to Greek and Nordic mythology. A general pessimism pervaded virtually all the movement, and in their anguish, the Modernists experimented with other religions and religious thought, notably Buddhism and mysticism. It was a movement devoid of dogmatism; if the poet's intention was to create art, and his ultimate goal was beauty, then he could be a Modernist regardless of the poetic form or rhyme scheme he used.

The movement can be divided into four rather clearly defined periods. The first of these, the developmental period was a transitional period between Romanticism and Modernism. It is marked by some poetry which is Romantic in tone as well as subject matter, but in which much of the subjectivism has been removed. Increasingly, during the early and middle years of the 1880's there is a refinement of the poetic language, a tendency toward simplicity of expression, and a search for new images. As the movement gathered momentum there are increasing indications of the influence of the Parnassians with their flight from reality and their impassivity. Three writers who are generally representative of this period are José Martí, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera and Julián del Casal. This developmental period is generally said to have lasted until 1888, the year in which Modernism emerged as a literary movement in the fullest sense of the word. It is a period in which, as it drew to a close, the emphasis was



increasingly on poetic form, the scrupulous selection of words for their precision of descriptiveness; it was the Parnassian cult of beauty.

The second and third periods run from 1888 to 1898 and from 1898 to 1905 respectively. Both periods can be described as the zenith of Modernism, with the differences between the two due to attitude and subject matter. The 1888-1898 decade is one devoted to the cult of exaggerated preciosity and a continued flight into the ivory tower of escapism, exoticism and impassivity; it is the truly aesthetic moment in Modernism. In the vanguard of the movement at that time was Rubén Darío, by then the recognized leader of the group, with two of his volumes, Azul (1888), and Prosas profanas (1895) themselves serving as fountains of inspiration for other Modernists.

The year 1898 witnessed the Spanish-American War and the resultant loss to Spain of her last remaining possessions in the new world. It also saw the emergence, overnight as it were, of the United States as a leading world power, and the sudden recognition of the fact that Spain was no longer to be considered seriously in world politics. An important result of that war was the creation of a sense of unity, a feeling of identification with Spain that had not been seen since before the wars for independence in the first quarter of the century. Darío had already been planting the seeds for this Hispanism, however. In 1892 the government of Costa Rica sent him to Spain as a delegate to the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America, and he felt ever after a strong affinity for the mother country.

Modernist literature of the third period, 1895-1905, underwent pronounced changes. This era, which Gómez-Gil (19:405) describes as

a metaphysical and human one, reflects the preoccupation of the Modernists with the problems of Spanish America and the personally disquieting thoughts about such things as man's origin, his destiny, his being, and his death. The Modernists turned away from the purely Parnassian writings of an earlier age to an increasing use of Symbolism which had begun noticeably to penetrate Modernism as early as 1895. The work most frequently identified with this period is Rubén Darío's Cantos de vida y esperanza, published in 1905.

The publication of Cantos de vida y esperanza marks not only the end of the third period of Modernism, but also, and perhaps more importantly, it signals the beginning of its decline. This work, along with that of many other poets of the time, reflects a general reaction against many of the basic tenets of the movement as it first developed. This final phase of Modernism, 1905-1916, which is sometimes regarded as a period of post-Modernism, sees a very rapid shift of emphasis. Poets tended to develop their own styles and themes. Although they reacted against the "ivory tower" and the excessive sonority of some of the Modernists, they did continue along the path of the enriched language, a variety of meters and abundant images. The concept of aesthetics was no longer thought of as being central to poetry. The writers of this period are characterized by subjectivism, controlled emotions and sobriety of expression, although their attitude was still one of renovation and modernity (19:479). Experimentation continued, and although some few poets still identified themselves strongly with Modernism, there was such a diversity of poetic type, indeed of poetic philosophy, that in fact Modernism as a consciously unified movement had virtually disappeared by 1910.

Short-lived though it was, it is undeniable that Modernism altered the course of Spanish American literature, and that

. . . in spite of its striving toward cosmopolitanism, it achieved a mode of expression singularly American; it had an extraordinary influence on subsequent development of our literature by opening the way for new stylistic possibilities; it made for a continental unity of aesthetic sensitivity never before achieved, and it marked what has been called 'the most important epoch' in the literary history of Hispanoamerica. (19:406)

It is not the purpose of this brief chapter to present more than a kind of overview of the Modernist movement, showing briefly some of its causes and the important elements that gave it inspiration. In the interest of clarity, though, it seems appropriate to include here some brief examples from poetry that is exemplary of Modernism, and which demonstrate some of the most salient of the characteristics of the movement. The selections are arbitrary on the part of the writer and are intended to be representative rather than definitive.

Two examples from the works of Rubén Darío will serve as an excellent point of departure. One is an extract from a poem entitled "Blasón" (Blazon), and the second is a sonnet entitled "El cisne" (The Swan). Both poems were published in Darío's work Prosas profanas, and show unusually good examples of both Parnassian and Symbolist influences, which influences had achieved a fine balance in Modernism by 1895. Both translations are by G. Durdas Craig (11), and first appeared in his study The Modernist Trend in Spanish-American Poetry.

#### Blasón

El olímpico cisne de nieve  
 Con el ágata rosa del pico  
 Lustra el ala eucarística y breve  
 Que abre al sol como un casto abanico.

En la forma de un brazo de lira  
Y del asa de un ánfora griega  
Es su cándido cuello, que inspira  
Como proa ideal que navega.

Es el cisne, de estirpe sagrada,  
Cuyo beso, por campos de seda,  
Ascendió hasta la cima rosada  
De las dulces colinas de Leda.

Blanco rey de la fuente Castalia,  
Su victoria ilumina el Danubio;  
Vinci fue su barón en Italia;  
Lohengrín es su príncipe rubio.

#### Blazon

Olympian-proud and white as snow,  
With rosy agate beak, the swan  
Makes his short stainless wings to glow  
That open sunward a chaste fan.

His neck is curved like arm of lyre  
Or handle of a Grecian vase,  
And, glittering white, seems to inspire  
Like ship that sails ideal ways.

This is the swan of brood sublime  
That, over silken fields, to kiss  
Even Leda's blushing cheek, would climb  
Her sweetly moulded charms, to bliss.

White monarch of the Castalian spring,  
On the Danube is his triumph seen;  
O'er Vinci in Italy he was king,  
His fair young prince is Lohengrin.

#### El cisne

Fue en una hora divina para el género humano.  
El Cisne antes cantaba sólo para morir.  
Cuando se oyó el acento del Cisne wagneriano  
fue en medio de una aurora, fue para revivir.

Sobre las tempestades del humano oceano  
se oye el canto del Cisne; no se cesa de oír,  
dominando el martillo del viejo Thor Germano  
o las trompas que cantan la espada de Argantir.

¡Oh Cisne! ¡Oh sacro pájaro! Si antes la blanca Helena  
del huevo azul de Leda brotó de gracia llena,  
siendo de la Hermosura la princesa inmortal.

Bajo tus blancas alas la nueva Poesía  
 concibe en una gloria de luz y de armonía  
 la Helena eterna y pura que encarna el ideal.

#### The Swan

In an hour divine it happened for the human race.  
 Of old the Swan would sing only when death was near;  
 But when the Wagnerian Swan was heard, the night gave place  
 To dawn, and then a finer life began to appear.

Above the storms that o'er our mortal ocean chase  
 Was heard the song of the Swan; we never cease to hear  
 It dominates the ancient Thor's Teutonic mace,  
 Or the trumpets loud that sing the sword of Argantir.

O Swan! O sacred bird! If erst Helena fair  
 From the blue egg of Leda burst with graces rare  
 To be princess immortal of Beauty still, though real,

The new Poetic Art under thy wings of white  
 Shall now conceive, in glory of harmony and light,  
 The Helen, eternal, pure embodying the ideal.

The extract from "Blazon," which is but the first four stanzas of a nine stanza poem, was written in Spain while Darío was there in connection with the Columbus exposition. It was inspired by the family coat-of-arms of one of Darío's friends, a coat-of-arms which shows a swan on an azure field. The swan was a source of inspiration to most of the Modernists, to whom it represented aristocracy, as well as sublime beauty, the ultimate in art. The blue field served as further inspiration, since to Darío and to many other Modernists the very color blue suggested art, this influence also coming from the French. This poem presents a combination of Parnassianism and Symbolism. In the first two stanzas the poet-turned-sculptor describes with Parnassian thoroughness the aristocratic swan polishing with his beak a wing that is turned to the sun. The poet compares the wing to a fan, and the neck with its graceful curve to both the arm of a lyre and to the handle of a Grecian vase. This allusion to Greece is only a prelude

to the abundance of references to mythology, both Greek and Nordic, which fill the poem.

In the second two stanzas of "Blazon," and throughout the sonnet "The Swan," the poet has brought together through Symbolism all of the myths about the swan which so pleased him. Craig (ll:260) has assembled them in a very compact manner:

. . . first, the myth of Leda and the Swan, and, by association, Leonardo da Vinci, who painted a great picture on this subject, of which, however, only a sketch has been preserved. A nineteenth-century engraving by Le Roux helped to give a fresh popularity to this story. A further classical reference is contained in "la fuente Castalia" [Castalian spring]; for, according to one version of the story, Cygnus, pursuing the nymph Castalia, found her, when she took refuge on the slopes of Parnassus, changed into a spring (thereafter sacred to the Muses), and was himself transformed by the pitying gods into a swan so that he might ever after be near his beloved.

. . . . .

The mention of Lohengrin suggests Wagner, and that leads to the introduction of Louis II, King of Bavaria from 1864 to 1866. . . . Near the end of his reign he staged a great performance of the opera Lohengrin, beside the Starnsee near his castle of Berg, he himself appearing as Lohengrin, clad in shining armor, in a barge drawn by a mechanical swan, while an orchestra on shore played the appropriate music.

The listing of references and allusions could continue, with each allusion designed to evoke in the mind of the reader an experience or a world of experiences. It was the aim of the poet to awaken in the reader a private world of thoughts and dreams of distant, exotic places. This poetry is, in short, escapism from the dreary world surrounding the Modernist into a realm of fantasy.

These two poems included here exemplify very well also the esotericism and the cosmopolitanism of the Modernists. Written for the initiated only, those well schooled in mythology, in painting, and in music, it was expected to be incomprehensible to the ordinary person.

In addition to blue, the other color very popular with the Modernists was white. It signified to them, in addition to virginity in its broadest sense, purity, cleanliness, chastity, and, above all, completely untarnished beauty. Many of the Modernists wrote poems which had whiteness as their central themes. Inspired in their use of white by the French precursor to Parnassianism, Théophile Gautier, author of a poem entitled "Symphonie en blanc majeur" (Symphony in White Major), many poets produced works filled with descriptions suggesting white. Probably the best-known of these poems is one by Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, a Mexican, and one of the developers of Modernism. It is entitled "De blanco" (Whiteness), and typical of the true Modernist poem, it makes no attempt to carry any sort of message beyond the inherent beauty of the color white. The translation from Spanish is by Alice Stone Blackwell.

#### De blanco

¿Qué cosa más blanca que cándido lirio?  
 ¿Qué cosa más pura que místico cirio?  
 ¿Qué cosa más casta que tierno azahar?  
 ¿Qué cosa más santa que el ara divina  
 de gótico altar?

¡De blancas palomas el aire se puebla;  
 con túnica blanca, tejida de niebla,  
 se envuelve a lo lejos feudal torreón;  
 erguida en el huerto la trémula acacia  
 al soplo del viento sacude con gracia  
 su níveo pompón!

¿No ves en el monte la nieve que albea?  
 La torre muy blanca domina la aldea,  
 las tiernas ovejas triscando se van,  
 de cisnes intactos el lago se llena,  
 columpia su copa la enhiesta azucena,  
 y su ánfora inmensa levanta el volcán.

Entremos al templo: la hostia fulgura;  
 de nieve parecen las canas del cura,  
 vestido con alba de lino sutil;

cien niñas hermosas ocupan las bancas,  
y todas vestidas con tunicas blancas  
en ramos ofrecen las flores de abril...

¡Oh mármol! ¡Oh nieves! ¡Oh inmensa blancura  
que esparces doquiera tu casta hermosura!  
¡Oh tímida virgen! ¡Oh casta vestal!  
Tu estás en la estatua de eterna belleza,  
de tu hábito blanco nació la pureza,  
¡al ángel das alas, sudario al mortal!...

En sueños ufanos de amores contemplo  
alzarse muy blancas las torres de un templo  
y oculto entre lirios abrirse un hogar;  
y el velo de novia prenderse a tu frente,  
cual nube de gasa que cae lentamente  
y viene en tus hombros su encaje a posar.

#### Whiteness

What thing than the lily unstained is more white?  
More pure than the mystic wax taper so bright?  
More chaste than the orange-flower, tender and fair?  
Than the light mist more virginal--holier too  
Than the stone where the eucharist stands, ever new,  
In the Lord's House of Prayer?

By the flight of white doves all the air is now cloven;  
A white robe, from strands of the morning mist woven,  
Enwraps in the distance the feudal round tower,  
The trembling acacia, most graceful of trees,  
Stands up in the orchard and waves in the breeze  
Her soft, snowy flower.

See you not on the mountain the white of the snow?  
The white tower stands high o'er the village below:  
The gentle sheep gambol and play, passing by.  
Swans pure and unspotted now cover the lake;  
The straight lily sways as the breezes awake;  
The volcano's huge vase is uplifted on high.

Let us enter the church: shines the eucharist there;  
And of snow seems to be the old pastor's white hair;  
In an alb of fine linen his frail form is clad.  
A hundred fair maidens there sit robed in white;  
They offer bouquets of spring flowers, fresh and bright,  
The blossoms of April, pure, fragrant and glad...

O marble! O snows! O vast, wonderful whiteness!  
Your chaste beauty everywhere sheds its pure brightness,  
O shy, timid vestal, to chastity vowed!  
In the statue of beauty eternal are you:  
From your soft robe is purity born, ever new;  
You give angels wings, and give mortals a shroud...



In proud dreams of love, I behold with delight  
 The towers of a church rising white in my sight,  
 And a home, hid in lilies, that opens to me;  
 And a bridal veil hung on your forehead so fair,  
 Like a filmy cloud, floating down slow through the air,  
 Till it rests on your shoulders, a marvel to see!

This poem is completely representative of the early stages of Modernism, when it was principally under the influence of the French Parnassians. The only aim of the poet is to describe beauty, and through the description, to suggest further beauty, all of it being a glorification of the purity of whiteness. The descriptions are almost exclusively made in terms of plasticity, and in contrast with the two poems by Darío, suggest nothing beyond the beauty inherent in the objects described. That is, the poem shows no influence of the Symbolist movement that was to have so great an impact on later Modernist poetry, including much of the poetry of Gutiérrez Nájera himself.

Though the poems cited above are given as examples of Modernist poetry at the high point of the movement, they can serve likewise as reasons why Modernism could not last long. Despite its ultimate influences on Hispanic literature and language, the fact that it was so short-lived is perhaps consistent with normal literary trends in Spanish America. It bore the causes of its own demise in its very aims--renovation, innovation, and experimentation. It was inevitable that with such aims, writers who followed the precepts of the movement would become more divergent in their own artistic philosophies, and Modernism would simply cease to exist in any conscious and unified sense. Though it did not officially come to a close until the death of Rubén Darío in 1916, it was no longer a literary issue by 1910.

Men who had been the initiators of the movement, or who had been its chief advocates in Spanish America, had either died or had almost ceased producing. Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, Julián del Casal, and José Asunción Silva, all important men in the movement, were dead before the beginning of the twentieth century. José Santos Chocano, a Peruvian Modernist, lived on until 1934, but wrote little poetry of consequence after 1910. Darío himself, popularly considered to be the originator of Modernism, and certainly the poet who introduced it into Europe, wrote his last significant poem, "Canto a la Argentina" (Song to Argentina), in 1910. Amado Nervo, an early collaborator with Gutiérrez Nájera, and a close friend of Darío's until the latter's death, had ceased to consider himself a Modernist by 1905.

Despite the fact that Nervo moved away from Modernism relatively early in his career, he will always be classified as a Modernist. For a time, in fact, he had the reputation for being one of the most extreme of the Modernists due to his use of far-fetched metaphors (8:285).

Almost immediately upon his arrival in Mexico City in 1894, he became closely associated with Gutiérrez Nájera in the publication of Revista Azul, a periodical devoted to furthering the aims of the Modernist movement, and it was in that journal that many of Nervo's early works were published. Upon the death of Gutiérrez Nájera in 1895, publication of Revista Azul ceased, and Nervo became a partner of Jesús E. Valenzuela in establishing La Revista Moderna, which was for several years a journal of great literary significance in Mexico.

By 1900, Paris was considered the focal point of Modernism. Many of Spanish America's chief exponents of the movement, including Rúbén

Darío, were then living there, exchanging ideas with the French Symbolists. Nervo went to Paris in that year, and entered almost immediately into the close circle of American and European artists who were living an often Bohemian existence, and devoting their energies to the aesthetic perfection of the new movement. It was in Paris that Nervo formed his friendship with Rubén Darío, and there that the two lived together for a time. It was during that period, also, that Nervo was most seriously concerned with the pure aesthetics of the poetry he was writing. Most notably, this aesthetic concern resulted in one of Nervo's better-known poems, La hermana agua (Sister Water), which, in terms of style, is one of his most Modernist poems. All the principal elements of Modernism--exoticism, cosmopolitanism, symbolism, and musicality--are present.

Before 1905, Modernism was beginning to undergo certain changes. World events that strongly affected Spanish America were such that the Modernist writers could no longer hold themselves aloof. The time had passed when a writer could withdraw into his ivory tower and concern himself with aesthetics alone. The Spanish-American War that had such disastrous results for Spain, and later, in 1903, North American intervention in Panama, forcibly turned the attention of many of these writers to civic matters. The resultant de-emphasis of pure aestheticism, and attention to topics of close concern to the peoples of Spanish America can best be seen in the 1905 publication of Darío's Cantos de vida y esperanza. This is a collection that contains many poems on nationalistic themes, some of which are decidedly anti-imperialistic in nature, and directed clearly at the United States.

Nervo's attitude toward poetry was undergoing a change at this time, also. Like Darío, he became less concerned with the aesthetic qualities of poetry, and more concerned with what his poetry had to say. Unlike Darío, however, he did not turn to contemporary events for subject matter for his poetry. In fact, only very rarely does a reader find references in his poetry to political and social events of the period, notwithstanding the fact he produced a sizeable portion of his entire poetic work during the time of two of the greatest political and social explosions in recent times, the Mexican Revolution and the First World War.

Rather, Nervo's poetry takes on an increasingly personal and philosophical note. His concept of poetry appears to be that poetry should deal with eternal themes, themes that, in the words of Manuel Durán (15:79) ". . . are not bound to the immediate, concrete, and circumstantial." This emphasis upon themes that to him are eternal continues through the remainder of Nervo's life. There is a corresponding diminution of concern for poetic perfection that leads, in his 1918 collection, El estanque de los lotos (The Lotus Pond), to his describing the poems in that volume as rhymed prose.

This evolution on the part of both Nervo and his poetry leads to possible ambiguity in terms of his position as a Modernist. The reader who sees Modernism only in terms of frigid Parnassian impersonality is led to question whether Nervo was really a Modernist. The same is true of the reader seeking poetry filled with images that are evocative of a world of mythology. Amado Nervo was capable of writing both kinds of poetry, and on occasion did so, but his poetic spirit was too personal, and too independent, to follow slavishly in the footsteps of

others. Whether he was affected by the forces that combined to form the movement known as Modernism has never been a serious question in the minds of students of Spanish American letters; evidence that he was affected can be found throughout his poetry. He differs from many of the more obvious Modernists in that his acceptance of those influences was always tempered by the extent to which they might be useful to him. He implemented the ideas of others, the Parnassians, the Symbolists, and certainly the musicality of Verlaine. He experimented with new poetic forms, and with new concepts in the use of the language; he never, however, allowed his own personality to be submerged for long. It was this independence, this willingness to be different, that gave to Modernism its raison d'être, and made Modernism the great force for change that it became.

### CHAPTER III

#### DEATH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Amado Nervo was a man who revered life; he was a man for whom, in the words of Concha Meléndez (32:81), "life is a perpetual miracle which his eyes never tire of watching." Yet, paradoxically, he was at the same time a man who was deeply preoccupied with death, and with what happens to man beyond the grave. This preoccupation is such a strong central theme in his poetry that literary critics and historians have tended to label Nervo, somewhat injudiciously, as one who was somehow abnormal in his reflections upon death. Max Henríquez Ureña (21:473) states that while Nervo found life loathesome, he feared death. This would seem to be borne out in a poem entitled "Predestinación," in which the poet speaks of his mixed feelings toward death.

...un disgusto infinito de la vida,  
y un temor infinito de la muerte...  
.....  
¿Qué hacer cuando la vida me repela  
si la pálida muerte me acobarda?  
(34:1311)

...an infinite disgust for life,  
and an infinite fear of death...  
.....  
What can I do when life repels me  
if pale death makes a coward of me?

It seems pertinent here to point out, however, that this poem appeared in Nervo's volume entitled Místicas (34:1311), which was published in

1898, only four years after the poet's arrival in Mexico City from the provinces, and at a time when he was still very much under the influence of his rather narrow religious background. Only very rarely does Nervo indicate this feeling toward death in his succeeding works, particularly those written after 1905.

Taking a contrary point of view, Manuel Durán (15:153) describes Nervo as being in love with death to such a degree that an unsympathetic psychoanalyst might have classified him as a necrophiliac. Durán (15:48) also cites a visit made by Miguel de Unamuno to the Madrid home of Nervo, and the impression Nervo's living room made upon him. Without exception, the pictures in the room either suggested death, or depicted it. One was a representation of the Isle of the Dead; another was simply a photograph of an enormous tombstone. Nervo is also said to have kept in a drawer of his desk a photograph of the dead body of his beloved Ana (30:111).

There is no denying the presence of death as one of the important recurring themes in the poetic works of Amado Nervo, nor is it surprising that critics variously classify Nervo from having a deep psychotic fear of death to having an obsessive longing for it. Since in his poetry Nervo's attitude toward death varies from the superstitious fear seen in his early poems to the longing of the bereaved lover to the impassivity of the Oriental, a reader who wishes to document a particular attitude can find abundant evidence simply by reading isolated poems. A student of Nervo's works must ask himself, however, the extent to which this apparent preoccupation is indicative of the man himself. Nervo's prose writings do not, in the main, mirror this fascination with death that is apparently so evident in his poetry;

rather, they are eclectic in nature. Since Neruo considered himself first a poet and second a prose writer and columnist, he may have deliberately chosen this theme for his poetry. A writer who wishes his work to achieve any permanence must of necessity seek themes that are universal, themes that will have an appeal to men at all times and in all places. It is conceivable that Neruo took death, the one thing that is a common experience to all men, and simply employed it as a very effective literary device.

Death, particularly the more morbid aspects of it, was a popular theme among many of the Modernist writers. The poetry of Julián del Casal of Cuba abounds with it. Casal liked especially to write of the ugly and grotesque aspects of death. Likewise, the Colombian Modernist, José Asunción Silva, was an extremely pessimistic writer who brooded often on death, and ultimately committed suicide.

Neruo, then, is not entirely unique among his contemporaries in his propensity for writing about death. He does differ from them, though, in his handling of the topic. Whereas Casal and Silva leaned toward the more lugubrious side of death, Neruo's contemplation of death was, with only minor exceptions, religious, philosophical, and even scientific. He was curious about what happened beyond the tomb; he wanted to communicate with the dead in the hope that all the great mysteries might be revealed to him.

There is much in the life of the poet himself that may serve to satisfy the critic as to the reasons for the prevalence of death in Neruo's poetry. He was reared in a deeply religious and highly superstitious family environment in a remote province of Mexico where credence was given to visions and to the prophetic quality of dreams,



especially if those dreams dealt with religion or death. Contrasting this influence was his academic training. French Positivism had become firmly entrenched in Mexico in the second half of the nineteenth century, and had become almost a national philosophy. It is reasonable to assume that these contradictory forces must have had a disquieting effect upon the young Neruo. Umphrey (39:143), feels this is true in later years also, especially after Neruo went to Paris.

When Neruo was thirteen years of age the finality of death was impressed upon him by the death of his father. This occasioned profound changes in the life style of the family, since they were left in deep financial straits. It is popularly thought that it was financial problems, and not any lack of religious fervor, that forced Neruo to give up his plans for entering the priesthood. It is well to mention here, though, that this opinion is not universally held. G. W. Umphrey (39:142) states, although without documentation, that Neruo's decision was prompted, not by financial considerations, but by personal ones. That is, he had doubts about himself and his religion. This factor, if true, could indirectly have had a bearing on the poet's attitude toward death.

There were the deaths of two other people close to Amado Neruo which were to affect him deeply. His mother, to whom he was deeply devoted, died in 1905, and it was her death that inspired the writing of a volume of verse entitled En voz baja (In a Soft Voice) (34:1557). Then, in 1912, Ana Cecilia Luisa Dailliez, the one great and overpowering romantic love in the life of Neruo, died in his arms. In an agony of grief, Neruo wrote his most famous volume of poetry, La amada

inmóvil (The Stilled Heart) (34:1671), a tormented tribute to the spirit and the person of Ana.

Whatever the causes, or the poet's reasons, death as a theme does in fact pervade a sizeable amount of Amado Nervo's poetry. There are numerous indications of his great curiosity about death, particularly so in the poetry he produced after reaching maturity. The death wish is also present in varying degrees throughout his poetic production, and reaches almost overwhelming proportions in La amada inmóvil. Despite the statements of Henríquez Ureña (21:473) to the contrary, fear of death, in its most literal and unqualified sense, appears so rarely in the poetry Nervo wrote after late adolescence that it cannot be assigned any real importance.

After the death of Ana Cecilia Luisa Dailliez, the woman with whom Nervo lived for more than ten years, Nervo suffered terribly. At first, his mind seemed unable to grasp the fact of her death, and by his own account he spent most of the first few weeks after her death praying to God that she be returned to him. Then, once full realization of her death did come to him, and he began to comprehend the enormity of that death in terms of his own despair, he experienced a longing for his own death that nearly drove him to collapse. He was afraid that if he lived on he would inevitably forget her, and it was this thought, more than the loneliness, that gave him the desire for death. Nervo (34:1120) says, in the prologue to La amada inmóvil, that "this idea [forgetting Ana] is so intolerable to me that it makes me wish fervently, passionately for death."

This longing for death in the period immediately following Ana's death became so strong that the poet seriously contemplated suicide.

The fact that he did not commit suicide is due neither to a fear of death nor to his Roman Catholic upbringing. Rather, the temptation to end his own life was overcome by the fear that God, in order to punish him, might separate him from Ana for all of eternity. This fear is poignantly exemplified in a poem Neruo wrote six months after the death of Ana. Its title is "Por miedo" (Fear) and describes in very literal terms the inner conflict he was facing at that time, that is, desire for death and fear of God's retribution, not for the sin of suicide, but for his own suicide.

La dejé marcharse sola  
 ...y, sin embargo, tenía  
 para evitar mi agonía  
 la piedad de una pistola.

"¿Por qué no morir"--pensé  
 "¿Por qué no librarme desta  
 tortura?" ¿Ya qué me resta  
 después que ella se me fue?"

...Pero el resabio cristiano  
 me insinuó con voces graves:  
 "¡Pobre necio, tú qué sabes!"  
 Y paralizó mi mano.

Tuve miedo..., es la verdad;  
 miedo, sí, de ya no verla,  
 miedo inmenso de perderla  
 por toda una eternidad.

Y preferí--no vivir,  
 que no es vida la presente--,  
 sino acabar lentamente,  
 lentamente, de morir.

(34:1693)

I let her go away alone,  
 and all the while, I had  
 the mercy of a pistol  
 to end my agony.

"Why not die?" I thought;  
 "Why not free myself of this  
 torture?" "What is left me,  
 now that she has gone?"

But Christian fear  
 within me spoke with accents  
 grave; "Poor fool, well you  
 know!" and stayed my hand.

I was afraid, it's true;  
 Yes, I was afraid of not  
 seeing her again; immensely  
 afraid of losing her for all  
 eternity.

And I preferred--not to live,  
 What I endure is not living--,  
 but rather, slowly, slowly  
 to stop dying.

Here, while the poet says that he is afraid to die by his own hand, it clearly is not a literal fear of death that keeps him from suicide. Similarly, it is important to note that there is no indication that his church's ban on suicide is deterring him. His fear is a much more personal one, the fear of eternal separation from Ana. His one wish is to be reunited with her and death is of course the only thing that can bring that about. He is ready for death; he longs for it. He resists it simply because he cannot face losing her forever.

Again, almost a year after Ana's death, Neruo suggests suicide in the poem "Yo no debo irme..." (I Must Not Go). Again he realizes that the time of his own death is not a decision he can make.

Yo no debo irme: Tengo de esperar  
 hasta que la muerte me venga a llamar.  
 ¡Tengo de esperar!

.....  
 Mucho, tal vez mucho tengo de esperar;  
 pero al fin la muerte me vendrá a llamar.  
 (34:1710)

I must not go; I have to wait until death  
 comes to call for me. I must wait!

.....  
 It may be that I shall have to wait  
 a long, long time, but finally death  
 will come for me.

Excepting the initial period of a few months following the death of Ana, when a bereft Nervo pleaded for death as an end to his suffering, his poetry that is typically cited by biographers and critics as indications of a death wish seems, rather, to be evidence of his continuing wish to be with Ana. There is no morbidity in these poems, only a feeling of loss at having to wait, and an anticipation of what death will bring to him. In "Impaciencia" (Impatience), this loss is eloquently expressed.

Soy un viajero que tiene prisa  
de partir.  
Soy un alma impaciente e insumisa,  
que se quiere ir.

Soy un ala que trémula verbero...  
¿Cuándo vas, oh Destino, a quitar  
de mi pie tu grillete de acero  
y-- ¡por fin! --a dejarme volar?  
(34:1706)

I am a traveler anxious to  
depart.  
I am a soul, impatient and  
rebellious, who wants to go.

I am a wing that tremulously  
flutters. When, Oh Destiny,  
will you take the shackles from  
my feet and, at last! let me fly?

Next to nothing is known of the sub rosa life Nervo had from 1901 to 1912 with Ana Cecilia Luisa Dailliez beyond what the poet himself has left in the prologue to La amada inmóvil, and that which can be inferred from the poems contained in that book. Only a very few of his closest friends even knew of her existence. There is only speculation as to why, in a love affair as deep as theirs seems to have been, they never married. The conditions of their association indicate that Ana certainly must have reciprocated his love. There

seems to be no other logical explanation for the fact that she willingly severed contact with virtually everyone she had known, and apparently lived for him alone. It is this love, this interrupted love they had together, and a desire to resume it, that supplies the inspiration for many poems in La amada inmóvil that have been cited as evidence of a death wish on the part of Amado Nervo.

¡Cómo Será!

Si en el mundo fue tan bella,  
 ¿cómo será en esa estrella  
 donde está?  
 ¡Cómo será!

Si en esta prisión oscura  
 en que más bien se advina  
 que se palpa la hermosura,  
 fue tan peregrina,  
 ¡cuán peregrina será  
 en el más allá!

Si de tal suerte me quiso  
 aquí, ¿cómo me querrá  
 en el azul paraíso  
 en donde mora quizá?

.....  
 Siempre que medito en esa  
 dicha que alcanzar espero,  
 clamo, cual Santa Teresa,  
que muero porque no muero:  
 hallo la vida muy tarda  
 y digo: ¿cómo será  
 la ventura que me aguarda  
 donde ella está?  
 ¡Cómo será!

(34:1685)

How?

If on earth she was so beautiful,  
 how will she be on that star  
 where she is now?  
 How?

If in earth's dark prison,  
 where beauty is more to be  
 divined than experienced,

she was so rare and beautiful,  
How lovely she must be  
in Heaven!

If such was my fortune that  
she loved me here, how much  
more will she love me in that  
blue paradise where she now lives?

When I think about that  
happiness that awaits me,  
I cry, like Saint Therese,  
that I die because I do not die:  
I find life very tedious  
and say: How great will be  
the happiness that is waiting  
for me with her?  
How?

Clearly this is a wish for death, but the poem contains no suggestion of morbidity or of any fascination with death on the part of the poet. It was written a little more than three months after Ana's death, and is nothing more nor less than the yearning of a man to be with the woman he loves. The fact that he must die to join her concerns him not at all beyond the inconvenience of having to wait.

There are relatively rare examples of Nervo's poetry in which he longs for death simply because he finds living no longer worth the effort. One such example is seen in the poem "Tedio" (Tedium). It is included here not so much for its subject matter alone as for the thoughts it contains. The poem is a part of the volume entitled Serenidad (Serenity) (34:1596), published in 1914, at a time when the poet had recovered somewhat from the blow of Ana's death and was coming under the influence of Buddhism, with its passivity and Stoicism. Therefore, the poem itself is unusual, out of place, as it were, given the time and Nervo's general state of mind as indicated by the very title of the book. Strongly reminiscent of Hamlet and

his thoughts on death, it reflects his general weariness and the emptiness of the life he was living.

Tengo el peor de todos los cansancios:  
 ¡el terrible cansancio de mí mismo!  
 ¡Dónde ir que a mí propio no me lleve,  
 con el necio gritar de mis sentidos  
 y el vano abejear de mis deseos  
 y el tedio insoportable de lo visto  
 y el gran desabrimiento de los labios  
 después del amargor de lo bebido?

¡Oh! qué hambre de paz y de penumbra  
 y de quietud y de silencio altivo  
 y de serenidad... ¡Dormir, dormir!  
 ¡Toda una eternidad estar dormido!  
 (34:1642)

I have the worst of all kinds of weariness:  
 a terrible weariness with myself!  
 Where can I go and not take myself along,  
 with the foolish shouting of my senses  
 and the vain demands of my desires  
 and the insufferable tedium of all I see  
 and the complete lack of flavor  
 in anything I eat or drink?

Oh, what a hunger for peace, and for shadow,  
 and quiet, and proud silence,  
 and serenity... To sleep, to sleep!  
 Throughout eternity to be asleep!

With the possible exception of the poetry contained in La amada inmóvil, an attitude toward death that is more representative of Nervo's poetry than either a death wish or an abnormal fear of death is his intense curiosity about it. With his maturity, and his increasing interest in science, notably astronomy, he came to reject, or at least to grow away from the religious beliefs that were so much a part of his provincial background. Nervo had a great interest in mysticism which dated back to his student days in the seminary. At first, his reading was limited to the Western mystics, but he soon began investigating the mystical teachings of the Eastern religions as well.



Mysticism, by its very nature, is contrary to either a deep-seated fear of death or a desire for death. Rather, it implies a quieter, more contemplative attitude toward it.

With the death of Amado Nervo's mother, there is an increase in the incidence of the death theme in his poetry. This is particularly apparent in En voz baja, a volume of poetry inspired by her death. Here, it becomes more apparent that death is much on the poet's mind. However, the general tenor of most of this poetry is that death is neither to be feared nor sought. Simply, it is man's final experience. The poet is curious, both from a religious point of view and a philosophical one, about what takes place with death. It occurs to him, in fact, possibly man does not even know when it happens.

Tal vez

Este despego de todo  
esta avidez de volar  
estos latidos que anuncian  
el advenimiento de la libertad;  
esta pasión por lo arcano,  
me hacen a ratos pensar:  
--Alma, tal vez estoy muerto  
y no lo sé... ¡como don Juan!

Esta nostalgia de mundos  
¡ay!, que ni sé donde están;  
estas vislumbres de seres  
y cosas sin nombre, que no vi jamás;  
esta embriaguez de infinito,  
me hacen a ratos pensar:  
--Alma, tal vez estoy muerto  
y no lo sé... ¡como don Juan!

Estos amagos de vértigo,  
cual si mi espíritu ya  
fuese flotando en el éter;  
esta misteriosa sensación de paz,  
estos perfumes de enigma,  
me hacen a ratos pensar:  
--Alma, tal vez estoy muerto  
y no lo sé... ¡como don Juan!

(34:1561)

## Perhaps

This indifference to all,  
 this longing to fly,  
 these throbs that announce  
 the advent of freedom;  
 this passion for the great Mystery,  
 sometimes cause me to think:  
 --Spirit, perhaps I am dead  
 and don't know it... like Don Juan!

This nostalgia I have for worlds,  
 when I don't even know where they are;  
 these notions I have of nameless beings  
 and things that I've never seen;  
 this rapture I feel for the infinite,  
 sometimes cause me to think;  
 --Spirit, perhaps I am dead  
 and don't know it... like Don Juan!

These moments I have of vertigo  
 as if already my spirit  
 were floating there in the heavens;  
 this mysterious sensation of peace,  
 sometimes cause me to think:  
 --Spirit, perhaps I am dead  
 and don't know it... like Don Juan!

Whether Neruo's attitude toward death at a particular moment was fear, longing, or resignation, he was always concerned, not about death itself, but about the implications of death. He was haunted by the fact that those implications constitute a part of the great arcanum, the revelation of which can come only with death. It was not, however, until late in his life that he reached a philosophical level at which he could resign himself to whatever death held in store for him. He continued to probe, to wonder, to ask.

When his mother died in 1905, Neruo's own life was two-thirds over. He had reached an age at which men typically begin to become aware of their own mortality. Further, he was experiencing the only romantic love of his life that can be said to have had any substance. It is these two elements coming together at precisely the right time

that may have generated the great curiosity about death that is so evident in En voz baja. This curiosity reaches a high point in a poem entitled "Muerta" (Dead) in that volume. Though his speculation is centered specifically around the question of where his dead mother is, and what she is experiencing, clearly it is not the welfare of his mother's spirit exclusively that is disturbing to him. He may be showing concern for the destiny of all of mankind; certainly his own destiny is not far from his thoughts as he writes.

#### Muerta

En vano entre la sombra mis brazos, siempre abiertos,  
asir quieren su imagen con illusorio afán.  
¡Qué noche tan callada, qué limbos tan inciertos!  
¡Oh Padre de los vivos; ¿a dónde van los muertos,  
a dónde van los muertos, Señor, a dónde van?

.....  
Acaso en una playa remota y desolada,  
enfrente de un océano sin límites, que está  
convulso a todas horas, mi ausente idolatrada  
los torvos horizontes escruta con mirada  
febril, buscando un barco de luz que no vendrá.

.....  
Tal vez en un planeta bañado de penumbra  
sin fin, que un sol opaco, ya casi extinto alumbra,  
cuitada peregrina, mirando en rededor  
ilógicos aspectos de seres y de cosas,  
absurdas perspectivas, creaciones misteriosas,  
que causan extrañeza sutil y vago horror.

.....  
Acaso está muy sola. Tal vez mientras yo pienso  
en ella, está muy triste; quizás con miedo esté.  
Tal vez se abre a sus ojos algún arcano inmenso.  
¡Quién sabe lo que siente, quién sabe lo que ve!

(34:1572)

#### Dead

Vainly among the shadows my arms, ever open,  
try with an illusory eagerness to grasp her image.  
So still the night, so filled with uncertain emptiness!  
Oh God of the living, where do the dead go?  
Where do the dead go, Father, where do they go?

Perhaps on some desolate and remote beach  
facing a limitless ocean that is always convulsed,  
my idolized mother is looking weakly at the  
forbidding horizon, searching for a light  
that will not come.

Perhaps on a planet shrouded in endless shadow,  
that an opaque sun, almost cold, tries to illuminate,  
my troubled pilgrim, seeing round her only illogical  
suggestions of beings and things, absurd perspectives,  
mysterious creations that cause subtle wonder  
and vague horror.

Perhaps she is all alone. Perhaps even as I think  
of her, she is sad; maybe she is afraid.  
Perhaps some great mystery will be revealed  
before her eyes.  
Who knows what she feels; who knows what she sees!

With the passing of the years, there is increasing evidence in Nervo's poetry of the influence of the Eastern philosophies. Gone now, for the most part is the plaintive note, the anguished supplication. No longer is his poetry filled with a longing for the great arcanum, the revelation of the great mysteries; he has ceased yearning to know the unknowable. Rather, there is an inner peace, a tranquil acceptance of life as well as death, that first becomes apparent in his 1914 volume of poetry entitled Serenidad, and continues unabated through the final five years of his life.

Nervo's last years were not entirely years of asceticism and abnegation, however. As a man who found so much in life worth the living, he could not be completely governed by death. Though this is much more apparent in his prose writings than in his verses, there are indications of a will to live that seem almost to negate much of the resignation that even Nervo sees in himself. There is some significance, perhaps, in the fact that one of the final poems in

Serenidad reflects this will. Titled "Cansancio" (Tiredness), there is a note almost of hedonism that is rare in Nervo.

Está cansada ya de gritar mi laringe,  
interrogando a cada mundo del firmamento;  
está cansado ya mi pobre pensamiento  
de proponer enigmas a la inmutable Esfinge...

¡A qué pensar, a qué lanzar nuestro reproche  
a lo desconocido!

¡Comamos y bebamos!  
¡Quizás es preferible que nunca comprendamos  
el enorme secreto que palpita en la noche!  
(34:1646)

My throat is tired of shouting,  
of questioning each body in the firmament;  
my poor mind is weary from proposing  
enigmas to the immutable Sphinx...

What good is it to think, why hurl  
our reproach against the unknown?

Let's eat and drink! Perhaps it's better  
that we never comprehend the enormous secret  
that palpitates in the night!

Another poem, also from Serenidad, and which also points out the futility, in Nervo's mind, of ceaseless questioning of God's intent is "A qué..." (For What...). Much more representative than the above poem of the poet's general state of mind in 1913 or 1914, the time when it can be presumed to have been written, it reflects somewhat the Buddhistic influence that was to become even stronger in some of his succeeding works. There is nothing here of the person obsessed with thoughts of death. Rather, the reader sees the poet's calm acceptance of man's inability to know what lies beyond, and a suggestion, not Buddhistic, that the only recourse is to live life, tasting the joys, and accepting the burdens.

A qué...

¡A qué tantos y tantos sistemas peregrinos!  
¡A qué tantos volúmenes y tanta ciencia, a qué!  
Si lo que más importa, que son nuestros destinos,  
se nos esconde siempre; si todos los caminos  
conducen al "¡no sé!"

Marchamos pensativos por parajes inciertos,  
tras el Deus Abscórditus que nadie ver logró  
y del cual no sabemos ni qué hace con los muertos,  
ni por qué nos destruye, ni por qué nos creó.

(Le amamos, sin embargo; y en este cautiverio,  
bebemos, bendiciéndole, su acíbar y su hiel.  
Le amamos, sí, le amamos..., ¡quizá por el misterio  
torturador, inmenso, divino, que hay en El!)

...Mas nunca entenderemos la esencia de las cosas,  
y, pues que lo absoluto siempre nos ha de huir,  
dejemos lo absoluto y aspiremos las rosas  
(las pobres rosas pálidas, enfermas, espinosas  
y mustias) del vivir...

Brille nuestra sonrisa, cual una mansa luz  
crepuscular, en toda labor, en toda pena,  
y, como Jesucristo, llevemos nuestra cruz,  
con el alma dolida, pero noble y serena.

(34:1606)

To what end so, so many rare new systems?  
What good so many books, and so much science, what?  
If that which matters most, our own destiny,  
always eludes us; if all paths  
lead to a simple "I don't know!"

Pensively, we move through strange uncertain places  
in quest of the Deus Abscórditus no one ever sees,  
and from whom we learn neither what He does with the dead,  
nor why He destroys us, nor why He created us.

(But still we love Him; and in this captive state  
we drink the bitter and the sweet, and thank Him.  
We love Him, yes, we love Him..., perhaps for the  
immense, torturing, divine mystery He is!)

But we will never know the essence of things;  
the absolute will always fly from us;  
then let's leave the absolute, and smell the roses  
(the poor pale roses, the sick and thorny roses)  
of life.

Let our smile shine like a brave light  
at dusk in our times of trial and pain,  
and like Christ, let us carry our cross  
with a heavy heart, but noble and serene.

Death, or rather, the great mystery of death is a theme that is present in a great amount of Nervo's poetry. It runs as a never ending thread through all of what is generally considered to be his best poetry. Manuel Durán (15:142) states that if one were to make a study of Nervo's principal, substantive poems, that is to say, those poems by Amado Nervo that express the essence of the poet, that the unflinching theme would be that of man confronted by the unknown. In fact, while Durán captures an important central theme in the poetry, it is something of an arbitrary extension of what Nervo says to refer to that theme in such universal terms. It would be more accurate to say that the theme invariably is Amado Nervo confronted by the unknown. This is not to suggest that Nervo was indifferent to the destinies of others, only that circumstances extraneous to himself caused him to be more deeply preoccupied with what was likely to happen in his own particular case.

Coming from an ambience that, though chronologically was in the nineteenth century, could hardly have been distinguished from that of the eighteenth, he found himself surrounded by ideas that were antithetical to his whole heritage. Suddenly, there were no absolutes. Positivism had captured the imagination of a Mexico newly freed from church domination. Great strides forward were being made in the sciences, and ideas long held to be truisms were suddenly being challenged. The answers to man's questions, or at least to Nervo's questions, were no longer so easily found.

His first close experience with death after his maturity was in the death of his mother in 1905. For ten years or longer he had been questioning his own beliefs and the dogmas of the church into which he had been born, and in which he had seriously considered the priesthood. His mother's death brought him face to face with specific questions relating to death, and all the implications of death. He began seriously to question what death is, where the dead go, and what they experience, if indeed they experience anything.

With the death of Ana, the only person with whom he ever formed a romantic alliance of any permanence, he was once again thrown into thoughts on death. At first, he yearned achingly for his own death. Contrary to what is often thought, however, his death wishes do not reflect any abnormality, any fixation with death. Rather, they demonstrate his love for Ana and his desire to be reunited with her so that they might resume their interrupted relationship beyond the grave.

With the realization that he can have no voice in the time of his own death, he turns once again to questions about death, and what his own existence--their existence--will be after he dies. The questions now are less philosophical in nature than were those following his mother's death. His concern is much more immediate and personal.

After the shock of Ana's death subsides, Nervo moves into another, and his final stage in his attitude toward death. He is still concerned about death and the great mysteries death will reveal to him. Now, however, the influence of his studies of Buddhism becomes more and more apparent. Nervo has reached a level of serenity he has not approached in his earlier poems; now he is no longer troubled.



He has reached a point at which there is evident a kind of resignation, of acceptance, not only of the inevitability of death, but of the fact that it is only with death that the mysteries will be revealed to him. Finally he sees the futility of anguish about death, and the logic of accepting life for what it offers, and of living it the best way he can.

## CHAPTER IV

### SPIRITUALITY

Just as family and educational backgrounds of Amado Nervo had helped to shape his attitudes toward death, so did they serve to shape facets of his spiritual beliefs that were to remain with him until his death. Reared in a devout family setting, religion was an integral part of his existence, certainly until he entered the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Mexico City at age twenty-four.

He began his secondary studies at age fourteen in the town of Jacona, in the state of Michoacán. In the two years he spent there he studied the classics, and also "he learned, above all, to love God, nature, and the firmament . . ." (25:28). He then entered the Seminary of Zamora, where, in addition to his religious instruction, he studied science and philosophy, and completed the first year of the study of law.

As first-born, it was expected that he would enter the priesthood, and in 1890 he began studies for that career. After only one year, however, and for reasons that are not clear, he left the seminary. G. W. Umphrey (39:142) states unequivocally that ". . . when wider acquaintance with modern thought began to weaken his religious faith, he decided that the priesthood was not his true vocation." A much more popular theory is that financial problems kept him from continuing his studies. There is an abundance of evidence in his

works to indicate that whatever doubts he may have held at that time were about himself, and not about his religion. In any case, he gave up all thoughts, apparently, of the priesthood and turned to journalism, and to poetry.

Contemporaries and friends of Amado Nervo often referred to him as "el monje de la poesía" (the monk of poetry), and "el fraile de los suspiros" (the friar of sighs). Both terms were due in part to his devotion to Christianity, in part to an aura of holiness he is reputed to have radiated, and in part simply to an innate goodness that many of his associates detected in him. Above all, the survival of the sobriquets is indicative of the esteem, almost the veneration, that has been held for the poet among the masses in the Spanish speaking world.

Though many readers consider Christian piety to be both a mark of Nervo and his poetry, it is contrasted, and at times almost contradicted by elements of Hinduism. The presence of Hinduism is undeniable, and permeates much of his poetry. His interest in Oriental cultures, begun early in his career perhaps only for the purpose of injecting the necessary exoticism into his Modernist writings, continued to a greater or lesser degree throughout his life. Finally, Orientalism reaches such overwhelming proportions in his 1918 work, El estanque de los lotos (The Lotus Pond), that it becomes the dominant theme.

To many of the critics of the works of Nervo, this influence of Eastern religions and philosophies appears to have created unsettling contradictions in the thinking of the poet which demand explanations. Well meaning critics, wishing presumably to minimize the importance

of these contradictions, suggest that they are more apparent than real, or, that if real, they point more than anything else to a strengthening of his Christian beliefs.

Concha Meléndez (32:67) cites a lecture given by Calixto Oyuela, author of the prologue to Nervo's 1917 volume, Elevacion (Elevation), at the University of Buenos Aires in which he admits to the presence of obvious Oriental influence in the mysticism of Nervo, but adds that

" . . . this tendency of his, common to other writers of his time, follows only certain analogies of doctrine, and in no way weakens the integrity of his Christian faith, which is based essentially on love. It is curious in this respect to see how, at times, his own faith is intensified through his Buddhistic contemplation."

A book, appropriately titled Amado Nervo, Mexico's Religious Poet, written in 1936 by Esther Wellman adds further to the image. While Miss Wellman does not disregard the presence of Oriental influences in the poetry of Nervo, the substance of her discussion is that Nervo's study of Eastern philosophies and religions served to strengthen his own.

Alfred Coester (8:291), on the other hand, remarks that "the Christian inspiration . . . of the beautiful nature poem, "La hermana agua" (Sister Water), written in 1901, disappears little by little until his last volume, El estanque de los lotos (The Lotus Pond), 1918, is so Buddhistic in tone that his friends worried for the salvation of his soul."

Coester's statement is supported by a similar one made many years later by G. W. Umphrey (39:136), who sees Nervo as being essentially Hinduistic throughout the last fifteen years of his life.

From 1904 until his death in 1919 the spiritual life of Amado Neruo oscillated between Hinduism and Christianity. . . . But scattered through (his most Christian works) and in the volume entitled El estanque de los lotos (1918), there is a sufficient number of poems to prove that he was decidedly Hinduistic in the eclectic religious philosophy that finally gave him the spiritual serenity that he desired.

Essentially the same line of reasoning is taken by the bulk of Neruo's critics and biographers. That is, there is a tendency to assume a certain thematic point of view, or to place an exclusive classification on the poet and his works simply because a given theme recurs with frequency. An important point overlooked by Umphrey is the fact that El estanque de los lotos, Neruo's most Buddhistic work, was written almost concurrently with Elevación, possibly the most Christian of his works.

In terms of spirituality, Neruo's poems reflect a thematic eclecticism that very possibly is an indication of his own eclectic philosophy, a blend of several elements--mysticism, pantheism, Buddhism, and, of course, Christianity. To assume that one of the elements represents exclusively the religious philosophy of Amado Neruo is not only dangerous, but also infers a knowledge of Neruo's thinking that cannot be drawn from his writings, either prose or poetry.

Since the poet left nothing concrete upon which scholars can base conclusions beyond poems which they may interpret as they like, then a pertinent point emerges. It becomes a question of the extent to which Neruo used certain religious and philosophical elements because he believed implicitly in them, and the extent to which he employed them as literary contrivances, frameworks upon which he could build his poems.

The presence of exotic Oriental references in the poetry of Neruo is not sufficient evidence, in itself, to justify labeling the poet Buddhistic. Such references, particularly when they appear in the early poems of Neruo cannot reasonably be regarded as anything more than exoticism, one of the marks of Modernism. Nearly all the Modernist poets used references to the distant, the alien, the mysterious, and the foreign, and they did so for a number of reasons, none of which necessarily indicates a personal acceptance of a particular philosophy. They wanted to make their work more recondite; they wanted to display their own broad knowledge and interests; they wanted to escape from the realities of their own surroundings; and they wanted to inject newness and variety into their works as well as into the entire field of Hispanic letters.

There are so many poems throughout the entire production of Amado Neruo that demonstrate not only his piety in general, but also his deep seated sense of Christianity specifically, that a reader could probably prove that piety conclusively with a random sampling of his poems. Many of his poems stand out in this respect, either for their forcefulness or for their beauty and simplicity of expression. Of the former classification, one of his better known poems, whose fame is perhaps due as much to the whimsicality contained in the first strophe as in what the poet actually says is "Credo" (Creed).

¡Preguntas en qué creo de fijo? No recato  
mi confesión de fe, muy simple y cristalina:  
Creo en Dios, y en el noble sulfato de quinina,  
y a veces creo en Dios..., ¡pero no en el sulfato!

Lo demás es acaso, puede ser y quizá:  
lo demás son dos mil años de discusiones;  
es mucha teología, muchas definiciones,  
sobre algo indefinible que envuelto en sombra está.

...Pero si me preguntas qué es lo que amo, verás:  
¡Amo a Cristo Jesús!

--- ¡Haya o no haya venido?

--- ¡No amamos tantas cosas que nunca han existido?  
¡No amamos tantos seres que no veremos más?

¿Piensas que necesito dioses de carne y hueso  
para adorarlos? Yo adoro las ideas  
hechas dioses...

--- ¡Aun cuando nunca esos dioses veas?

--- ¡Quién sabe si los amo justamente por eso!

(34:1622)

You ask what I believe in absolutely? I'll not  
hide my confession of faith, it's clear and simple:  
I believe in God, and in sulfate of quinine so noble,  
and sometimes I believe in God..., but not in quinine!

The rest is possibly, maybe, and perhaps:  
the rest is two thousand years of discussion;  
it is too much theology, too many definitions  
over something indefinable and wrapped in shadow.

But if you ask me what it is I love, you'll see:  
I love Jesus Christ!

--- Has he come, or not?

--- Don't we love so many things that have never existed?  
Don't we love so many beings we'll never see again?

Do you think I must have gods of flesh and blood  
in order to adore them? I adore ideas  
turned gods...

--- Even when you never see those gods?

--- Who knows but that I love them precisely for that reason?

There is little in the poetry of Amado Nervo to warrant serious questioning of his adherence to Christianity. There is little question that he was influenced by Buddhism, at least in terms of subject matter for his poetry. Nor, is there any reason to suppose that it was not an important factor in his personal life. Certainly, in the final years of his life, when he had found the peace and tranquility he had sought for so long, Buddhistic elements dominate a sizeable portion of his poetry. By way of contrast, however, in other poetry produced in those same years, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that he was never far from the dogma of his church.

Certainly there were times when Nervo was assailed by doubts; he lived in a time of doubts and questions. In Mexico above all, perhaps, it was an age of positivism. Nationally, there was a tendency to view questions pragmatically and not theologically. It was disturbing to Nervo that new thinking was introducing new questions without also providing man with their answers. By his own account he kept his faith or, perhaps more accurately, his faith remained with him.

No es culpa mía

Si alternan la fe y la duda  
como la noche y el día  
en mi alma yerma y desnuda,  
¡no es culpa mía!

Culpa es del siglo, que forja  
sistemas a discreción,  
y que no trae en su alforja  
ni una afirmación.

Culpa es de la obscuridad,  
de la esquivia lobreguez,  
del no dar con la verdad  
ni una vez...

Sin embargo, allá en el fondo  
del obscuro laberinto,  
muy hondo, mucho, muy hondo,  
habla un instinto.

Es como un sí que confirma  
mi raro sí de creyente  
y que, cuando niego, afirma  
tímidamente...

Como vago cuchicheo  
que surge apenas de los  
abismos de mi deseo  
y que murmura: "¡Yo creo  
en Dios..."

(34:1646)

The Fault is not Mine

If faith and doubt alternate  
as night and day  
in my naked empty soul,  
the fault is not mine!



It is the fault of the century,  
that forges systems without compromise,  
and that does not bring with it  
a single affirmation.

It is the fault of the darkness,  
of the impenetrable darkness,  
of not encountering the truth  
even once...

Nevertheless, there in the depths  
of the dark labrynth,  
deep, very deep,  
an instinct speaks.

It is like a yes that confirms  
my rare believing yes,  
and that, when I deny,  
timidly affirms...

Like a vague whisper  
that scarcely leaves the  
depths of my longing  
that murmurs,  
"I believe in God..."

Shortly after Nervo's decision to give up his studies for the priesthood, he secured employment as a newspaper reporter in the coastal city of Mazatlán, and from there, in 1904, he went to Mexico City where he continued to support himself through journalism. By that time, however, it was clear to him that his first interest was in serious writing, and he continued, as he had been doing in Mazatlán, to publish both verses and short prose selections locally.

The bulk of his earliest published poetry is largely Romantic in tone, and its content is generally either love or religion. Místicas, a volume of poetry Nervo published in 1898, is generally considered his first poetic effort of any real literary merit. Subject matter of the poems in this work is varied, but the predominating theme is religion. Some religious poems here are positive declarations of faith; many are prayers, pleas for guidance and direction.

It is in this work that the reader gets the first concrete indications of the poet's inner struggle for peace of mind. Increasingly, there is evidence of Nervo's inability to equate the unquestioning faith of his youth with the loss of faith he sees around him in a sophisticated society imbued with positivism, science, and materialism. Far from any rejection of his faith, he fears that his faith is rejecting him. The result is a number of poems that are supplicating in tone, the cries of a man prostrating himself before his god and begging for help.

#### Al Cristo

Señor, entre la sombra voy sin tino;  
 la fe de mis mayores ya no vierte  
 su apacible fulgor en mi camino:  
 ¡mi espíritu está triste hasta la muerte!

Busco en vano una estrella que me alumbre;  
 busco en vano un amor que me redima;  
 mi divino ideal está en la cumbre,  
 y yo, ¡pobre de mí!, yazgo en la sima...

La lira que me diste, entre las mofas  
 de los mundanos, vibra sin concierto;  
 ¡se pierden en la noche mis estrofas,  
 como el grito de Agar en el desierto!

Y paria de la dicha y solitario,  
 siento hastío de todo cuanto existe...  
 Yo, Maestro, cual Tú, subo al Calvario,  
 y no tuve Tabor, cual lo tuviste...

Ten piedad de me mal, dura es mi pena,  
 numerosas las lides in que lucho;  
 fija en mí tu mirada que serena,  
 y dame, como un tiempo a Magdalena,  
 la calma: ¡yo también he amado mucho!  
 (34:1326)

#### To Christ

Father, blindly I wander among the shadows;  
 the faith of my fathers no longer spills  
 its calm radiance in my path:  
 a deathly sadness permeates my soul!

Vainly I search for a star to light my way;  
 in vain I seek a love that may redeem me;  
 my divine ideal is there upon the summit,  
 while I here in the deepest abyss lie...

The lyre you gave me discordantly vibrates  
 here among the jeering, worldly throngs;  
 my verses dissolve into the night  
 like the shouts of Agar in the desert.

Outcast from all joy, and solitary,  
 I feel revulsion for everything I see.  
 Father, I, as You, am struggling up Golgotha's  
 way, but I have no Tabor, as You had...

Be merciful to me, my pain is heavy,  
 and many are the battles I must fight;  
 help me, ease me with your soothing glance;  
 and give me calmness, as once you did to Magdalene:  
 I also have loved much!

As is repeatedly the case in the poetry of Amado Nervo, the extent to which his poems reveal his true beliefs, and that to which he used religious themes simply as subject matter, is a matter of speculation. Concha Meléndez (32:64) suggests that the latter may be the case, at least in the case of Místicas. She says they are reminiscences that seminary life left in the mind and the vocabulary of the poet, and that ". . . his eyes, filled with liturgical visions, have not yet learned to look inward."

It is ironic that Místicas, a book filled with poetry that on the surface, at least, is so religious in tone, should also contain a poem that caused his excommunication. The poem is "Raffinement" (Refinement), written in French, and appearing in only the first edition of the book. It was deleted by the poet himself from subsequent editions and, indeed, does not appear in the most recent edition of the complete works of Nervo.

Si je pouvais un jour effleurer de ma bouche  
 ta bouche où l'hostie sainte descend se reposer...  
 Las des femmes du siècle, de leur banal cortège,  
 je sens que je ne puis savourer les amours  
 que si les amours ont l'horreur du sacrilège.  
 (15:69)

If only I could one day gently press my lips on yours  
 where the sacred host comes to rest...  
 Weary of mundane women and of their worldly procession,  
 I feel that the only love I can savor  
 is a love abhorring sacrilege.

The poem generated instant and adverse comments among Nervo's Catholic critics, and the bishop of Tepic publicly condemned the book, and excommunicated the poet. Nervo's own reactions to the excommunication are not known, and he makes no mention of it in his works. In fact, while at times in his later life he does seem to vacillate between Christianity and some aspects of Buddhism, there are continued declarations of his religious faith. Even in the most anguished times of his life, he shows an almost total submission to, and an acceptance of Catholic dogma.

There is only one notable exception to this submission, and it does not appear in his poetry, but rather in the Prologue he wrote to La amada inmóvil. He is reminiscing about the extra-legal love he shared with Ana, and says " . . . as no priest had recited mechanically, while uniting our hands, a few Latin phrases . . . we did not have the right to love each other in the open . . . " (34:1116). While this passage does not indicate Nervo's typical submission, neither does it reflect either disbelief or rebellion. For reasons that are not known today, they did not have their union sanctioned by any authority, religious or secular, and they seem to have taken the only alternative open to them, and he is expressing his bitterness.

Whether within his own church or without, there is no real indication of any diminution of Nervo's faith. His religious poems do undergo a transformation as he grows older. In his later poems, there is little of the self-flagellation the reader sees in the poetry of his youth. There is increased introspection, and with it, increased tranquility on the part of the poet, and an increased certainty of his own faith.

"Tú" (You), a poem Nervo wrote in 1915, and published as a part of the volume entitled Elevación, is probably his best proclamation of his own faith, and appears also as an almost mystical disclaimer of the positivistic philosophy that had caused him so much mental anguish earlier.

Señor, Señor, Tú antes, Tú después, Tú en la inmensa  
hondura del vacío y en la hondura interior;  
Tú en la aurora que canta y en la noche que piensa;  
Tú en la flor de los cardos y en los cardos sin flor.

Tú en el cenit a un tiempo y en el nadir; Tú en todas  
las transfiguraciones y en todo el padecer;  
Tú en la capilla fúnebre y en la noche de bodas;  
Tú en el beso primero y en el beso postrer.

Tú en los ojos azules y en los ojos oscuros  
Tú en la frivolidad quinceañera, y también  
en las graves ternezas de los años maduros;  
Tú en la más negra sima, Tú en el más alto edén.

Si la ciencia engreída no te ve, yo te veo;  
si sus labios te niegan, yo te proclamaré.  
Por cada hombre que duda, mi alma grita: "Yo creo."  
¡Y con cada fe muerta, se agiganta mi fe!

(34:1734)

Father, Father, You before all and after all, You in  
the immense depths of the void, and in the depths  
of everything; You in the singing morning, and in the  
quiet of the night; You in the thistle flower,  
and in the thistle that has no flowers.

You in the zenith and nadir of all time; You in all  
transfigurations and in all suffering;  
You in the funeral chapel and all wedding nights;  
You in the first kiss, and in the last.

You in blue eyes and in dark ones;  
You in the frivolity of the fifteen year old, and also  
in the grave tenderness of declining years;  
You in the darkest abyss, you in the highest Eden.

Though haughty science denies you, I see you;  
when its voice denies you, I'll proclaim you.  
For every man who doubts, my soul cries, "I believe,"  
and with every faith that dies, my own faith grows.

In spite of the fact that Nervo has repeatedly been called a mystic, and otherwise identified with mysticism, there remains strong disagreement among critics on the true depth of mysticism in his poetry. This disagreement is not generally over the question of the presence of mysticism, but rather, where it appears, and how genuinely it reflects the poet himself. There are strong arguments that mysticism was but a literary contrivance for Nervo--little more than a refinement of Modernist exoticism. Also, there are men, like Henríquez Ureña (21:437) who admit to the presence of mystical qualities in Nervo's poetry but deny that it appears until relatively late in the poet's career.

Was Amado Nervo a mystic? Some have considered him so, impelled perhaps by the fact that, before 1890, Amado Nervo had aspired to following a sacerdotal career, an inspiration which he later abandoned; or influenced by the title of Místicas, which he gave to his first collection of poetry. . . . Nevertheless, it is only in the final phase of his production . . . where we might encounter a sense of religious affirmation which could be considered as 'abstract mysticism', within which the doctrines of Buddha and Jesus Christ are interwoven and confused.

The final phase to which Henríquez Ureña refers begins about 1912, and so would begin with the poetry contained in La amada inmóvil and Serenidad. The question arises, then, assuming the

accuracy of the above evaluation, as to the classification of a very considerable amount of poetry written prior to 1912, and which has popularly been referred to as mystical. Henríquez Ureña (21:474) cites Díez-Canedo as having dismissed much of it, along with all of Místicas, as simply an exaltation of liturgy in which mysticism is reduced to symbols and formulas, the preciousness of mysticism.

Other writers, some of whom are chronologically closer to Neruo, and admittedly may not have the objective viewpoint of Henríquez Ureña, see specific evidences of mysticism in his works much earlier. Concha Meléndez (32:65) agrees with most other writers when she concludes that Neruo's 1898 volume Místicas contains little mysticism. She insists, though, that by the end of that volume Neruo had found that secret and luminous path to complete union with God, and further, feels that through a combination of mysticism and pantheism, the poet achieved complete spiritual union in La hermana agua (1901). In fact, in what is intended to be a sort of one sentence summary of Neruo, Concha Meléndez (32:69) makes the following unqualified statement:

Amado Neruo was a mystic to the depths of his being, one who struggled in torment with the doubts and disbelief of his century, elevating himself, as Calixto Oyuela has so beautifully said, like a solitary flower, amidst the incomprehensiveness of his contemporaries.

Neruo's mysticism, or lack of it, continues to be a source of contention. Critics and literary historians who have discussed his writings and his life tend to speak in absolutes. That is, Neruo tends to be classified as either a complete mystic, as Meléndez sees him, or as a poet almost devoid of any feelings for it beyond poetic affectation, as he is described by Díez-Canedo. Perhaps the truth lies somewhere between the two extremes.

It is a matter of history that Nervo's interest in mysticism, and his study of mysticism began very early in life. His childhood was in many ways a portent of the mystical tones, either literary or religious, found in much of his poetry. His boyhood home was permeated with an air of austerity, humility, and religious fervor. During his student days in the seminary, he studied the Western mystics, particularly the great Spanish mystics of the sixteenth century, Santa Teresa, Fray Luis de León, and San Juan de la Cruz. Also, while still a student at the seminary, he came very strongly under the influence of the thoughts of St. Francis of Assisi, for that saint's emphasis on simple love, kindness, and compassion. By Nervo's own account, he felt throughout his life a reverence for St. Francis that was second only to that reverence he felt for Jesus Christ. In spite of his reverence for St. Francis, however, Nervo was a poet, as were the Spanish mystics mentioned above, and despite his occasional emulation of the founder of the Franciscans, there is more of the Spanish mystic in Nervo than there is of St. Francis.

Since "mysticism" is a word that is peculiarly subject to individual definition and interpretation, it seems necessary here to define the word as it is commonly used in speaking not only of the poetry of Amado Nervo but of Spanish poetry generally. Díez Echarri and Roca Franquesa (14:297) point out that in any study of Spanish letters, mysticism and asceticism are discussed at the same time, the two terms are separate and need to be differentiated.

While the mystic has as essence and final objective the unification with God in the fullness of faith and love, the ascetic offers himself on a didactic and formative basis whereby the spirit can be enhanced through proper utilization of one's virtues.



Continuing, they quote Sainz Rodríguez, who is even more specific.

The word mystic should only be applied to designate secret supernatural relationships, through which God elevates man above natural limits and lets him know a superior world that is impossible of achievement through natural forces. . . . On the other hand, the ascetic is the product of human activity. This word is derived from a Greek verb . . . which means practice (or exercise), and specifically in this lies its meaning, since it is the period of spiritual life in which, by means of exercises, mortification, and prayer, the soul is able to purify itself, to purge itself of desires for corporal pleasures and worldly goods.

In the Spanish mystic, and in Spanish literature, there is found an almost unique mixture of the two distinct terms. That is, Spanish mysticism is not exclusively one or the other, and the Spanish mystic, while seeking spiritual unification with God, is at the same time an active worker. And so, the mystic of Spain, and of Spanish literature, is by definition something of a self-contradiction.

Angel del Río (12:251) equates the two terms with idealism and realism, and this is applicable in a study of mysticism in Amado Nervo. Nature is extremely important in Nervo's poetry. Del Río sees in Spanish mysticism generally the feeling that earthly beauty is made sublime through a longing for the absolute, through the perception of God, at once both the creator and perfect image of that beauty. This concept touches rather closely on pantheism, to be discussed later, but may provide an alternative explanation to those critics who have seen only infidelity to Christianity in the pantheistic poems of Nervo.

Carrying further the topic of idealism and realism in Spanish mysticism, Del Río speaks of what he calls a synthesis of the two elements present, not just in the mystic writers, but in the spirit of Spain generally, and it is this synthesis that causes the Spaniard

to lose himself in a desire to convert all his ideals into living reality. Del Río suggests, rather reasonably, that quixotism is nothing more nor less than this synthesis of the idealism of the mystic and the realism of the ascetic.

Mysticism, as it is used here referring to Spanish literature generally, and to the mystical poetry of Amado Nervo specifically, is taken to mean an attitude that is somewhere between the definitions of mysticism and asceticism cited above. Generally, mystical poetry of Spain reflects this synthesis, and certainly it is found in abundance in the poetry of Amado Nervo. He was clearly not a mystic in the purest sense of the word; he was much too worldly for that. On the other hand, there is little of the mortification and self-denial of the ascetic in Nervo the man. Both elements appear in his poetry, and this fact coupled with what is almost universally known of the personal life of the man, has led to a good deal of conjecture over the apparent disparity between the way he lived his life, and the way he suggested, through his poetry, that others live.

Bearing in mind the reservations that Henríquez Ureña (21:473) has regarding the mystical qualities of Nervo's poetry, and the even more specific denial he credits to Díez-Canedo, the reader is still faced with the suggestion that much of Nervo's so-called mystical poetry is mystical only in the literary sense and not in any philosophical or religious sense. Still the mysticism, along with suggestions of pantheism found in a work like La hermana agua, perhaps cannot be so easily dismissed. It is present; whether it reflects the personal philosophy of the poet in 1901 when he wrote La hermana agua is perhaps not altogether relevant. It could be suggested, in light of the

fact that Nervo's personal life did not always reflect the mystical ideals so evident in his poetry, that rather than his poems being an indication of how he truly believed, they are indications of how he may have wanted to believe and could not. Certainly there is very little in his life that mirrors the complete asceticism he so strongly recommends in the poetry of the final four or five years of his life.

Assuming for the moment the reasonableness of such an hypothesis, then Nervo could be likened to the protagonist of Miguel de Unamuno's novel, San Manuel Bueno, Mártir (St. Manuel the Good, Martyr), a priest who longed to believe but whose reason made belief impossible. He therefore pretended to a faith he could not have and lived an exemplary and saintly life so that his parishoners might have faith and might aspire to a union with God in the hereafter, a union that his reason told him was impossible. He felt that simple people needed the protection of belief in immortality. He taught that belief, that faith, in the certainty that his flock could not live with the truth. Therein lay his martyrdom.

This is not to suggest, of course, that Nervo was inspired in his thinking by Unamuno's novel, since the novel was written a number of years after Nervo's death. The possibility that such an attitude might have come from the Spanish writer does exist, however. It is known that Nervo knew Unamuno, and was influenced by him to some extent. It is conceivable, then, though not suggested here, that Nervo's poetry is purely didactic, and not necessarily an indication of the inspiration he himself felt. González Peña (20:210) a Mexican literary historian, appears almost to suggest this when he describes

Nervo's mysticism as seeming to be more literary and external than internal and profound.

Whatever the case, and whatever Nervo's motives may have been, mystical themes appear in his poetry. Early in his career, mysticism appears only intermittently as a theme and, when it does appear, as occasionally in Místicas, it is so uncertain and so intertwined with his own apparent gropings, that it has little impact.

One of the first poems in which the element of mysticism can clearly be identified is "A Kempis" (To Kempis), which appeared in Místicas in 1898. Mysticism appears here not as a thematic element but as subject matter for the poet. Its significance lies in its title, a reference to Thomas à Kempis, a fifteenth century German ecclesiastic who wrote Imitation of Christ, a book on Catholic spiritual meditation. That book was not only a principal precursor to much of the Spanish mystical literature but was a principal source of inspiration to many of Spain's mystics. At the time Nervo can be presumed to have written the poem, probably 1896 or 1897, he was besieged by doubts concerning his own religious faith. He had only recently given up the comparative isolation of the province of his birth and was coming into contact with new ideas and theories, religious and philosophical, that were antithetical to everything he had believed to that time or, as in the case of the work of Kempis, ideas that had at most been peripheral to his training.

#### A Kempis

Ha muchos años que busco el yermo,  
 ha muchos años que vivo triste,  
 ha muchos años que estoy enfermo,  
 ¡y es por el libro que tú escribiste!

¡Oh Kempis, antes de leerte, amaba  
la luz, las vegas, el mar Oceano;  
mas tú dijiste que todo acaba,  
que todo muere, que todo es vano!

Antes, llevado de mis antojos,  
besé los labios que al beso invitan,  
las rubias trenzas, los grandes ojos,  
¡sin acordarme que se marchitan!

Mas como afirman doctores graves,  
que tú, maestro, citas y nombras,  
que el hombre pasa como las naves,  
como las nubes, como las sombras...

Huyo de todo terreno lazo,  
ningún cariño mi mente alegra,  
y con tu libro bajo del brazo  
voy recorriendo la noche negra...

¡Oh Kempis, Kempis, asceta yermo,  
pálido asceta, qué mal me hiciste!  
¡Ha muchos años que estoy enfermo,  
y es por el libro que tú escribiste!  
(34:1322)

#### To Kempis

For many years I've sought the wilderness,  
for many years sad has been my life,  
for many years I've lived with this strange sickness  
and all because of that book you wrote.

Oh, Kempis, before I read you,  
I loved the light, the fertile fields, the sea;  
But you told me that everything must end,  
that all must die, that all is vain!

Before, I lived according to my whim,  
I kissed the lips that gave me invitation,  
girls with golden hair, inviting eyes,  
refusing to think that they would ever fade.

But since great and learned doctors have affirmed,  
men that you have named, maestro,  
that man is transitory, man must pass,  
like ships, like clouds, and like the shadow...

I run away from any worldly involvements,  
no act of tenderness my soul delights,  
and with your book beneath my arm I go  
through the silent, empty blackness of the nights.

Oh Kempis, Kempis, hermit-like ascetic,  
 pale ascetic, what a wrong you did to me!  
 For many years I've lived with this strange sickness,  
 and all because of that book you wrote.

There is nothing, of course, in the above poem to suggest a mystical theme; certainly it does not suggest the tranquility and peace of mind generally associated with mysticism. Rather, it is reasonable to assume that the poet found in Kempis' book subject matter, a vehicle for a poem. The self-centered, romantic lamentation in this poem is in accord with the general tenor of the bulk of the poetry appearing in Místicas.

The appearance of La hermana agua in 1901 marks the first real indication of the direction in which the poetry of Neruo is going. It is a lengthy poem, generally considered his first to show marked elements of mysticism, though there is little to justify the argument that mystical elements in the poem are anything other than Modernist conceits.

Neruo was living in Paris in 1901 and, though he would shortly move away from the general sphere of Modernism and its limitations, he was at that time strongly under the influence of the Parnassians, and also of Rubén Darío. Among these Modernist poets there was a constant search for innovation in subject matter as well as in technique and, for Neruo, La hermana agua can be said to be innovative, if only for the fact that it is the most impersonal poetry he had written. That is, his poem deals with something that is completely outside him and, for the first time, it is not a reflection of some inner turmoil he feels.

The poem is an extended personification of water in all its various forms, liquid, vapor, and solid. It is narrated for the most

part by the water, and addressed to the poet, while the poet himself remains outside the poem except for intermittent exhortations to bless God. One extract from the poem, entitled "Las voces del agua" (The Voices of the Water), is representative of the entire poem and enumerates the many tasks and activities which the water selflessly performs.

--Mi gota busca entrañas de roca y las perfora.  
 --En mí flota el aceite que en los santuarios vela.  
 --Por mí raya el milagro de la locomotora  
 la pauta de los rieles. --Yo pinto la acuarela.  
 --Mi bruma y tus recuerdos son por extraño modo  
 gemelos; ¿no ves cómo lo divinizan todo?  
 --Yo presto vibraciones de flautas prodigiosas  
 al cristal de los vasos. --Soy triaca y enfermera  
 en las modernas clínicas. --Y yo, sobre las rosas,  
 turiferario santo del alba en la primavera.  
 --Soy pródiga de fuerza motriz en mi caída.  
 --Yo escarcho los ramajes. --Yo en tiempos muy remotos  
 di un canto a las sirenas. --Yo, cuando estoy dormida,  
 sueño sueños azules, y esos sueños son lotos.  
 --Poeta, que por gracia del cielo nos conoces,  
 ¿no cantas con nosotras?

-- ¡Sí canto, hermanas Voces!  
 (34:1385)

My drop seeks out the innermost recesses of the rock,  
 and splits it open. In me floats the oil that lights  
 the sanctuary. Through me the miracle of the loco-  
 motive moves along the rails. Mine is the water color  
 painting. In some strange way my mist and your memories  
 are twins. Don't you see how both exalt the beauty  
 of everything? I give the beautiful flute-like vibra-  
 tions to crystal. I am nurse and medicine in modern  
 clinics. And on the roses, I am the saintly thurifer  
 of the spring dawn. I am lavish with motor power in  
 my fall. I whiten the foliage with frost. And in a  
 distant time, I gave song to the sirens. I, when I am  
 asleep, dream dreams of blue, and those dreams are  
 lotuses. Poet, through Heaven's grace you know us;  
 don't you sing with us?

Oh sister Voices, of course I sing!

The statement by Concha Meléndez (32:69) that La hermana agua  
 finds Neruo firmly in the path toward that spiritual union which is  
 the aim of the mystic is something of an exaggeration. Mysticism is

present in the poem, as is pantheism, at least in the feeling of tranquility the poem conveys, and assuredly so in the poet's intimate contact with nature. There is no real justification for saying that mysticism is central to the poem, however. The poem generally, and the passage cited here particularly, is filled with examples of Modernism, plasticity, color, suggestion of sound, and of course, exoticism.

Notwithstanding the fact that mystical and pantheistic elements in this poem are largely Modernist preciousness, they are thematically important in that they are indicative of a trend in the overall poetic production of Neruo. Following the 1901 publication of La hermana agua, he began to draw away from the influences of Modernism, that is, Modernism as a deliberate and conscious movement, and into a completely personal type of poetry. There was still much of the Modernist in his works, but it is increasingly found to be an incidental element rather than a central one.

In the early years of the new century, subject matter for Neruo's poetry is varied and touches on most aspects of human life. Much of it, particularly that dealing with love and with reminiscences of childhood, is shallow and of negligible value.

Reference has already been made to the death of Neruo's mother in 1905 and the impact it had upon him. This event marks another step in his career, for almost immediately he began shifting the point of emphasis in his poetry to man's inner self and to his ultimate relationship to universality. Neruo's poems from this point on are increasingly more introspective; the poet leaves almost all forms of frivolity behind and concerns himself with the salvation of Man. It



is here that mysticism becomes clearly and undeniably a major thematic element in his poetry. For the first time it is philosophical and religious rather than stylistic.

Nature, typically an important element in mystical poetry, begins to assume new dimensions in Neruo's poems after 1905. Many of the poems written in the three or four years following the death of Neruo's mother, and published in 1909 under the title En voz baja, deal with nature and man's relation to nature, and many are decidedly mystical in tone.

#### Astros

Mira el cielo, amiga mía:  
la lejana pedrería  
de los astros luce ya;  
mira el cielo, amiga mía:  
¡hay en él la poesía  
ideal del más allá!

Dulce amiga, mira el cielo:  
en su vago terciopelo  
sin cesar los soles caen;  
esos globos colosales  
son imanes inmortales  
de oro y fuego, que se atraen.

Misteriosa como una  
serenata, va la luna  
con molicies de mujer,  
dibujando, lenta y grata,  
su paréntesis de plata  
por el vago atardecer.

En el vivo Suroeste,  
opulento como veste  
imperial, a orar invita  
Venus, trémula, que arde  
como santa lamparita  
que al buen Dios prende la tarde...

(34:1587)

## Stars

Look at the sky, my friend:  
 the distant jewelry of the sky  
 is sparkling now;  
 look at the sky, my friend:  
 In it there is the ideal poetry  
 of eternity!

Sweet friend, look at the sky;  
 in its velvety vagueness  
 suns fall endlessly;  
 those colossal globes  
 are timeless magnets of fire  
 and gold that seek each other.

Mysterious as a serenade,  
 the moon moves with the  
 softness of a woman,  
 outlining, slow and lovely,  
 its silver parenthesis  
 across the vague twilight.

In the vivid southwest sky,  
 opulent as imperial dress,  
 and blazing like a holy lamp  
 the evening lights to God,  
 tremulous Venus sends out  
 an invitation to evening prayer...

Pantheism is so closely tied to mysticism in most poetry written in the Spanish language that frequently critics and scholars speak of the two simultaneously, using such terms as "mystical pantheism" and "pantheistic mysticism." Such is the case with the poetry of Amado Nervo; nature, and Nervo's relationship to it, become central elements in many of his poems. At times, nature becomes almost his cathedral. It is there that he most easily finds his god, sometimes as a reflected radiance from nature, and at other times, as a completely pantheistic feeling that when he is contemplating nature he is in the presence of the Deity.

### La montaña

Desde que no persigo las dichas pasajeras  
muriendo van en mi alma temores y ansiedad;  
la Vida se me muestra con amplias y severas  
perspectivas, y siento que estoy en las laderas  
de la montaña augusta de la Serenidad.

Comprendo al fin el vasto sentido de las cosas;  
sé escuchar en silencio lo que en redor de mí  
murmuran piedras, árboles, ondas, auras y rosas...  
Y advierto que me cercan mil formas misteriosas  
que nunca presentí.

Distingo un santo sello sobre todas las frentes:  
un divino me fecit Deus, por dondequier;  
y noto que me hacen signos inteligentes  
las estrellas, arcano de las noches fulgentes,  
y las flores, que ocultan enigmas de mujer.

La Esfinge, ayer adusta, tiene hoy ojos serenos;  
en su boca de piedra florece un sonreír  
cordial, y hay en la comba potente de sus senos  
blanduras de almohada para mis miembros, llenos  
a veces de la honda laxitud del vivir.

Mis labios, antes pródigos de versos y canciones,  
ahora experimentan el deseo de dar  
ánimo a quien desmaya, de verter bendiciones,  
de ser caudal perenne de aquellas expresiones  
que saben consolar.

Finé mi humilde siembra; las mieses en las eras  
empiezan a dar fruto de amor y caridad;  
se cierne un gran sosiego sobre mis sementeras;  
mi andar es firme...

¡Y siento que estoy en las laderas  
de la montaña augusta de la Serenidad!

(34:1599)

### The Mountain

Now that I no longer seek fleeting, momentary pleasures,  
fear and anxiety are fading from my soul:  
Life shows itself to me in ample and austere  
perspectives, and I feel I am on the slopes  
of the august mountain of Serenity.

I comprehend at last the vast meaning of things;  
Now I can listen in silence to the murmur of rocks,  
trees, waves, roses, and soft breezes...  
And I feel surrounded by a thousand mysterious  
forms I never felt before.

I see a stamp of saintliness on every face:  
 a divine me fecit Deus where'ere I look;  
 and I feel that the stars, that embody all the  
 mystery of the night, and the flowers, that hide all  
 the enigmas of woman, make intelligent signals to me.

The Sphinx, yesterday austere, today appears serene;  
 her stone lips blossom with a cordial smile,  
 and I see in the strong fullness of her breast  
 the softness of a pillow, inviting my body that is often  
 filled with the lassitude of living.

My lips, once prodigal with song and verse,  
 now experience the wish to give new strength  
 to him who falters, to pour out benedictions,  
 to be the perennial source of those words  
 that can console.

The crops I've sown are now mature;  
 the sheaves, in threshing, begin to give their fruit  
 of love and charity; a great calm has settled o'er my fields;  
 my step is firm...

And I feel I am on the slopes  
 of the august mountain of Serenity!

This poem appears in the volume entitled Serenidad, published in 1914. Some of the poetry in this volume can be presumed to have been written before the death of Ana in 1912, but the bulk of it almost certainly was written after. At the time of its publication, it was described by Nervo as being filled with the spirit of Ana.

Following the loss of Ana, and Nervo's immediate reaction to it, nature begins to assume greater importance in his poetry. In the presence of nature Nervo feels that he is at last at one with his god, and that the mysteries of life are being revealed to him. He sees the hand of the Creator, evidence of God, everywhere he looks.

Another poem from the same volume that is equally indicative of the theme of mystical pantheism is "Yo no soy demasiado sabio..." (I'm not so wise...), and this element is particularly evident in

the first two strophes. Here, the poet sees not only evidence of a divine creator in nature, but the presence of the Divinity.

Yo no soy demasiado sabio para negarte,  
Señor; encuentro lógica tu existencia divina;  
me basta con abrir los ojos para hallarte;  
la creación entera me convida a adorarte,  
y te adoro en la rosa y te adoro en la espina.

¿Qué son vuestras angustias para querer por ellas  
argüirte de cruel? ¿Sabemos, por ventura,  
si Tú con vuestras lágrimas fabricas las estrellas,  
si los seres más altos, si las cosas más bellas  
se amasan con el noble barro de la amargura?

Esperemos, suframos, no lancemos jamás  
a lo Invisible nuestra negación como un reto.  
Pobre criatura triste, ¡ya verás, ya verás!  
La Muerte se aproxima... ¡De sus labios oirás  
el celeste secreto!

(34:1606)

I'm not so wise that I can deny you, Father;  
I find logical your divine existence;  
I need but to open my eyes to find you;  
All creation invites me to adore you,  
and I adore you in the rose, and I adore you in the thorn.

What are our sufferings that we should want,  
because of them, to call you cruel? What do we know  
but that perhaps with our tears you make the stars,  
or that the higher beings, the most beautiful of things,  
are molded from the noble clay of bitterness?

Let us wait and suffer, and never hurl  
our negation, like a challenge, against  
the Invisible. Poor sad creature,  
you'll see, you'll see... Death is coming...  
and from its lips you'll hear the celestial secret.

This poem provides at once a declaration of Neruo's religious belief and another refutation of the positivistic philosophy that had so disturbed him in his youth. He gives proof, that to him is undeniable, of the existence of God. Also, he answers in one stanza the charges of the positivists concerning a cruel and an unjust God.

Nature, and its importance to Neruo, reaches a high point of expression in "Extasis" (Ecstasy), a poem written in 1915, and first published in Elevación in 1917. It is almost the essence of mysticism. The poet seems to achieve a complete sense of spiritual unity with his god here in the presence of nature and its beauties.

Cada rosa gentil ayer nacida  
 cada aurora que apunta entre sonrojos,  
 dejan mi alma en el éxtasis sumida...  
 ¡Nunca se cansan de mirar mis ojos  
 el perpetuo milagro de la vida!

Años ha que contemplo las estrellas  
 en las diáfanas noches españolas  
 y las encuentro cada vez más bellas.  
 ¡Años ha que en el mar, conmigo a solas  
 de las olas escucho las querellas,  
 y aún me pasma el prodigio de las olas!

Cada vez hallo a la Naturaleza  
 más sobrenatural, más pura y santa.  
 Para mí, en rededor, todo es belleza;  
 y con la misma plenitud me encanta  
 la boca de la madre cuando reza  
 que la boca del niño cuando canta.

Quiero ser inmortal, con sed intensa,  
 porque es maravilloso el panorama  
 con que nos brinda la creación inmensa;  
 porque cada lucero me reclama,  
 diciéndome al brillar, "¡Aquí se piensa  
 también, aquí se lucha, aquí se ama!"  
 (34:1739)

Every gentle, newly opened rose,  
 every day that blushinglly dawns,  
 leaves my soul in complete ecstasy...  
 My eyes never tire of watching  
 the perpetual miracle of life!

For years I've watched the stars  
 in those diaphanous Spanish nights,  
 and I find them every time more beautiful.  
 For years I've listened, all alone,  
 to the quarrelsome sound of the sea,  
 and still I am astonished by the marvel of the waves!

Every day I find nature more  
 supernatural, more pure and saintly.  
 For me, and all about me, all is beauty;  
 and I am filled with the same enchantment  
 by the lips of a mother when she prays  
 as by those of a child when he sings.

I have an intense thirst for immortality,  
 because the panorama with which immense creation  
 salutes us is marvelous;  
 because every morning star claims me,  
 telling me, as it shines, "Here we think also,  
 here we struggle, here we love."

Many of Neruo's poems as early as those in Místicas contain suggestions of influences of Hinduism, and specifically of Buddhism. Neruo was not unique among the Modernist poets in this respect, however, for Oriental religions and philosophies provided many of the Modernists with exotic references in the form of imagery and symbolism that were so much the mark of that movement. In the case of Neruo, though, what began as poetic affectation evolved gradually into an apparent acceptance of some of the basic teachings of Buddha. As has already been suggested, the depth to which he was influenced by Buddhism has almost certainly been exaggerated. It is true he wrote a good deal of poetry, some of which will be cited here, that is almost pure Buddhism. It is also true, though, that concurrent with the writing of that poetry, he wrote many poems of a deeply religious nature in which no hint of Buddhism can be found. That he was affected by Buddhism is undeniable; the extent to which he was affected is debatable and will likely never be determined with any certainty.

G. W. Umphrey (39:135) feels that Hinduism is not only an integral part of Neruo's poetry but that it was central to the philosophy of Neruo himself.

From 1904 until his death in 1919 the spiritual life of Amado Nervo oscillated between Hinduism and Christianity. Several volumes of his poetry and prose are permeated with the spirit of Christianity . . . and various literary critics, by carefully selecting their evidence, have presented him plausibly as the Christian poet par excellence in Spanish-American literature. But scattered through these same volumes and in the volume entitled El estanque de los lotos (1919), there is a sufficient number of poems to prove that he was decidedly Hinduistic in his eclectic religious philosophy that finally gave him the spiritual serenity that he desired.

The weakness of Mr. Umphrey's statement is obvious by the fact that it is self-contradictory. On the one hand, he speaks of critics making careful selection of evidence to prove Nervo's Christianity, and on the other, he speaks of elements of Hinduism being scattered through Nervo's poetry in sufficient quantity to prove that Nervo was "decidedly Hinduistic." Given the great variety of both subject matter and theme in the poet's work, and using the repetition of those elements as the criterion, one could, with equal facility, arrive at any one of perhaps half a dozen conclusions, all equally arbitrary and exclusive.

Manuel Durán (15:167), a critic who appears to have a better knowledge than does Umphrey of the complete writings of Nervo, offers an opinion that is considerably less sweeping in nature. Specifically in rebuttal to Umphrey, he points out that a given poem cited as evidence of a philosophical position must be read within the context of the entire volume and, that to be fair, that volume must be read within the context of all the poetry Nervo wrote. He suggests caution in an area where Nervo was not always sure of his own precise philosophies.

. . . let's not forget, as a corrective against an excessive zeal for simplification, that Nervo was never clear nor rigorous, and he never excluded attitudes that were, in



principle, antagonistic to each other. Furthermore, the poems of El estanque de los lotos were written over a period of four years, and thus, many of them were written at the same time that he was writing the Christian poems of Elevación.

It is not the purpose of this study to place labels upon the poet under study. It is rather to study themes as they appear and, when it seems pertinent, to attempt to trace reasons for the presence of those themes. As will be seen, there are strong elements of Hinduism in Nervo's poetry. Whether or not the presence of these elements is indicative of the fact that he was philosophically closer to Hinduism than to Christianity is perhaps academic, since it is a matter of history that he died in full grace of the Roman Catholic Church.

Although there are references to Hinduism, and suggestions of it throughout the poetry of Amado Nervo, it does not become an important thematic part of his poetry until relatively late in his career. In his earlier writings, during the time he can properly be referred to as a Modernist, these references are almost exclusively literary devices. Like his contemporaries in the Modernist movement, he sought to achieve cosmopolitanism and exoticism through the use of many allusions to cultures that were foreign to the Hispanic world, and Orientalism was but one. During the time of his Modernist writings, images suggesting classical Western cultures appear almost as frequently as do those evoking thoughts of the East.

Evidence popularly cited as proof of Hinduism generally, and Buddhism particularly, in Nervo's poetry is the strong presence of pantheism found there. Pantheism, though a part of Buddhism, is not unique to it; there are strong suggestions of it in many aspects of Western attitudes, notably in the Spanish mystics mentioned earlier.

Another aspect of Neruvo's poetry frequently pointed out when critics are looking for proof of his Buddhism is his emphasis upon self-denial and renunciation of worldly goods and pleasures. Again, this is not exclusive to the Buddhists; it is basic also to Christian asceticism. Religious orders such as the Franciscans and the Carmelites, to name but two, have self-abnegation as one of their basic tenets.

A poem entitled "Transmigración" (Transmigration), which appeared in the 1898 work, Místicas, is often mentioned in connection with Neruvo's presumed Buddhistic leanings. The poem itself, a description of a series of reincarnations through which the poet thinks he may have gone, is nothing more than a fanciful flight of the poet's imagination and suggests nothing of any philosophical acceptance of the concept of transmigration.

There are recurrent references to the lotus flower in Neruvo's poetry. They appear as early as 1898 in his volume Perlas Negras (Black Pearls) and several times in poems from La hermana agua. Specifically, in "The Voices of the Water," a poem from the latter volume, which was discussed earlier in this chapter, the line "I, when I am asleep, dream dreams of blue, and those dreams are lotuses" is frequently shown as an indication of Neruvo's leanings toward Hinduism. The use of the word lotus in that poem suggests nothing beyond exoticism and the incidental implication of purity and cleanliness, both of which are Modernist tendencies.

It is not until the appearance of Serenidad, the volume published in 1914, that the reader is able to find evidences of Hinduism in sufficient quantity that it could properly be considered a thematic

trend. "La montaña" (The Mountain), a poem already cited, is perhaps indicative of this, although the renunciation referred to in the first strophe could just as easily be suggestive of Christian asceticism as of Hinduism.

Now that I no longer seek fleeting, momentary  
pleasures, fear and anxiety are fading from my soul:  
Life shows itself to me in ample and austere  
perspectives, and I feel I am on the slopes  
of the august mountain of Serenity.

Another poem from Serenidad, "Renunciación" (Renunciation), provides the first clear and unequivocal instance of direct inspiration from Hinduism, in this case, Buddhism. In the first stanza, the poet addresses himself directly to Buddha, and states his agreement with Buddha's teachings of self-abnegation.

¡Oh, Siddharta Gautama!, tú tenías razón:  
las angustias nos vienen del deseo; el edén  
consiste en no anhelar, en la renunciación  
completa, irrevocable, de toda posesión;  
quien no desea nada, dondequiera está bien.

El deseo es un vaso de infinita amargura,  
un pulpo de tentáculos insaciables, que al par  
que se cortan, renacen para nuestra tortura.  
El deseo es el padre del esplín, de la hartura,  
¡y hay en él más perfidias que en las olas del mar!

Quien bebe como el Cínico el agua con la mano,  
quien de volver la espalda al dinero es capaz,  
quien ama sobre todas las cosas al Arcano,  
¡ése es el victorioso, el fuerte, el soberano,  
y no hay paz comparable con su perenne paz!

(34:1603)

Oh, Siddartha Gautama, you were right:  
our grief comes from desire; Eden  
consists in not craving, in the complete,  
irrevocable renunciation of all possession;  
he who wants nothing, wherever, is content!

Desire is a glass of infinite bitterness,  
 an octopus of insatiable tentacles which,  
 as soon as they are cut, grow back to torture us.  
 Desire is the father of melancholy, of satiety,  
 and in it there are more perfidies than waves on the sea!

He who, like the Cynic, drinks water from his hand,  
 who can turn his back on money,  
 who loves the Arcanum above all things,  
 he is the victorious, the strong, the sovereign,  
 and there is no peace comparable with his perennial peace.

It would be something less than candid to suggest here that ideas of self-denial and renunciation came first to Amado Neruo from the teachings of Buddha. It has already been pointed out that Neruo had almost unlimited admiration for St. Francis of Assisi, and the religious order which St. Francis founded had its basis in the rejection of all worldly goods and in mendicancy.

Another poem, "Temple" (Ease), follows the same general theme but adds the suggestion of another, that of transmigration, which is an aspect that Buddhism does not share with Christianity. This element will be discussed later; it is mentioned here simply to recognize its presence in the poem.

Estoy templado para la muerte,  
 templado para la eternidad,  
 y soy sereno porque soy fuerte;  
 la fuerza infunde serenidad.

¿En qué radica mi fuerza?

En una  
 indiferente resignación  
 ante los vuelcos de la fortuna  
 y los embates de la aflicción.

En el tranquilo convencimiento  
 de que la vida tan solo es  
 vano fantasma que mueve el viento,  
 entre un gran "antes" y un gran "después."  
 (34:1607)

I am prepared for death,  
 prepared for eternity,  
 and I am serene because I am strong;  
 strength infuses serenity.

In what is found the root of my strength?  
 In an indifferent resignation  
 in the face of the adversities of fortune  
 and the beating forces of affliction.

In tranquil certainty  
 that life is but a mere  
 vain phantom moved by the wind  
 between a great "before" and a great "after."

This poem, probably written in 1913 or early 1914, reflects a distinct change of attitude from that expressed in the poetry Nervo wrote in the year immediately following the death of Ana. That poetry, particularly that found in La amada inmóvil, shows a man beset by doubts and uncertainty, a man whose every thought and action must have been governed by the anguish he was feeling. Until the time of Ana's death, Nervo seems to have been able to find the spiritual solace he needed within the framework of his own Christian religion. The only exception to this would be in some of his poetry dating from the late 1890's, poetry that was highly romantic in nature and filled with passionate pleas to God for guidance. The extent to which that poetry is exemplary of how Nervo really felt, though, and the extent to which it was simply emotion-charged poetry written with a view to its appeal to his readers is conjectural.

It was not until after Ana died that there is any genuine indication of Nervo's seeking spiritual inspiration beyond his own cultural and religious background. On January 30, 1912, only three weeks after Ana's death, he wrote a letter to Luis Quintanilla in which he tells of Ana's death and describes his own sufferings as a result of it.

He thanks Quintanilla for a book the latter had sent him and then makes this request:

When you find something of a decided spiritualistic tendency, something that will make me think we are something more than a poor putrefying object that decomposes in the cemeteries, . . . send it to me. (34:1159)

The experience through which he had just passed, the one he described as the most horrifying of his life, had shaken his faith in many religious and philosophical beliefs that he had previously accepted without question. He was in need of consolation that he apparently was unable to find in his own Christian doctrine.

He was lonely and alone; so few of his friends and acquaintances had even known of Ana's existence that he even had to mourn her in private. He was beset by financial and political problems. The Mexican Revolution that had begun in 1910 had made a chaos of his country and, for a time, his own future in the diplomatic corps was in doubt. It is perhaps understandable to a sympathetic reader, then, that this overpowering combination of circumstances, coupled with the fact that throughout it all he had to conduct himself publicly as if his private life were completely normal, might have caused him to look upon some aspects of a philosophy such as Buddhism with longing eyes.

There are several fundamentals of Buddhism to which Nervo was attracted or with which he could readily identify. Self-abnegation, though not, as has been seen, unique to Buddhism, could conceivably have served as a first link for Nervo between Christianity and Buddhism. In addition to self-abnegation are three other concepts found in Buddhism that are unique to it and to other Hinduistic philosophies. They are Nirvana, Maya, and Karma, and will be discussed in turn.

Logically, that element of the Buddhist doctrine that held the greatest fascination for Neruo was the concept of Nirvana. This state, the Buddhist's counterpart to the Christian concept of Heaven, is a complete annihilation of being, a condition in which all suffering, mental anguish, and transmigrations have ceased. It denotes a re-joining with the metaphysical world (37:210). In his corporeal existence, man prepares himself for this state of non-being through an imitation of the Buddha, who made a complete renunciation of all worldly goods and of all physical desires. The Buddha's teachings stressed self-denial as the gateway to inner purification and moral goodness which he considered to be the only road to man's salvation (4:142).

Given Neruo's general state of mind in 1912 following his loss of Ana, and without implying anything approaching unqualified acceptance on the part of Neruo of the complete dogma of Buddhism, it is not difficult to see why he immersed himself in readings on Eastern philosophies and religions. It is undeniable that those readings had a calming influence on him. If one can accept what he says in the major part of his poetry after the publication of La amada inmóvil, he very nearly reached that exalted state called Nirvana before his death. He found, perhaps, not the relief from suffering that he was seeking, but rather, an almost total release from it. Gone now is the supplicating tone, the plaintive attention to his own suffering, the self-pity that in some of his earlier poetry reaches almost masochistic levels. Not only has he conquered physical cravings, but he has also achieved an emotional tranquility that is not manifested anywhere in his earlier poems.

Si una espina me hiere...

Si una espina me hiere, me aparto de la espina,  
... ¡pero no la aborrezco!

Quando la mezquindad  
envidiosa en mí clava los dardos de su inquina,  
esquívase en silencio mi planta, y se encamina  
hacia más puro ambiente de amor y caridad.

¿Rencores? ¡De qué sirven! ¡Qué logran los rencores!  
Ni restañan heridas, ni corrigen el mal.  
Mi rosal tiene apenas tiempo para dar flores,  
y no prodiga savias en pinchos punzadores;  
si pasa mi enemigo cerca de mi rosal,

se llevará las rosas de más sutil esencia;  
y si notare en ellas algún rojo vivaz,  
¡será el de aquella sangre que su malevolencia  
de ayer vertió, al herirme con encono y violencia,  
y que el rosal devuelve, trocada en flor de paz!  
(34:1739)

If a Thorn Wounds Me...

If a thorn wounds me, I move away from the thorn,  
but I don't hate it!

When small and envious people  
hurl their angry darts at me,  
I step silently aside and move  
toward purer surroundings of love and charity.

Hatreds? Why? What good are they?  
They heal no wounds, and correct no ill.  
My rose bush scarcely has time to flower,  
and doesn't waste its saps in painful scratches;  
if my enemy passes near my rose bush,

he will take with him the roses of the most  
subtle essence; and if he sees in them a certain vivid red,  
perhaps it is from that blood his malevolence  
spilled yesterday on wounding me in anger and violence,  
and which the bush gives back, changed into a flower of peace!

The tranquility evidenced in the above poem is repeated in poem after poem in Neruo's writings in the last years of his life. The renunciation preached by Siddharta Gautama seems to have given to Neruo an utter peace of spirit that made him impervious to the problems of everyday living. The following poem, taken, as is the



preceding one, from the 1917 publication, Elevación, is in the same general vein. However, here the poet has gone beyond simple renunciation; he has reached a point at which he simply is indifferent to worldly things and even to the passing of time.

Ya no tengo impaciencia...

Ya no tengo impaciencia porque no aguardo nada...  
Ven, Fortuna, o no vengas; que tu máquina alada  
llegue al toque del alba, llegue al toque de queda;  
con el broto abrioleño, con la hoja que rueda...  
Ya no tengo impaciencia, porque no aguardo nada.

Al fulgor de las tardes, del balcón anchuroso  
de mi estancia tranquila, con un libro en la mano,  
yo contemplo el paisaje, siempre austero y hermoso;  
y mi espíritu plácido, con fervor religioso,  
tiende amante las alas de oro en pos del Arcano.

Nadie turba las aguas deste lago dormido  
de mi ser, deste lago de caudal puro y terso.  
No hay afán que me inquiete; nada quiero ni pido,  
¡y del cáliz de mi alma, cual aroma elegido  
brota cándido, uncioso y apacible, mi verso!

(34:1746)

I'm not impatient now...

I'm not impatient now, because I await nothing...  
Come, Fortune, or not; let your winged machine  
come at dawn, or when it will,  
with April's buds, or the whirling leaves of fall...  
I'm not impatient now, because I await nothing.

In the splendor of the evening, from the wide  
balcony of my tranquil home, with book in hand,  
I gaze upon the beautiful, austere landscape;  
and with religious fervor, my placid spirit  
lovingly spreads golden arms in quest of the Arcanum.

No one disturbs the waters of this sleeping lake  
of my being, of this lake of clear and pure abundance.  
There is no eagerness to disquiet me; I want nothing,  
and ask for nothing, and from the chalice of my soul,  
like select aroma, sprouts my verse, simple,  
fervent, and gentle!

The above poem contains a philosophy that is central to Buddhism. Life is suffering; suffering is caused by craving; and serenity is achieved through annihilation of all craving.

According to Hindu philosophy, the only reality is spiritual. If this is true, the material world can only be an illusion without any real existence; or at most, it is a veil through which man can catch glimpses of the beauty and perfection of the Supreme Spirit (39:138). This illusion, this veil, is called Maya, and man must overcome it in order to achieve unity of his soul with the Spirit. Though only an illusion, however, it can be very real and distracting to the individual, and through use of the intellect he must dispel it; he must simply will it away.

#### El Maya

Eres uno con Dios: en tu alma llevas  
tu paraíso.  
Lo exterior, que te turba y entristece,  
no cobra realidad sino en ti mismo;  
tú formas las imágenes, y luego  
las deseas, trocándolas en ídolos.

El resultado de tus sensaciones  
para ti constituye el Universo,  
y son tus sensaciones cualidades  
puras de tu mortal entendimiento.  
No hay objetividad sino en ti propio;  
tú sólo eres tu fin y tu comienzo...

El fenómeno (relatividad  
entre tú y la materia) por ti tiene  
vida... Mas tú desdénalo, recógete  
en ti mismo; verás que no te hiere,  
y ya libre tu espíritu del MAYA  
en divina quietud nadará siempre.

(34:1774)

### Maya

You are one with God: You carry  
your paradise within you.  
External things, that trouble and sadden you,  
acquire no reality except within yourself;  
you create their images, and then  
you crave them, turning them into idols.

The result of your sensations  
constitutes the Universe for you,  
and your sensations are pure qualities  
of your mortal understanding.  
There is no objectivity but in you;  
you alone are your end and your beginning...

The phenomenon (the relationship  
between you and the material world)  
is real to you... But scorn it, take refuge  
within yourself; you will see that it does not  
hurt you, and your spirit, once free from MAYA,  
will float in divine quietude forever.

The renunciation of worldliness, material things, and specifically, the cravings for personal pleasures strikes a responsive note in Nervo. In the mind of Nervo, it is in these cravings that man risks the loss of purity and makes himself perpetually subject to the retributive law of Karma.

This law is an underlying part of many Oriental philosophies. It is the law of cause and effect; it is universal and inexorable. It carries with it the demand for retribution for past sins, an idea not uncommon to many Western philosophies. In the Hindu world, though, Karma insists upon a series of transmigrations in which man, in a series of existences, must suffer and purify himself until, once the law of Karma has been satisfied, he can enter into the exalted state of Nirvana (4:141).

In principle, Nervo accepted this law. However, he was never able to reconcile himself to the fatalistic, and therefore pessimistic,

notion that a law could function only in a series of reincarnations. He preferred rather the Buddhistic acceptance of man's moral evolution in this life, where, through determination to think and do right, man can purify himself, overcome the laws of Karma, and thus break the chain of transmigrations (39:139).

Still, he makes enough references to transmigration, and his thoughts on transmigration recur with enough frequency in the collection El estanque de los lotos that it must be considered as an important sub-theme. How deeply Nervo actually believed in transmigration is difficult to say with any certainty. Logically, of course, acceptance of the idea of Karma necessarily entails the acceptance of reincarnation. If Karma is applied to only one existence, it does not account for the apparently undeserved suffering seen in the world. If, on the other hand, it is applied to a series of existences it becomes more plausible. This may have been the case with Nervo; acceptance of the first would have been illogical without acceptance also of the second (39:140).

Nonetheless, the thought of an endless series of reincarnations frightens him, and he sees himself following the cycle endlessly, forced on by the fruits of his desires he is unable to control.

¡Oh febril, oh brioso corcel de mi deseo,  
a cuyo lomo, atado cual Mazeppa, me veo!  
¡cadena despiadada, que con tus eslabones  
me ligas a los CICLOS de las REENCARNACIONES,  
fundiendo cuna y cuna, soldando muerte y muerte!  
¡Cuándo querrá mi KARMA que pueda yo romperte!  
(34:1775)

Oh feverish, oh spirited charger of my desire,  
to whose back, tied like Mazeppa, I see myself!  
Oh pitiless chain, that with your links  
you bind me to the CYCLES of REINCARNATIONS,  
fusing cradle to cradle, and death to death!  
When will my KARMA allow me to break you!

It could be reasonably argued that this desire to break out of the cycle of reincarnations may hold the key to Nervo's inability to accept fully the philosophies of Hinduism. To accept those philosophies, especially those ideas implicit in the Hindu concept of reincarnation, would have meant automatically a rejection of the exercise of free will. This Amado Nervo was not prepared to do. The assertion of free will was too much a part of his heritage, indeed, of Spanish heritage, for it to lie dormant for long. He thus exhorts his readers, and himself, to use that free will and to break the bonds imposed by destiny.

Parece que está cerrada la puerta de las mercedes.  
 Parece que el dulce fiat del Padre ya enmudeció.  
 Parece que tus intentos son alas presas en redes;  
 voluntad, voluntad mía, parece que nada puedes...  
 ¡Pero no!

¡Pero no!

Sigue queriendo tenazmente, y con iguales  
 esfuerzos hiere la roca del destino, voluntad.  
 No consientas en tus grillos, no consientas en tus males,  
 y opón sin cesar a tantas limitaciones fatales  
 tu propia fatalidad.

(34:1803)

It seems as if mercy's door has closed.  
 It seems as if the Father's sweet decree is silenced.  
 It seems as if your efforts are wings fettered by nets;  
 oh free will of mine, you seem unable to do anything...  
 But no!

But no!

Continue doggedly to care, and with equal  
 force, smash the rock of destiny, oh will.  
 Don't surrender to your shackles, don't give in to wrongs,  
 and endlessly oppose the many fatal limitations  
 of your own fatality.

Although the above poem forms a part of the volume El estanque de los lotos, easily his most Buddhistic work, it leaves little room for doubt as to Nervo's stand on Hinduism as a complete religious philosophy.

Certainly there were aspects of several Eastern philosophies that held appeal for Nervo, and there is ample reason to believe that some of those elements provided him with spiritual solace he could not find elsewhere. There is no reason to suspect, however, if one bases a conclusion on the full extent of his poetry, that he ever seriously considered anything like a complete rejection of Christian Catholicism. Such a move would have been contrary to his own logic he propounds when he answers a reader's request for some sign he can use for personal guidance (34:793). He mentions the good that is found in many religions of the world, including Buddhism. He stresses the fact that a religion is a way of thinking that is deeply rooted in the tradition and history of a people and that, for a given people, whatever religion they practice is the true religion for them. He concludes by saying that for those same reasons, "for us the true religion is Christianity."

That statement, made in the final year of his life, expresses his feelings briefly and concisely. His life, his background, his associations during the years of his youth, very nearly preclude his having been able to say anything else. Christianity was deeply ingrained in him, and had always been an integral part of his existence. Given this fact, and also given a reasonable familiarity with his writings, speculation about any serious consideration on the part of Amado Nervo in terms of total acceptance of other religions seems almost superfluous.

## CHAPTER V

### COSMOPOLITANISM

Cosmopolitanism in literature is normally considered to be the characteristic, or characteristics of a given work that give it an air of internationalism. Cosmopolitan literature is typically free of purely local or national elements that would otherwise limit its widespread appeal, and concerns itself, thematically at least, with matters that are universal in nature and with which men everywhere can identify. This is not to say that a literary work cannot have an identifiable local or regional setting and still be cosmopolitan. Indeed, it is not uncommon to find, especially in prose literature, works that are entirely local in plot or setting, but which deal with problems or conflicts that are common to mankind. Such works have that necessary ingredient, universality, and so are cosmopolitan works. Existentialist writings often have very localized and easily identified settings, but they concern themselves with problems that men everywhere encounter. Many of the works of the Argentine writer, Eduardo Mallea, provide a case in point. Two Spanish American short story writers, Horacio Quiroga and Juan José Arreola, are famous for stories that are set in specific locales, but whose themes are universal and timeless. Such works also should be considered cosmopolitan, since their readership is not confined to the geographic regions in which they are set.

Cosmopolitanism was one of the earliest and most salient of the characteristics of Modernism. The Modernists, working to free Spanish American literature from its local ties, were quick to accept the internationalism, or more precisely, the absence of nationalism and regionalism in the works of the French Parnassians. In the main, members of the Modernist movement thought of themselves as citizens of the world, and avoided writing anything that would link them with particular regions. They considered their ties to be with art, and since art is timeless and universal, at least in the eyes of a Modernist, their works should not reflect their national or regional origins, as they so often did in the Romantic period in Spanish America.

Romanticism had placed an emphasis on regionalism, on the American scene. There had been a general effort on the part of the Spanish American Romantics to create national literatures, and in many cases the efforts had been highly successful. However, achievement of these national literatures had not been without sacrifices to both the general quality of Spanish American letters and to American Spanish. There was a general inbreeding of ideas and themes. Spanish had, in a sense, almost ceased to be an international language. Literary works tended to be larded with regional expressions and local dialects, such as the patois of the Argentine gauchos. It was against this air of general debility that the Modernists reacted.

In their reaction, they strove to inject new topics and subject matter; they sought newness of ideas. Literature of a cosmopolitan nature was the obvious, perhaps inevitable result of their search. As Spanish American writers had so often done previously, they turned to France for inspiration. There they found both Parnassianism and



Symbolism in abundance, and both schools were to provide excellent vehicles for their new movement.

As is so often the case in the introduction of a new movement, or of any new set of ideas, the Modernist movement toward cosmopolitanism overreached itself. Though the Modernists originally adopted it in an effort to inject new themes into their poetry, and to enrich the language, it soon became its own end. Some writers of the period, notably men like Rubén Darío, instead of using cosmopolitanism for the presentation of universal themes, sought instead through the use of elements of cosmopolitanism, to make their works so esoteric that the masses would fail to comprehend them. In Modernism then, cosmopolitanism went beyond internationalism. To the Modernists, cosmopolitanism was exoticism; it was a means of evasion, of escapism. This type of writing, done principally during the early period of Modernism, manifested itself in a profusion of allusions to the elegance of eighteenth century France, to ancient and exotic cultures, and to an entire world of mythology. Instead of being literature of the world in the true cosmopolitan sense, it was a deliberate esotericism, literature that was pointedly recondite. It was an ostentatious display of erudition written for a select minority, reflecting a feeling in the Modernist writers, not of belonging to the world, but rather a feeling of aloofness, an absence of any sense of commonality. It demonstrated a sense of almost total detachment from the world and its problems. This is what cosmopolitanism was to the Modernist until the turn of the century, and it is in this rather restricted sense that the term is used in this chapter.

By the terms in which cosmopolitanism in Modernism is defined above, Amado Nervo was possibly the most cosmopolitan of all the Modernist poets; certainly he was the most consistent in his cosmopolitanism. It is curious, therefore, that such an important trait in his works is almost universally overlooked by critics and students of Spanish American Modernism. This failure to see such an obviously important characteristic in Nervo's poetry may be due to the fact that references and subject matter normally associated with Modernist cosmopolitanism are not present in his poems in the abundance in which they are found elsewhere in Modernist literature. Pure Parnassianism, for example, is relatively rare in his poetry. He had little interest in the description of beauty simply for the sake of description. Another reason for the oversight may be found in the fact that Nervo's poetry is almost always of a very personal nature, and it is nearly always highly subjective. This is a departure from the techniques employed by the majority of the Modernists, who felt that the ego of the poet must remain outside the poem. The utter absence of the personality of the poet is, to many critics, a first requisite to cosmopolitanism. In fact, it is but one of many characteristics.

Nervo was, of course, capable of writing highly Parnassian poetry that was filled with the deliberate, frigid impersonality typical of the period, and, as will be seen, he occasionally did so, though such total objectivity was foreign to his personality. Though not so flamboyant and obviously pretentious in his use of the elements of cosmopolitanism favored by the typical Modernist, he was widely read and completely familiar with those elements. There are enough allusions to Greek and Nordic mythology in his works to indicate that he was

conversant with those areas, though they do not appear with sufficient regularity to assume thematic importance in his poems. In spite of Nervo's affection for France and French culture, there are only rare allusions to the glories of eighteenth century France and her courtly life, themes that were extremely popular with the Modernists generally. In fact, all the typical marks of cosmopolitanism do at times appear in Nervo's poetry, but aside from his consistent use of references to Hinduism and its various sub-cultures and attendant philosophies, his purely Modernist cosmopolitanism seems to be more incidental than conscious and deliberate.

Where the typical Modernist withdrew into his ivory tower and produced writings filled with deliberate obscurity, Nervo almost never deviated from the simple and direct language for which he has always been known. Further, he never withdrew from the world, either literally or figuratively. He withdrew, rather, from the events of the world, insofar as they affected him personally, and insofar as his reactions to them marked him as being a Mexican.

Some of the exceptions to Nervo's otherwise highly subjective poetry are worthy of inclusion in any study, not only of his work, but of the Modernist movement as well. The first two poems included here are noteworthy because they show that indeed he was able to write Parnassian poetry that ranks with the best of the entire Modernist movement, with close attention to the use of plasticity, color, and contrast. The first, "Noche ártica" (Arctic Night), was written sometime prior to 1900, before he left Mexico. It is typical of the impassivity of the Parnassian poets; it contains a vivid description of the beauty of a scene, with no pretense at any moralizing or

philosophizing. The poem contains no message beyond that of the beauty inherent in the scene, nor was it intended to. It is an excellent example of the Parnassian concept of art for art's sake.

#### Noche ártica

En el cenit, azul; blanco en el yerto  
y triste plan de la sabana escueta;  
en los nevados témpanos, violeta,  
y en el confín del cielo, rosa muerto.

Despréndese la luna del incierto  
Sur, amarilla; y en la noche quieta,  
de un buque abandonado la silueta  
medrosa se levanta en el desierto.

Ni un rumor... El Silencio y la Blancura  
celebraron ha mucho en la infinita  
soledad sus arcanos esponsales,

y el espíritu sueña en la ventura  
de un connubio inmortal con Seraphita  
bajo un palio de auroras boreales.

(34:1348)

#### Arctic Night

In the zenith, blue; white in the somber,  
rigid surface of the empty plain;  
On the snow-clad icebergs, violet,  
and along the horizon, faded rose.

The moon rises yellow in the dim  
uncertain South; and in the quiet night,  
the fearful silhouette of an abandoned ship  
rises against the emptiness.

Not a sound... The Silence and the Whiteness  
celebrated long ago their mysterious betrothal  
in the infinite solitude,

and the spirit drowns in the bliss  
of an eternal marriage to its Seraphita  
beneath the altar cloth of the aurora borealis.

Just as representative of the Parnassian emphasis on description, the next poem, "La nube" (The Cloud), presents an even better example of the use of both shape and color than is seen in "Arctic Night."

Inspired by the sight of the sunlight playing on a thunderhead at dusk, the poet lists, with Parnassian precision, all the objects that seem to take shape there, and the colors that predominate. The vocabulary itself is typical; imagistic language referring to peacocks, fans, precious stones, flowers, and flames is common to much of the poetry of Modernism. Perhaps the most startling thing about the poem, in view of the fact that it is almost totally representative of the early period of Modernism, is the fact that it was written at least ten years after the Modernist cult of beauty had ceased as a unified literary effort. Further, it was published in 1918 in El estanque de los lotos, a volume of poems associated almost exclusively with spiritual inspiration.

#### La nube

¡Qué de cuentos de hadas saldrían de esa nube  
 crepuscular, abismo celeste de colores!  
 ¡Cuánta vela de barco, cuánta faz de querube,  
 cuánto fénix incólume, que entre las llamas sube;  
 cuánto dragón absurdo, cuántas divinas flores!

¡Cuánto plumón de cisne, cuánto sutil encaje;  
 cuánto pavón soberbio, de colas prodigiosas;  
 cuánto abanico espléndido, con áureo varillaje;  
 cuánto nimbo de virgen, cuánto imperial ropaje,  
 cuántas piedras preciosas!

Mas ella no lo sabe, y ensaya vestiduras  
 de luz y vierte pródiga sus oros y sus cobres,  
 para que la contemplen tan solo tres criaturas:  
 ¡un asno pensativo lleno de mataduras,  
 y dos poetas líricos, muy flacos y muy pobres!

(34:1811)

#### The Cloud

What fairy tales might come from that twilight cloud,  
 celestial chasm of colors!  
 How many sailing ships, how many cherub faces,  
 how many unbroken phoenixes that rise among the flames;  
 how many absurd dragons, how many divine flowers!

How much swan's-down, how much subtle lace,  
 how many haughty peacocks with prodigious tails;  
 How many splendid fans with golden ribbing;  
 How many virginal halos, how many imperial vestments,  
 how many precious stones!

But the cloud doesn't know it, and she clothes herself in  
 light and prodigally pours her golds and coppers,  
 to be contemplated by just three creatures:  
 A pensive jackass covered with sores,  
 and two lyric poets, very thin and very poor.

The one element in the above poem that is not typical of early Modernism appears in the last two lines. Though it was not uncommon for a poem to contain the veiled presence of the poet, the presence of a sore-infested jackass presents a jarring note not often found anywhere in the movement. Nor is this typical of the poetry of Neruo. The poem as a whole, however, forms an excellent example of Modernist cosmopolitanism, with strong emphasis on plastic description.

Another poem, also more representative of Modernist cosmopolitanism as a whole than of the writings of Amado Neruo, is "La flauta de Pan" (Pan's Flute). Here, the poet has combined a muted form of Parnassianism with the evocative qualities of images intended to open for the reader a dream world of ancient Greece and mythology.

#### La flauta de Pan

En las dóricas noches diamantinas,  
 cuando boga Selene por el cielo  
 como un sol moribundo, y en el suelo  
 duerme todo, memorias y ruinas,

puebla sotos, oteros y colinas  
 un rumor de infinito desconsuelo,  
 una música lánguida en que el duelo  
 treme y llora con gamas cristalinas.

Es la flauta de Pan, hecha de caña,  
 inmortal, porque al dios le plugo en ella  
 convertir a Siringa en la campana,

y parece decir su arrullo triste:  
 "Viandante, une tu voz a mi querella  
 si buscas la beldad... ¡Helos no existe!"  
 (34:1354)

#### Pan's Flute

In the diamond-like Doric nights  
 when Selene rows across the sky  
 like a dying sun, and on earth  
 everything sleeps, memories and ruins,

a murmur of infinite sadness  
 fills the groves and hills,  
 a languid music in which grief trembles  
 and weeps with crystal sound.

It is Pan's flute, made of reed that is immortal  
 because it pleased the god to change Syrinx  
 to a reed there in the countryside,

and it seems to say in its sad lullaby,  
 "Wayfarer, join your voice to my lament  
 if you seek beauty... Hellas does not exist!"

The Modernist's use of Symbolism, particularly the uses of images relating to ancient classical civilizations and their mythologies, served his need for escape as well as his desire for cosmopolitanism. "Pan's Flute," written relatively early in Neruo's career and at a time when this type poetry was very much in vogue with the Modernists, stands as a superb example of cosmopolitanism as it was employed generally by the Modernists during the early period of the movement. It demonstrates also, as do the two poems included previously in this chapter, that Neruo was eminently capable of writing completely Modernist poetry that was filled with all the typical elements usually associated with Modernist cosmopolitanism.

Although the three poems cited above are good examples of what is normally considered as cosmopolitanism of the Modernist movement, none is completely typical of Neruo. At no time in his career does

he show any real interest in the sustained production of poetry reflecting obvious and ostentatious internationalism. Nor was he attracted by the idea of escapist poetry under the guise of cosmopolitanism. Rather, his poetry demonstrates a completely different, and surely a much more durable kind of cosmopolitanism. It is cosmopolitan by the fact that there is an almost total absence of precise references to either geography or time.

Alfred Coester (8:285) in a 1921 article about Neruo, remarks that Neruo " . . . will always be considered a Modernist poet despite his Mexican characteristics." Since Coester does not elaborate on his reference to Mexican characteristics, it can reasonably be inferred that he is speaking of Neruo's subjectivity and the Romantic overtones in his works. There is nothing else that appears consistently in his poetry that could remotely connect him with Mexico, and even those characteristics are obviously not restricted to Mexico.

An interesting contradiction to Coester's statement can be seen in the Prologue that Rubén Darío wrote some years earlier to a collection of poetry entitled Alma América (Soul of America), by José Santos Chocano, another Modernist. Darío comments upon the Americanism of Chocano's poetry, and contrasts Chocano with himself, Leopoldo Lugones, and Amado Neruo, all of whom he describes as strangers. That is, he feels they are not poets of their lands. This is an attribute which Darío cultivated and in which he took pride; in Neruo, it may possibly have been entirely unconscious. While both Darío and Neruo occasionally wrote poems concerning particular regions and events, neither, apparently, could identify completely with any geographical area.



More noticeable than the absence of geographical references in Neruo's poetry, though, is the startling rarity of references to contemporary events, political and social upheavals that were of far-reaching significance. Neruo's most productive period of writing coincides with both the First World War and the Mexican Revolution, and a reader familiar only with his poetry of the period, and not with either his newspaper articles or the personal letters he wrote, will begin to ask himself if Neruo was aware of either event.

The Mexican Revolution that began in 1910 was to terminate in social and political changes for Mexico that are unmatched anywhere else in America. In view of the fact that Neruo was a member of the diplomatic corps, it is inconceivable that he would not have been deeply preoccupied with events that were taking place in his homeland. For a period of about two years--1914 through the first half of 1916--conditions in Mexico were so chaotic that diplomatic services were suspended, and Neruo was forced to live by his pen, but there is no hint of it generally in his poetry.

Manuel Durán (15:24) theorizes that Neruo's apparent detachment from events that were taking place in Mexico may have been due in part, at least, to an ignorance of those events and a general confusion as to their importance. He was too far removed, both in terms of time and space, from his homeland to be able to relate to what was taking place there.

. . . in the life of Neruo the Revolution does not count as an active ingredient in either his experience or his formation. From 1900 he had lived in Paris; from 1905 until 1918, in Madrid. Through newspapers and through letters from his friends confused and chaotic echoes came to him of the drama that was being lived out in Mexico, and which was going to affect him also . . .

Durán's theory here assumes increased validity if one takes another important factor into consideration. Neruo was not a professional diplomat, at least not in the literal sense of the word. Traditionally, Spanish American countries have awarded diplomatic posts, not to professional politicians, but to men with established reputations in other fields, notably in art and literature. Writers in Latin America have historically found it almost impossible to live by their writings, and governments have frequently used diplomatic appointments as a kind of financial patronage to make it possible for writers to continue their work. Neruo was no exception to this, despite his having taken examinations to determine his fitness for the diplomatic corps. To consider him as anything like a professional diplomatic representative of his country would make his remoteness from events around him all the more incredible.

In May of 1913, Neruo wrote a letter to his friend Luis Quintanilla that is occasionally cited by critics as evidence that his detachment from contemporary events was due to his suffering after the death of Ana. In the letter, he speaks optimistically of the new Huerta regime in Mexico, and expresses a hope that Huerta's iron-fisted rule will return order to the country. He speculates briefly about how Huerta's assumption to power may affect him, and then seems to dismiss the entire question by saying

in any case, I live serene. That which others call 'the future' matters little to me. I, like Spain, have neither present nor future. I have an opulent and delicious past and an infinite indifference toward that which surrounds me. The world is hospitable to me, and I can find a crust of bread and a ray of sunshine anywhere. (34:1162)

Ana's death might reasonably be blamed for such an attitude of indifference were it not for the fact that the Mexican Revolution had been going on for almost two years before she died. In fact, this detachment from events that did not touch him personally is notably present throughout most of the poetry he produced.

Two rare exceptions to this appearance of obliviousness to anything outside himself are found in two short and beautiful poems. The first, "Mi México" (My Mexico), is dated February 23, 1915, at a time when the Revolution was still raging. It is a poignant cry for the loss and waste of the fighting, and for the Mexico that he wants to see arise from it. It is also prophetic, in that he correctly predicts that he will never see that Mexico that is to be.

#### Mi México

Nací de una raza triste,  
de un país sin unidad  
ni ideal ni patriotismo;  
mi optimismo  
es tan solo voluntad;

obstinación en querer,  
con todos mis anhelares,  
un México que ha de ser,  
a pesar de los pesares,  
y que yo ya no he de ver...  
(34:1656)

#### My Mexico

I was born to a sad race,  
to a country without unity  
nor ideals nor patriotism;  
my unique optimism  
is my will,

obstinacy in wanting,  
with all my heart,  
a Mexico that is to be,  
despite her sorrows,  
and which I will not see.

The second poem, "A México" (To Mexico), is not dated. Historical events to which he alludes, however, would place the writing of the poem probably in 1916. It is at once a plea to his country to stop its fratricidal war and a warning that his countrymen need to unite and face an outside enemy. The reference is to the government of the United States and to the annoyance that was being voiced in the United States over the continued disorder within Mexico.

#### A México

¡Ay infeliz México mío!  
Mientras con raro desvarío  
vas de una en otra convulsión,  
del lado opuesto de tu río  
te está mirando, hostil y frío,  
el ojo claro del sajón.

¡Cese tu lucha fratricida!  
¡Da tregua al ímpetu suicida!  
¡Surges apenas a la vida  
y loco quieres ya morir?  
¡Torna a la digna paz distante  
que ennobleció tu ayer radiante,  
y abre un camino de diamante  
en el obscuro porvenir!

(34:1656)

#### To Mexico

Ah, unhappy Mexico of mine!  
While with rare delirium  
you go from one convulsion to another,  
from the other bank of your river  
the blue eye of the Saxon  
is watching you, hostile and cold.

Stop your fratricidal struggle!  
Give respite to your suicidal rush!  
Scarcely have you tasted life  
and madly now you wish to die?  
Turn back to the dignity of a distant peace  
that made your radiant yesterday so noble,  
and open a glittering road  
into the dark uncertain future.

It could be theorized that the almost total absence of references by Neruo to political events in Mexico during the years of the Revolution stemmed from a reluctance to say anything that might have been construed as a political stand, and that he wished to preserve a position that certainly must have been tenuous at times. Or, as suggested above by Durán, the fact that Neruo had been physically far removed from Mexico for many years might have made any emotional response to the struggle there impossible. A close examination of all his poetry, however, certainly of that written after the turn of the century, reflects an equal sense of non-participation, almost of what Coester (8:298) describes as a ". . . detachment from the world of reality" regarding all contemporary happenings.

If one can draw an inference from the number of poems giving tribute to Spain, or dealing generally with Spain--and the number of such poems is admittedly small--then Neruo identified with Spain almost as much as with Mexico. Yet, in the final years of his thirteen year stay there, Spain herself was undergoing a period of almost total anarchy. There were great social and political upheavals, with strong movements of socialism and anti-clericalism. Neruo appears to have been untouched by it all. In the poetry he wrote during those final years in Spain there is not a single direct reference to what was taking place there.

Essentially the same sense of detachment from the events of the First World War is evident in Neruo's poetry as was seen in the case of the Mexican Revolution. Though Neruo was geographically much closer to the European conflict than to the strife in Mexico, he

demonstrates an equal lack of concern, at least insofar as evidence of any concern can be found in his poetry.

Assuming for the moment the acceptability of Durán's suggestion that Neruvo's attitude of detachment regarding the Mexican Revolution was due in part to his prolonged absence from his homeland, then the reader must at once question the poet's almost total lack of emotional involvement in the war in Europe. But for a brief stay in Mexico in 1904 and 1905, he had, in fact, lived continuously in Europe since 1900. He had traveled extensively throughout all of the continent, and if he ever felt any real sense of identification with any locale, it could be defensibly argued that he felt more at home there than in America. If the eleven years he lived with Ana, who was French, can be assumed to have created any familial feelings in him, then France should have been something of a second home to him. Yet, none of this is evident in his poetry; rather, he seems to have been practically unmoved by the destruction brought about by the conflict there.

Of the few poems Neruvo did write in which the First World War is present as a point of reference, one of the earliest is dated September, 1915. The title of the poem is "La incursión," and it carries the sub-title "El 'raid'." It offers no personal attitude regarding the war beyond that which the reader wishes to infer. It tells a simple story of a young couple killed by a falling bomb on their wedding night. The poem is of negligible artistic merit and is mentioned here only in recognition of the fact that the story it relates is set in wartime.

Curiously, the final eight poems in the 1918 collection, El estanque de los lotos, are devoted to the war, or rather, to war in

general, and the place of both man and God in war. The poems are striking, not only for the fact that they are highly artistic creations dealing with a terrible human condition, but also for the fact that even in their beauty they are out of keeping, as it were, with the other poems in the collection. Written over the four year period from 1915 to 1918, and assembled in the collection under the general heading of "La catástrofe" (The Catastrophe), they constitute virtually the only recognition the poet gave in his poetry to the First World War.

Three of the poems, generally representative of the eight, are included in this study. The first, "Lo que nos queda" (What We Have Left), is both a stoical acceptance of the destruction of war, and an insistence that the things of real value in one's life are indestructible and timeless.

#### Lo que nos queda

Porque en este aluvión de sangre y lodo  
se hundió nuestra fortuna, ¿te querellas?  
En suma, deja que se pierda todo;  
¡siempre habrán de quedarnos las estrellas!

¡Siempre habrá de quedarnos la argentina  
palidez de las noches enlunadas,  
y júbilo del hora matutina  
y la paz de las tardes fatigadas,  
y mi ternura casta, y la divina  
serenidad azul de tus miradas!

(34:1814)

#### What We Have Left

Because in this torrent of blood and filth  
we lost our fortune, you complain?  
In a word, let it all be lost.  
The stars will always be there for us!

We will always have with us the silvery  
paleness of moonlit nights,  
the jubilation of the morning hour

and the peace of waning afternoons,  
and my pure love, and the divine  
blue serenity of your glances.

The second poem is an admonition to himself and to other poets not to write of war. Apparently, Neruo believes that writing of war tends to exhalt it, and that it is better to write of beauty, love, work, and peace, and to await the return of mankind to its sanity.

Poeta, tú no cantes la guerra

Poeta, tú no cantes la guerra; tú no rindas  
ese tributo rojo al Moloch, sé inactual;  
sé inactual y lejano como un dios de otros tiempos,  
como la luz de un astro, que a través de los siglos  
llega a la Humanidad.....

Ya cuando la locura de los hombres se extinga,  
ya cuando las coronas se quiebren al compás  
del orfeón coloso que cante marselesas;  
ya cuando de las ruinas resurja el Ideal,  
Poeta, tú, de nuevo,  
la lira entre tus manos,

ágiles y nerviosas y puras, cogerás,  
y la nítida estrofa, la estrofa de luz y oro,  
de las robustas cuerdas otra vez surgirá;  
la estrofa llena de óptimos estímulos, la estrofa  
alegre, que murmure: "¡Trabajo, Amor y Paz!"  
(34:1813)

Poet, Don't Sing of War

Poet, don't sing of the war; don't render  
that red tribute to Moloch, don't be stylish;  
be out of date and distant as a god from other times,  
as the light of a star that comes to humanity  
across the centuries...

When the madness of man is extinguished,  
when crowns are shattered to the rhythm  
of the colossal chorus singing victory songs,  
when finally the Ideal resurges amid the ruins,  
you, Poet, will grasp again  
your lyre in hands

that are agile, vigorous, and pure,  
and the bright verse, the verse of light and gold,  
from the robust chords once again will spring;  
the verse filled with inspiration,  
the happy verse that murmurs, "Work, Love, and Peace!"



The final poem in this group from El estanque de los lotos is not only more typical of the other poetry in the collection, but it is also much more typical of the poet. His feeling of detachment from war and, presumably, all things of a mundane nature is obvious here. This poem, perhaps more than any other poem Amado Nervo wrote, exemplifies his total withdrawal from the events of daily existence. It also builds a very strong argument that, as suggested earlier, his cosmopolitanism is unlike that of the other Modernist poets. Where cosmopolitanism in Modernism generally was a studied and deliberate element, an exercise in preciousness, it may well have been automatic and unavoidable in Nervo.

La nieve misteriosa de la montaña

Ven, ya llegó la hora del amor: ¿por qué inmóvil  
y silencioso estás frente de tu ventana?  
¿No te esperan mis besos?

--Déjame: estoy mirando

la nieve misteriosa de la montaña.

--He aquí el libro que enseña tanta filosofía:  
¿por qué sobre la mesa lo abandonas, sin gana  
de sondar sus honduras?

--Déjame: estoy mirando

la nieve misteriosa de la montaña.

--Poeta, el mundo tiembla de expectación: la Horda  
científica destruye cuanto la especie humana  
supo crear... Asómate a la lucha; comparte  
la ambición de los fuertes, que triunfarán mañana,  
o el temor de los débiles...

--Déjame: ¡estoy mirando

la nieve misteriosa de la montaña!

(34:1815)

The Mysterious Snow of the Mountain

Come, the time for love has come; why do you stand  
so still and quiet by your window?  
Don't you know my kisses are awaiting you?

Don't disturb me; I'm looking

at the mysterious snow on the mountain!

Here is the book that teaches so much philosophy;  
 why do you abandon it there on the table,  
 not wanting to sound its depths?

Don't disturb me; I'm looking  
 at the mysterious snow on the mountain!

Poet, the world trembles in expectancy; the scientific  
 Horde destroys everything the human species has been able  
 to create... Look out at the battle; share  
 the ambition of the strong, who will triumph tomorrow,  
 or the fear of the weak.

Don't disturb me; I'm looking  
 at the mysterious snow on the mountain!

Critics marvel at the fact that the Mexican Revolution ground on and on with scarcely a reference to it in the poetry of Amado Nervo. Manuel Durán (15:24) explains, perhaps not altogether satisfactorily, the scarcity of those references by the fact that Nervo had been absent from Mexico for many years, and was thus unable to understand clearly what was taking place. Some of the same critics are bemused by the fact that Nervo, almost in the shadow of the First World War, appears to have been almost untouched by it. Craig (11:27), talking not just about Nervo, but of the Spanish American poets of the period generally, sees this as a typical reaction.

. . . surprising as it may appear to English readers, the war seems to have left little or no trace on the poetry of Spanish America. . . . It seems incredible that, while Europe was agonizing in what looked like her death-struggle, the poets of Spanish America had no ears for her cry and drew no inspiration from her sacrifice. Nero fiddling while Rome was burning was only a mild antetype.

While Craig is generalizing to all Spanish American poets, it hardly seems an adequate explanation in the case of Nervo. His situation, while not unique, was different from that of the ordinary Spanish American poet. He was, in fact, in Europe throughout those war years; few of the others were. To the casual reader of Nervo's poetry, it seems almost beyond belief that a conflict of the magnitude of the

First World War could have failed to enter into his works, and particularly so when that reader is aware of the sensitivity attributed to the poet and the compassion for humanity that fills his poetry.

Still, Neruo's reaction to that war is typical of his reactions to other major world events that occurred during his career. While he never joined the other Modernists in their fanciful flights into pretentious cosmopolitanism, neither did he join them in their swing to Hispanism following the Spanish American War. Rather, there is an increasing trend in his poetry, becoming especially noticeable from 1905 onward, toward more personal and philosophical topics. With some exceptions, certain ones of which are included in this chapter, Neruo's poetry reflects an increasing disassociation from contemporary events. The reasons for this disassociation will perhaps always be matters for speculation. As mentioned earlier, Coester (8:298) describes it as a ". . . detachment from reality." Coester's use of the word "reality" would seem to suggest not so much an indifference to world affairs as a lack of awareness of them.

In a statement already cited above, Manuel Durán explains the relative rarity of Neruo's references to the Mexican Revolution as being a result of his prolonged absence from Mexico and the confusing and oftentimes contradictory reports he got from newspapers and letters. Later, however, Durán (15:79) seems to contradict himself and concedes neither ignorance nor indifference on the part of Neruo, that, in fact, he deliberately excluded references to temporal events from his poetry on the ground that they had no place there. Durán discusses the general state of the Spanish world in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening years of the twentieth. He

mentions the policies of expansionism in the United States and their possible consequences on the Spanish speaking peoples, and insists that Neruo was fully aware of those consequences, literary as well as political and social.

The explosion of 1910 in Mexico and of 1914 in Europe will come, furthermore, to shatter faith in the burgeoise and in traditional culture; post-Modernism will emerge--sometimes confused and convulsed--from those years of crisis. None of these events--nor their possible consequences--escapes the attentive eye of Neruo, and more than once he gives them space in his chronicles. But his conception of poetry is another matter. Poetry should deal with eternal themes, themes not tied to the immediate, concrete, and circumstantial. . . . The thing that occurs is that--in his poetry, at least--he seeks an internal ethical position that is not bound to social and political action.

Whatever the cause, the result of the general absence of allusions to contemporary events in Neruo's poetry has been a very large amount of poetry that has remained timeless and universal. The almost total detachment of his poetry, in terms of subject matter, has made it among the most cosmopolitan to be found with any consistency among the works of the Modernist writers. The reason for this air of cosmopolitanism in Neruo's poetic works may indeed be found in his general lack of awareness, as Coester suggests. There is much evidence that Coester's evaluation in 1921 was accurate. Neruo himself may unwittingly have underlined the reason in his 1913 letter to his friend Luis Quintanilla when he mentioned the total indifference he felt for everything around him. Perhaps a more valid explanation, though, and certainly one which speaks more favorably of the poet, is Durán's (15:79) insistence that the reason is an artistic one, that Neruo felt that poetry should not concern itself with temporal events, but rather should be involved with ideas that are personal, internal,

and eternal. In the bulk of Neruo's poetry there is almost nothing to fix it in either place or time; and this fact, coupled with the fact that he almost always wrote on topics with which men generally can identify, indicates that he achieved a cosmopolitanism of the highest sort.

## CHAPTER VI

### ROMANTIC SUBJECTIVITY AND THE THEME OF LOVE

One of the principal characteristics of the poetry of Amado Nervo is the ever-present personality of the poet. Wherever one looks in the poetry of Nervo, one sees Nervo. This stamp of personality, this Yo (I), small at times, but more often large and central to the poem, is a significant element in practically all his poetic production. It is a paradox that although Nervo is classified as a Modernist, and in some respects, as has been seen in preceding chapters, he was one of the most extreme Modernists of the movement, the elements of Romantic subjectivity and emotionalism can be seen running almost without interruption throughout his work. A great amount of his poetry is written in first person, with his treatment of subject matter reflecting generally his personal relationship with it and his immediate reaction to it.

The reasons for the highly personal qualities of Nervo's poetry are speculative. With only rare exceptions, those qualities are present, though, even during the years when he was completely immersed in the Modernist movement and thoroughly devoted to its cause.

In the preceding chapter the suggestion was made that perhaps Nervo was simply unable to relate to ideas or events of a political nature that did not touch on himself. Malvigne (30:83) would seem

to support such a theory when he speaks of the super-ego of the poet; Nervo's detachment from reality mentioned by Coester (8:298) lends further credence to the theory of non-involvement also. Basing a judgement solely upon the poetry Nervo wrote, it is unquestionably true that he felt no deep sense of identification with nations and their problems, not even, in fact, with his own nation. Nor, apparently, was he able to make anything more than occasional, transitory identification with peoples, in any national or cultural sense. In this sense, he was distinctly a man of the world.

Yet, Amado Nervo as a man appears to be as filled with contradictions as is his poetry. It is curious that a man who could remain both politically and emotionally removed, not only from the First World War, but from the holocaust sweeping his homeland could, in 1916, write of his personal identification with Man in such simple and touching terms.

¡Oh Cristo!

Ya no hay un dolor humano que no sea mi dolor;  
ya ningunos ojos lloran, ya ningún alma se angustia  
sin que yo me angustie y llore;  
ya mi corazón es lámpara fiel de todas las vigili-  
as, ¡oh Cristo!.....

(34:1747)

Oh Christ!

There is no human grief that is not my grief;  
no eyes weep, no soul anguishes  
but that I also anguish and I weep;  
my heart is a faithful lamp for all vigils,  
oh Christ!

Admittedly, the outstanding element of the fragment cited above is the personality of the poet. The poem exemplifies the attitude that is generally characteristic of Nervo's poetry. His feeling of

identification with mankind is on a kind of one-to-one basis. That is, while he is either unwilling to feel emotion for the sufferings of an entire nation, or is incapable of doing so, he feels a strong sense of unity with the individual who is troubled. This unity, nonetheless, is almost invariably ego-oriented, with the poet talking of the private, individual tribulations of mankind in terms of their reflections in himself and his sometimes vicarious suffering of those tribulations. Whatever the case, it is a rare poem in the works of Neruo that does not have Neruo at its center.

A popular theory explaining the constant presence of the personality of the poet, and certainly one which speaks better of Neruo than the opinions of either Malvigne or Coester, is that of the Romantic tendencies he never outgrew. Durán (15:128) considers the Romantic era into which Neruo was born to have had a permanent influence on his writings.

Neruo, born in an obscure corner of the province and in the second half of the nineteenth century, was to have a literary formation almost totally Romantic--in those years Romanticism was arriving in the province; it was, in fact, the latest style . . .

Alfred Coester (8:285) is referring also to Neruo's subjectivity when he says that Neruo will always be known as a Modernist poet ". . . despite his Mexican characteristics." He simply means, much as does Durán, that the background of the poet, his heritage as a Mexican, dictates a certain amount of Romantic subjectivity.

The presence of Romantic elements in a Modernist poet, or in a Spanish American poet from almost any other period, is not so extraordinary as it may first appear, however. Spanish American poetry in general is frequently marked by Romantic tendencies toward



individuality, subjectivity, and emotionalism. Clearly, the objectivity and impassivity of some of the more deliberate of the Modernists such as Darío led to a type of poetry that was more exceptional to Spanish American poetry than was Nervo's subjectivity exceptional to Modernism. The Modernist movement did not, after all, set out to destroy all that Romanticism had stood for. On the contrary, as was seen in Chapter II, the very raison d'être of the movement can be found also as an integral part of Romanticism.

Whatever the causes for Nervo's subjectivity, whether ego and detachment from reality, or Romanticism and Mexicanism, the great bulk of his poetry is highly subjective. It tends generally to be personal in nature, with frequent overtones of didacticism.

In much of the poetry of Nervo's youth, poetry that was written before his arrival in Mexico City, the reader sees little to differentiate it from Spanish American Romantic poetry written by other poets forty or fifty years earlier. The unmitigated suffering of the poet is present, as is the reflection of the poet's moods in nature. A volume of poetry entitled Mañana del poeta (Morning of the Poet), collected and published posthumously, contains poems written over the period 1886 to 1891. Subject matter in these poems is varied; there are love poems, religious poems, and poems with patriotic themes. An element that is common to most of them is Romantic subjectivity.

Quiero llorar...

Después que padezco tanto,  
que es tan bárbaro mi duelo,  
ay, no me concede el cielo  
ni el don de verter mi llanto.

Me destrozan los abrojos  
del mundo, no tengo calma,  
hay un infierno en mi alma,  
¡pero están secos mis ojos!

Señor, aumenta el penar  
de mi mártir corazón,  
mas deja, por compasión,  
¡deja que pueda llorar!

Recuerda que Tú en el mundo  
cuando padeciste tanto,  
vertiste, Señor, tu llanto  
en tu dolor sin segundo.

Ten piedad de mi dolor  
que me impulsa a que te implore:  
permite, Dios mío, que lllore...  
¡Dame lágrimas, Señor!

(34:1274)

I Want to Weep...

Now after so much suffering,  
and terrible is my sorrow,  
ah, heaven does not give me  
the ability to shed my tears.

The rocks and reefs of life  
destroy me, I have no peace,  
an inferno rages within my soul,  
but still my eyes are dry!

Father, increase the punishment  
on this martyred heart,  
but, through compassion,  
let me weep!

Remember, when you suffered so  
upon the earth,  
you shed, my Father, your tears  
in your incomparable grief.

Have pity on this grief of mine  
that moves me to implore:  
permit me, my God, to weep...  
Father, give me tears!

The above poem is not only representative generally of the poetry in Mañana del poeta, but is also exemplary of the bulk of Nervo's poetry written prior to about 1900. A good indication of the type

poetry for which Neruo had become known is seen in a poem entitled "Amado Neruo," written by Rubén Darío just after the turn of the century. It is at once a tribute to Neruo and a description of him, and contains the phrase "fraile de los suspiros" (friar of sighs). While the poem, written in the space of a few minutes, never achieved any fame, the phrase has become a part of the vocabulary of all who study the works of Amado Neruo. It suggests very succinctly not only the theme of religion that is so much a mark of Neruo's poetry but also the tone of wistfulness and melancholy that pervades a large part of his work.

Although Neruo departs very early from the almost pure Romanticism of the early part of his career to the refinement of Modernism, he continues to write subjectively. Only on rare occasions did he write poems with the complete impassivity that came to be a mark of the early Modernists. As was shown in Chapter V, he was completely capable of writing purely Parnassian, descriptive poetry; he generally chose not to. Rather, the inner feelings and sentiments of the poet always show themselves. His poetry is filled with expressions of his searchings, his longings, of what he is. Poems written during the final years of the nineteenth century, particularly those appearing in the volume entitled Místicas, are often found to be completely personal cries for help, for some guiding light; some, such as "Al Cristo" (To Christ), are prayers.

Señor, entre la sombra voy sin tino;  
la fe de mis mayores ya no vierte  
su apacible fulgor en mi camino:  
¡mi espíritu está triste hasta la muerte!...

Ten piedad de mi mal, dura es mi pena,  
 numerosas las lides en que lucho;  
 fija en mí tu mirada que serena,  
 y dame, como un tiempo a Magdalena,  
 la calma: ¡yo también he amado mucho!  
 (34:1326)

Father, blindly I wander among the shadows;  
 the faith of my fathers no longer spills  
 its calm radiance in my path:  
 a deathly sadness permeates my soul!...

Be merciful to me, my pain is heavy,  
 and many are the battles I must fight;  
 help me, ease me with your soothing glance;  
 and give me calmness, as once you did to Magdalene:  
 I also have loved much!

This tendency toward subjectivity and to the almost exclusive use of the first person is found almost as frequently in one book of Nervo's poems as in another. *La amada inmóvil*, a small volume of poetry that to a limited degree tells the story of his love affair with Ana, exhibits this tendency almost endlessly. Throughout, however, as Nervo tells of the terrible blow of Ana's death, and his suffering as a result of it, the reader never has the feeling that Nervo is wallowing in self-pity, as is so often the case in his earlier poetry. Rather, there is apparent in Nervo an almost ascetic embracing of his loss and his suffering. With the suffering comes purification; while he suffers he becomes a better person.

#### Resurrección

Yo soy tan poca cosa, que ni un dolor merezco...  
 Mas Tú, Padre, me hiciste merced de un gran dolor.  
 Ha un año que lo sufro, y un año ya que crezco  
 por él en estatura espiritual, Señor.  
 (34:1710)

#### Resurrection

I am so small a thing I do not even merit grief...  
 But you, Father, granted me a great grief.  
 I've suffered it now a year, a year in which I've grown  
 in spiritual stature, Father, because of it.

This grief-filled poem is typical of a great many poems contained in La amada inmóvil. The book is, of course, a eulogy to the dead Ana, and is filled with an outpouring of the grief and loss Neruo felt at her death. It is, therefore, only natural that the poetry contained in the volume should be full of subjectivity. Once he has convinced himself of the fact of her death, then his next thoughts are for himself: joy and gratitude for the happiness they shared, and fear for what may happen to him without her.

Given the circumstances that led to the writing of La amada inmóvil, the fact that the poetry it contains is ego-centered and highly subjective is understandable. It is not, of course, the only subjective poetry Neruo wrote. It is noteworthy here also for the fact that much of it is deeply moving poetry, and further that it ranks with the most beautiful poetry Spanish America has produced.

Amado Neruo has often been referred to as "el poeta nacido para el dolor" (the poet born for grief). Certainly he experienced an unusual amount of grief in his lifetime. His poetic reaction to it was often centered upon himself to the point that, in much of his early poetry, at any rate, he seems almost to revel in his grief. This is not the case with the poetry he wrote eulogizing Ana. Naturally, it is subjective; under the circumstances, it would have been difficult to avoid subjectivity, short of writing in metaphors and parables. In his poetry, Neruo was always too simple and direct for that sort of obscurity.

A good example of the dignity and simplicity with which he faced grief after Ana's death is seen in the poem "Solo tú" (Only You), written almost three and a half years after her death. Extremely

subjective, it is also a beautiful tribute to the inspiration she had given him during their years together. It also furnishes evidence of the personal growth and purification he experienced as a result of having suffered and which he describes in the poem "Resurrección," one strophe of which is cited above.

#### Solo tú

Cuando lloro con todos los que lloran,  
cuando ayudo a los tristes con su cruz,  
cuando parto mi pan con los que imploran,  
eres tú quien me inspira, solo tú.

Cuando marchó sin brújula ni tino,  
perdiendo de mis alas el albor  
en unos barrizales del camino,  
soy yo el culpable, solamente yo.

Cuando miro al que sufre como hermano,  
cuando elevo mi espíritu al azul,  
cuando me acuerdo de que soy cristiano,  
eres tú quien me inspira, solo tú.

Pobres a quienes haya socorrido,  
almas oscuras a las que di luz:  
¡no me lo agradezcáis, que yo no he sido!  
Fuiste tú, muerta mía, fuiste tú...  
(34:1717)

#### Only You

When I weep with those who are weeping,  
when I help the saddened carry their cross,  
when I share my bread with those who implore me,  
it is you who inspires me, only you.

When I go blindly and without direction,  
sullyng the white of my wings  
in the dirt of the road,  
mine is the blame, and mine alone.

When I look as a brother upon him who suffers,  
when I lift my spirit into the blue,  
when I remember that I am a Christian,  
it is you who inspires me, only you.

Oh poor ones I may have aided,  
dark souls to whom I gave light:  
do not give me your thanks, for it wasn't I!  
It was you, my dead love, it was you...

While this poem was intended to be a tribute to Ana and a statement of gratitude for the goodness she had inspired in Neruo, it is at the same time a deeply moving love poem. Like other poems from La amada inmóvil, it serves to describe, and to keep alive, a love story that has become almost legendary among admirers of Neruo's poetry.

Many of the poems of love in La amada inmóvil are addressed directly to Ana, not as if she were still living, but to the dead Ana. Some are simply expressions of loneliness and reaffirmation of his love for her. Others, like "Seis meses" (Six Months), are anguished cries to her, attempts at communication across the barriers of death, and despair at being unable to communicate.

Seis meses...

¡Seis meses ya de muerte! Y en vano he pretendido  
un beso, una palabra, un hálito, un sonido...  
y, a pesar de mi fe, cada día evidencio  
que detrás de la tumba ya no hay más que silencio...

Si yo me hubiese muerto, ¡qué mar, qué cataclismos,  
qué vórtices, qué nieblas, qué cimas ni qué abismos  
burlaran mi deseo febril y omnipotente  
de venir por las noches a besarte en la frente,  
de bajar, con la luz de un astro zahorí,  
a decirte al oído: "¡No te olvides de mí!"

Y tú, que me querías tal vez más que te amé,  
callas inexorable, de suerte que no sé  
sino dudar de todo, del alma, del destino,  
¡y ponerme a llorar en medio del camino!  
Pues con desolación infinita evidencio  
que detrás de la tumba ya no hay más que silencio...  
(34:1696)

Six Months

Six months dead! And vainly I have sought  
a kiss, a word, a breath, a sound...  
and, in spite of my faith, daily it is clearer to me  
that beyond the tomb there is only silence.

If I had died, what ocean, what cataclysm,  
 what vortices, what mist, what cliffs or chasms  
 could have stemmed my fevered and omnipotent desire  
 to come at night and kiss your face,  
 to descend, with the light of an all-seeing star,  
 to whisper gently to you, "Don't forget me!"

And you, who loved me perhaps more than I loved you,  
 hold an inexorable silence, so that now  
 I can only doubt everything, soul, destiny,  
 and begin to weep in the midst of my journey!  
 And so, with infinite desolation, I see  
 that beyond the tomb there is only silence.

Although the love poems in La amada inmóvil are usually considered the best Neruo wrote, there are many poems dealing with the theme of love generally to be found throughout his work. Doubtlessly, as Neruo so often says, both in his poetry and outside it, Ana had awakened in him the true meaning of love, as well as its real value to mankind. Certainly the love poetry he wrote after he met her is far superior to that he wrote in the early years of his career. Obviously, however, one cannot safely say that she was solely responsible for this improvement. It is quite natural that he should develop with passing years and maturity, and his poetry dealing with topics other than love reflects this development as well. His love poems particularly, though, that he wrote before the turn of the century, and before his love affair with Ana, generally have an adolescent ring to them. They tend toward the maudlin, and contain, as often as not, the typical lament for the unrequited love of the smitten juvenile.

It is only after he meets Ana, and after he matures somewhat as an individual, that his love poetry assumes any depth of feeling. This is evidenced particularly by the poetry contained in the volume Serenidad and in subsequent books. Serenidad, a collection of verse that Neruo described as being filled with the spirit of Ana, has many poems



dealing with the subject of love in its broadest sense. There are poems devoted to romantic love, of course, but many speak more generally of love as a source of fulfillment and contentment.

¡Amemos!

Si nadie sabe ni por qué reímos  
ni por qué lloramos;  
si nadie sabe ni por qué vinimos  
ni por qué nos vamos;

si en un mar de tinieblas nos movemos,  
si todo es noche en rededor y arcano,  
¡a lo menos amemos!  
¡Quizás no sea en vano!

(34:1625)

Let us Love!

If no one knows why we laugh  
nor why we weep;  
if no one knows why we came  
nor why we go;

if in a sea of darkness we move,  
if all about us is night and mystery,  
at least let us love!  
Perhaps it will not be in vain.

The fact that Amado Nervo's love poetry is so widely read and is so popular with the masses of Spanish speaking people is unquestionably due in part to the poet's simplicity of expression. His poems speak with a simple eloquence, devoid of the trappings so often found in love poetry from Spanish America, particularly so in the poetry from that period in which a strong tinge of Romanticism is still evident. Often Nervo's most profound love poems are short, direct, and entirely without adornment. The principal reason for the popularity, though, is much more likely the broad appeal Nervo's attitude toward love has among his readers. Love became to Nervo almost an end in itself, an objective to be sought for itself alone.

A collection of writings under the title Plenitud (Fulfillment), written near the end of Nervo's life, has as almost its one central theme the idea that love, in all its interpretations, should be one's single, overriding objective in life. The work is made up of short didactic prose writings which in many cases take the form of free verse poetry. It is here especially that Nervo speaks of love as being its own end, that love for the sake of love is good, whether returned or not. This attitude, virtually a philosophy with Nervo, is specifically spelled out in the second passage in this work, one that is often included in anthologies of love poetry, and one of Nervo's better-known selections.

#### Llévalo de amor

Siempre que haya un hueco en tu vida, llénalo de amor.  
Adolescente, joven, viejo: siempre que haya un hueco en tu vida, llénalo de amor.

En cuanto sepas que tienes delante de ti un tiempo baldío, ve a buscar al amor.

No pienses: "Sufriré."

No pienses: "Me engañarán."

No pienses: "Dudaré."

Ve simplemente, diáfananamente, regocijadamente, en busca del amor.

¿Qué índole de amor? No importa: todo amor está lleno de excelencia y de nobleza.

Ama como puedas, ama a quien puedas, ama todo lo que puedas..., pero ama siempre.

No te preocupes de la finalidad de tu amor.

El lleva en sí mismo su finalidad.

No te juzgues incompleto porque no responden a tus ternuras; el amor lleva en sí su propia plenitud.

Siempre que haya un hueco en tu vida, llénalo de amor.

(34:1037)

#### Fill it with Love

Whenever there is an empty moment in your life, fill it with love.

Adolescent, youth, old: whenever there is an empty moment in your life, fill it with love.

As soon as you know you have an idle hour before you, go in search of love.

Don't think: "I'll suffer."  
 Don't think: "I'll be deceived."  
 Don't think: "I'll have doubts."  
 Go simply, softly, joyfully, in search of love.  
 What kind of love? No matter: all love is filled with  
 excellence and nobility.  
 Love as you can, love whom you can, love all you can...,  
 but always love.  
 Don't worry about the end of your love,  
 It carries in itself its own end.  
 Don't think of yourself as incomplete because there  
 is no response to your tenderness; love carries within it  
 its own fulfillment.  
 Whenever there is an empty moment in your life, fill it  
 with love.

There is much in the life of Neruo that bears witness to the atti-  
 tudes expressed in the above lines. Though anthologists and critics  
 tend to concentrate on Neruo's one great love, Ana, and while it is  
 true that Ana was the only deep and constant love he had, it is also  
 true that women always held a strong fascination for him. While there  
 is nothing in his writings to suggest anything other than a life of  
 celibacy on the part of the poet after Ana died, he never ceased to  
 be acutely aware of the presence of women. In fact, among the last  
 letters Neruo wrote before his death is a group of tender, at times  
 passionate, love letters addressed to a girl named Carmen whom he had  
 met in Buenos Aires shortly after his arrival there early in 1919.

In any case, Neruo left a great deal of poetry honoring women  
 and their charms. Some of this poetry is filled with nostalgia and  
 yearning; much is whimsical and humorous; all of it reflects the beauty  
 and desirability he saw in them.

Possibly the most famous poem Neruo ever wrote, certainly one of  
 the most widely known, is "Cobardía" (Cowardice). It is included in  
 the volume Serenidad, most of which was written before Ana's death.  
 Yet, the poem rather accurately describes some aspects of his emotional

state in the period following her death. It demonstrates his wistfulness and longing for feminine companionship, but shows also his fear of loving again.

#### Cobardía

Pasó con su madre. ¡Qué rara belleza!  
 ¡Qué rubios cabellos de trigo garzul!  
 ¡Qué ritmo en el paso! ¡Qué innata realeza  
 de porte! ¡Qué formas bajo el fino tul!...  
 Pasó con su madre. Volvió la cabeza:  
 ¡me clavó muy hondo su mirada azul!

Quedé como en éxtasis...

Con febril premura,  
 "¡Síguela!", gritaron cuerpo y alma al par.  
 ...Pero tuve miedo de amar con locura,  
 de abrir mis heridas, que suelen sangrar,  
 ¡y no obstante toda mi sed de ternura,  
 cerrando los ojos, la dejé pasar!

(34:1630)

#### Cowardice

She passed by with her mother. What beauty so rare!  
 What tresses the color of sun-ripened wheat!  
 What rhythmical step! What innate royalty of bearing!  
 What forms beneath the fine tulle!...  
 She passed by with her mother. She turned her head  
 and held me with her look!

I stood there in ecstasy...

With feverish urgency,  
 "Follow her!" shouted both body and soul.  
 ...But I was afraid to love with abandon,  
 to re-open the wounds that yet tend to bleed,  
 and in spite of my thirst for tenderness,  
 closing my eyes, I let her pass by!

A short and less well-known poem, written less than two months before Neruo's death in 1919, states in five lines his feelings about women and what was, to him, the primary, perhaps the only mission of women. Typical of Neruo, the poem is simple and direct.

Da...

Da rosas, si eres rosal;  
refleja, si eres cristal,  
de la mañana el fulgor;  
brinda miel, si eres panal;  
si eres mujer... ¡dáme amor!  
(34:1858)

Give...

Give roses, if you are a rose arbor;  
reflect the morning's radiance  
if you are crystal;  
offer honey if you are a honeycomb;  
if you are a woman... Give me love!

It is unfortunate that the average reader of Amado Nervo's poetry is familiar only with the serious side of his works. While the phrase "friar of sighs" is, generally speaking, an appropriate sobriquet for him, he did, in fact, write some excellent poetry that is whimsical, and not without wry humor. This is especially true of poetry he wrote concerning women and their sometimes disturbing qualities. Most of the poetry of this particular type was written during the final year or so of Nervo's life, at a time when he was able to view affairs of the heart with somewhat more detachment than was the case in his more vigorous years.

#### Transformación

Señor, Tú que transformas sin fin todas las cosas,  
que las orugas pálidas truecas en mariposas  
y en flores milagrosas  
los gérmenes de ayer,  
transforma el corazón glacial de esa mujer.

Tú que eres todo amor y solo amor, ¿acaso  
no podrías verter  
un poquito de amor por mí en el breve vaso  
del corazón de esa mujer?

(34:1839)

## Transformation

Father, you who transform things endlessly,  
 who can change the pale caterpillar into a butterfly,  
 and yesterday's seeds  
 into miraculous flowers,  
 transform, then, that woman's cold heart.

You, who are all love and only love,  
 could you not pour  
 just a little love for me into the  
 small heart of that woman?

Another poem, entitled "El brazo de Concepción" (The Arm of Concepción), is at once both whimsical and serious. It is another example of his attraction to women. In this case, the attraction is the bare arm of a lady who lives next door. He is attracted by the woman, and at the same time, he resists the attraction in an attempt to remain true to a lost love.

## El brazo de Concepción

Soy cosa tan pequeñita,  
 que, con su brazo desnudo,  
 mi vecina Concepción  
 me incita...

Ella sonr e; saludo..  
 ¡y me escapo del balc n,  
 lleno de susto y de cuita,  
 ante aquella tentaci n  
 maldita!

-- ¡Y por qu !, dir s. ¡No es bella?  
 --Es bella y rubia, en verdad,  
 y yo libre y libre ella;  
 ¡mas guardo fidelidad  
 a la que est  en otra estrella!

... Y adem s, estoy enfermo,  
 y mi alma es un arenal,  
 tan desolado, tan yermo,  
 que all  no prende un rosal!

¡Nada amo,  
 nada quiero,  
 nada busco, nada espero  
 ni reclamo!

...pero  
 soy cosa tan pequeñita  
 que, en cuanto sale al balcon  
 mi vecina Concepción,  
 ¡lleno de susto y de cuita,  
 huyo de la tentación  
 maldita!

(34:1621)

### The Arm of Concepción

I am so small a thing  
 that, with her bare arm,  
 my neighbor, Concepción  
 incites me...

She smiles; I speak...  
 and I escape from my balcony,  
 filled with fear and longing,  
 before that wicked  
 temptation!

"Why not," you say, "isn't she pretty?"  
 She is pretty and blonde, it's true,  
 and I am free and so is she;  
 but I remain faithful  
 to one who is on another star!

... and moreover, I am ill,  
 and my soul is a desert,  
 so desolate, so empty,  
 that there are no roses there.

I love nothing,  
 I want nothing,  
 I seek nothing, I await nothing  
 and demand nothing!

... but  
 I am so small a thing  
 that, as soon as my neighbor  
 Concepción steps onto her balcony,  
 filled with fear and longing,  
 I fly from the wicked  
 temptation.

The elements in Neruo's poetry that have made it live, and will cause much of it to endure for many years to come, are found in poems like "The Arm of Concepción," "Cowardice," "Fill it With Love," and others with similar themes that have been included here. Simple and

unaffected, his poems strike responsive chords with his readers throughout the Spanish speaking world. This is especially true of his love poetry. It deals with human situations and emotions, common denominators for life anywhere, and matters to which people everywhere can relate.

Born into the Romantic period in Mexico, and deeply imbued with most of the characteristics of Romanticism, especially those of subjectivity and emotionalism, Amado Nervo carried these traits with him throughout his life. These characteristics, manifesting themselves in compassion and tenderness and, above all, in a deep human understanding in his poetry, withstood the forces of changing times and attitudes.

Subjectivity was entirely natural to him; he viewed everything in terms of his own emotions. In a less accomplished poet, this might have been so distracting as to alienate the reader. Such is not the case with Amado Nervo. There is nothing private or exclusive in the subjectivity of his poetry. Rather, there is more an invitation to the reader to share an intimate experience. Above all, there is an invitation to share, and to experience love.

It is in his love poetry that Nervo the poet will live. Though much of it is rather too obviously didactic, it is, at the same time, filled with a gentleness and humility that has made the poet almost legendary. For to him, love was of prime importance in man's existence; it gave meaning to that existence, and it tempered man's suffering enough that the suffering could be endured. That is the philosophy that is central to almost all his poetry. That is the way he lived his life.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Amado Nervo, a product of Mexican Romanticism and Spanish American Modernism, a prolific writer and a producer of exquisite poetry, carved for himself a place of importance in Spanish American letters that will be lasting. A man who preached love, kindness, and openness to his readers, Nervo was in many ways himself a strangely detached and withdrawn man.

Nervo was a poet of the people. His poetry carries messages the common man can comprehend and to which he can relate. There is a warmth, a tenderness and humility in his verses that made him popular with readers everywhere and unique among the other poets in the Modernist movement, the movement with which he is most closely associated.

Early in his career Nervo identified himself with Modernism. Upon his arrival in Mexico City in 1894, he began to collaborate with Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, one of the important precursors and chief exponents of Modernism in Mexico. They worked closely together on the literary journal Revista Azul, a publication established to promote Modernism, which was by that time a firmly established movement in Mexico. Although Gutiérrez Nájera died in 1895, the short association Nervo had with him was to influence him strongly. In fact, he is generally looked upon as the torchbearer for Modernism in Mexico after

Gutiérrez Nájera's death, and is described by Arturo Torres-Río (38:115) as the greatest of the Mexican Modernists.

Although Neruo was a strong supporter of the aims of Modernism, the fact is not immediately apparent in his poetry. The reader who associates the idea of Modernism only with the ivory tower concept of Parnassian escapism is likely to be disappointed. Neruo was too much an individual, and much too subjective in nature to have any real and sustained interest in the impassivity of the Parnassians. Rather, Modernism in his poetry is discernible in the freedom he allows himself in experimentation with verse forms, imagery, and musicality.

Modernism as a unified literary movement began to disintegrate early in the twentieth century. With Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American War and the resultant feelings of Hispanic unity in the Spanish world, strengthened by new policies of expansionism in the United States, Modernism underwent a transformation. Modernist writers, who had for years escaped into their ivory towers and concerned themselves almost exclusively with aesthetics, emerged and took up their pens to aid in the movement toward further unity. This was not true of Amado Neruo. Though he too was beginning to draw away from the almost pure aestheticism that is so evident in La hermana agua (1901), his poetry became increasingly more personal and philosophical. This evolution was due in part to his determination to write what he wanted and as he wanted, and in part to changes that were taking place in his personal life.

With the death of his mother in 1905, Neruo, who had always been acutely aware of death, becomes more introspective in his poetry, more contemplative in his attitudes toward death. From this period on

until near the end of his life, his poetry reflects attitudes that are variously described as fear of death, preoccupation with death, morbid curiosity about death, and unhealthy longings for death. In fact, none of the descriptions appears to be deserved by Amado Nervo.

It is conceivable that the importance of the theme of death in Nervo's poetry is traceable to his desire to write about an experience that is common to all men. Such being the case, the use of the death theme would be nothing more than a literary contrivance. Such a conclusion has not been borne out in this study. Rather, he wrote about death because he was concerned about it, not for himself alone, but for mankind. He had a deep curiosity, not at all morbid, about what happens to man after death, and his interest was both scientific and philosophical. This curiosity is particularly apparent in the volume of poetry entitled En voz baja, written in memory of his mother.

The theme of death continues as an important element in Nervo's poetry with added emphasis after January of 1912, when Ana Cecilia Luisa Dailliez, the woman with whom he had lived for several years, died after a brief illness. Poetry that Nervo subsequently wrote in tribute to her, and which was published posthumously under the title La amada inmóvil, is often cited as evidence that Nervo was obsessed by a death wish. His poetry written at that time does indeed indicate a longing for death, and it is true that at times he seriously considered suicide, but it is a mistake to construe this as an abnormal fascination with death as both Durán (15:48) and Malvigne (30:111) have done. It has been shown here that Nervo did not want to die simply to avoid continued life; on the contrary, he wanted very much to live. It is simply that he wanted his life to include Ana, and

she was dead. Death was the only course open to him for a continued association with her. Thus his longing for death.

Nervo's attitudes about death do, of course, undergo changes as he matures. He had been reared in a remote provincial area of Mexico in which people tended toward fundamentalism and were shaped, to a degree, by their superstitions. There is no doubt that in his youth Nervo was highly superstitious and fearful of the concept of death, and this is borne out in his early poetry. As he grows older, though, his attitudes change and with maturity he achieves a complete serenity of mind regarding death. He sees it as something neither to be feared nor sought. It is simply man's final experience.

Nervo's provincial upbringing was an important factor in the development of his religious philosophy, also. His was a very devout family and thus, religion was a part of his daily existence. This continued throughout his lifetime, even during many years when he was not formally associated, apparently, with any church. His reverence, one of the most outstanding single characteristics of his personality, gained for him such titles as "friar of sighs" and "the monk of poetry."

Contrary to theories popularly expressed in critical writings on Amado Nervo, nothing substantive has been found in this study to indicate that he ever strayed very far from the philosophy of the Catholic Church. Much attention has been given to the poet's interest in Orientalism, particularly Buddhism, and Coester (8:291) writes of his Buddhistic tendencies being so strong that his friends worried for his salvation. Findings here have been that, while certainly Nervo was influenced by Buddhistic emphasis upon resignation, self-denial, the

value of living a completely good life, and the concept of Nirvana, he never approached a point at which he seriously considered rejecting Christianity in favor of Buddhism.

As is true of most of the writers in the Modernist group, Neruo made early and frequent use of the exotic aspects of Orientalism in his poetry. Like the others, his use of such exoticism was nothing more than a poetic device common to Modernism, and such references do not assume any philosophical significance until late in his life, and then only within the limits mentioned above.

One of the more interesting aspects of this study has been the discovery that while Neruo, like other Modernists, made extensive use of Oriental references in his early works to give a cosmopolitan air to his writing, the cosmopolitanism he seems to have been seeking comes into his work seemingly of its own volition. Where other poets worked diligently to fill their writings with esoteric allusions in order to avoid regionalism and to lend an international flavor, Neruo avoided, for the most part, esotericism of any kind and achieved the highest kind of cosmopolitanism.

A careful study of all his poetry has revealed attributes of cosmopolitanism that are not immediately apparent to the casual reader. Like the other Modernists, Neruo generally tried to avoid regionalism in his poetry. Unlike them, however, he avoided also the deliberate, pretentious references and the planned obscurity that so limited the appeal of much of the typical Modernist poetry. Instead, he concentrated his efforts on poetry that is singularly free of allusions that would do anything to fix it in terms of either time or space. By so doing, and by confining himself almost exclusively to topics that have

a widespread appeal, his poetry obtains universality, cosmopolitanism in the broadest sense of the word, that has rarely been matched in Spanish American poetry.

This study has revealed also, however, that this cosmopolitan air about the poetry of Neruo reveals in him an attitude of detachment from world affairs that is bewildering to the reader. Though the impression is mitigated somewhat when one reads Neruo's prose writings, it is difficult to avoid speculation about possible indifference on the part of Neruo to the horrors of either the First World War, or the devastating revolution that swept Mexico during the second decade of this century. There is little to lead to any other conclusion, if one reads only Neruo's poetry, and particularly if one reads only the poetry produced during the years in question. It is necessary to interpret that poetry within the context of all the poetry Neruo wrote in order to come to a conclusion that does justice to him. His attitude, far from being indifferent, is rather one of deep compassion for suffering mankind.

The absence of references to contemporary social or political movements is due to two factors, one of which was deliberate on the part of the poet, and the other quite possibly one of which Neruo himself was ignorant. First, it is clear, in view of all the poetry Neruo wrote, that he considered his art to be transcendent and timeless, and that it should not concern itself with temporal things. Such an attitude was entirely consistent with the emphasis on art for its own sake the early Modernists borrowed from the French Parnassians.

The other factor, the one of which Neruo may have been unaware, is the fact that he was essentially a highly subjective and ego-centered person. While he could relate to the individual, and certainly could

identify with difficulties common to people generally, there is very little in his poetry to show that he had any deep feelings of personal identification with any national group or geographical region. Admittedly, this conclusion is based solely on a study of Nervo's poetry; it would be tempered somewhat if the study had included his prose as well.

A further explanation for the unusual amount of subjectivity in Nervo's poetry is found in the fact that he grew up at a time when Romanticism was at its highest point in Mexico, a time when subjective attitudes in literature were normal. Romantic literature in Spanish America is filled with the personalities of its writers. Great emphasis is placed upon the individual and his joys, his sorrows, and his suffering and there is frequent use of hyperbole. These characteristics are found in abundance in the poetry of Nervo, and it must be assumed that his Romantic background is an important cause.

The characteristics mentioned above are most notably present in the large number of Nervo's poems that have love as their central theme. It is with such poems, often filled with emotionalism, that the average reader associates the name of Amado Nervo. The poet believed, and he expresses his belief repeatedly in specific terms, that love was the solution to all of man's illnesses. Love was to be sought, all kinds of love, for its own inherent value. His poetry seems to indicate that, excepting the emphasis he placed upon religion, he attached little importance to anything else.

Nearly always a favorite of the masses, and rarely so of the select minorities, Nervo was a man who could, and did communicate with

his readers. His verses, unadorned, simple in the extreme, and yet filled almost always with elegance, are read and enjoyed universally.

A man of simple tastes, Amado Nervo lived life as he found it. He gave and continues to give pleasure to millions of people through the poetry he left, and asked little in return. His joy came to him from the giving.

Nervo was once asked what he would like his epitaph to say. He replied that if given a choice, he would prefer that it never be written. Since time makes such a request from anyone impossible to honor, no more fitting epitaph could be chosen for him than lines taken from one of his own poems. They contain the essence of Amado Nervo.

Amé, fui amado, el sol acarició mi faz.  
¡Vida, nada me debes! ¡Vida, estamos en paz!  
(34:1732)

I loved, I was loved, the sun caressed my face.  
Life, you owe me nothing! Life, we are at peace!



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