

Memory and Exile in the Poetry of Luis Cernuda

Aileen Anne Logan

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ABBREVIATIONS

All verse quotations will be taken from L. Cernuda, *Poesía completa: Obra completa*, ed. by D. Harris & L. Maristany, Libros del tiempo, 57, 3 vols (Madrid, 1993), I. Quotations will use the abbreviation RD (*La realidad y el deseo*).

All references to Luis Cernuda's prose writings will be taken from L. Cernuda, *Prosa I: Obra completa*, ed. by D. Harris & L. Maristany (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1993-94), II and III.

Quotations will use the abbreviation PC I or PC II. PC I refers to the second volume. PC II refers to the third volume.

ABSTRACT

Luis Cernuda (1902-1963) was exiled from Spain in 1938 due to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. He lived in Great Britain, America and Mexico and he never returned to his homeland. Until the mid-1960s, he was considered by the Spanish literary establishment to be an evasive and astringent poet. Since then, critics have recognised and praised the ethical quality and nature of his work and he is now considered to be one of the most profound and influential Spanish poets of the twentieth century. Despite the growing body of critical work on Cernuda, the salient role played by memory in his poetry has received little sustained critical attention. Critics have tended to stress the nostalgic and the evasive rather than the ethical and contemplative role played by memory in his work both before and after his departure from Spain. The objective of this thesis is to provide a more balanced view of the poet's use of memory in his early and mature poetry. Rather than limiting his concept of memory to nostalgia for his youth or his homeland, it argues that he deploys memory as an instrument of self-analysis, self-discovery and self-criticism. The first chapter concentrates on his pre-exilic poetry in order to show that memory plays a fundamental role in his poetics prior to the experience of physical exile. The central body of the thesis examines the increasingly analytical and philosophical role played by memory in a selection of his mature prose and verse texts written outwith Spain.

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INTRODUCTION

¿Qué será ver siempre la misma faz junto a nosotros al despertar?
¿Las mismas cosas? ¿Las mismas calles? Keats lo dijo:
“better be imprudent moveables than prudent fixtures”.
L.C. ‘Historial de un libro’

0.1 Memory, Poetry and Truth

Luis Cernuda (1902-1963) was one of the younger members of the so called “Generation of 1927”.¹ His literary activity encompasses not only poetry, but also short stories, plays, translations and literary criticism. Cernuda, a prolific and astute literary critic and an avid and alert reader, completed a book-length study on contemporary Spanish poetry, *Estudios sobre poesía española contemporánea* (1957). He also wrote a book on English poetry, *Pensamiento poético en la lírica inglesa (Siglo XIX)* (1958).² In 1960 he published the first part of *Poesía y literatura*, a volume of critical essays which testifies to the breadth and depth of his literary interests. The second part was published in 1964 one year after his death. He is the author of a single volume of verse, *La realidad y el deseo* (1924-1962).³ It contains eleven books of verse and prose poems and two books of prose poems, *Ocnos* (1963) and *Variaciones sobre tema mexicano* (1952). Cernuda, in many ways his own best critic, meditated on the nature of his craft, his poetic career and corpus in the essay ‘Palabras antes de una lectura’ (1935) and the autobiographical text ‘Historial de un

¹ Cernuda prefers the year 1925 because it marks a mid-point date in the publication of the first volumes of poetry of the most important members of the group. In his study on contemporary Spanish poetry, he writes: “A falta de denominación aceptada, la necesidad me lleva a usar la de generación de 1925, fecha que, aun cuando nada signifique históricamente, representa al menos un término medio en la aparición de sus primeros libros”, PC I, 183-84.

² For Cernuda literary criticism and teaching were always of secondary importance to his poetic activities. In the preface to his studies on English poetry he writes: “El autor desea [...] indicar que la composición de este libro fue consecuencia de sus circunstancias; es decir, que es obra voluntaria más bien que fatal. No obstante, su amor y su admiración ya antiguos hacia la poesía inglesa le hicieron agradable la tarea, o al menos el trabajo le alivió esa sensación de desempleo e inutilidad que agobia al poeta en nuestros tiempos. (Sólo la experiencia poética, y sobre todo la expresión de la misma, pueden deparar al poeta la certeza íntima de su propia necesidad, y ambas son igualmente breves y raras)”, PC I, 256. Nonetheless, in ‘El crítico, el amigo y el poeta: Diálogo ejemplar’ (1948), the “amigo”, Cernuda’s alter-ego, underlines the importance of cultivating an inquiring, creative and critical spirit. He states that “Todo poeta es, o debe ser, un crítico; un crítico silencioso y creador, no un charlatán estéril”, PC I, 623.

³ For a more detailed chronology of Cernuda’s life and work, see the ‘Cronología biográfica’ and the ‘Bibliografía descriptiva’ in the *Obra completa*. See also James Valender’s excellent ‘Cronología 1902-1963’ (2004: 107-81).

libro' (1958). Both texts offer the reader a vital insight into his uncompromising nature, his spiritual and intellectual development and the rigour and honesty of his thought. They also alert the reader to the fundamental role played by memory in his work as the poet recalls and reviews his poetic trajectory. 'Palabras antes de una lectura' (1935) provides the reader with an invaluable introduction to *La realidad y el deseo*. The poet reflects on the birth of his poetic instinct and the intensity of his poetic vision. He declares that his poetic instinct was awoken by his heightened perception of the world's beauty and by his realisation that he was alienated from "aquel vasto cuerpo de la creación" (PC I, 602). He defines the disassociation between himself and the world in terms of a conflict between *realidad* and *deseo*, concluding that this conflict constitutes the very essence of his poetry:

El instinto poético se despertó en mí gracias a la percepción más aguda de la realidad, experimentando, con un eco más hondo, la hermosura y la atracción del mundo circundante. Su efecto era, como en cierto modo ocurre con el deseo que provoca el amor, la exigencia, dolorosa a fuerza de intensidad, de salir de mí mismo, anegándome en aquel vasto cuerpo de la creación. Y lo que hacía aún más agónico aquel deseo era el reconocimiento tácito de su imposible satisfacción.

[...] Así pues, la esencia del problema poético, a mi entender, la constituye el conflicto entre realidad y deseo, entre apariencia y verdad, permitiéndonos alcanzar alguna vislumbre de la imagen completa del mundo que ignoramos, de la "idea divina del mundo que yace al fondo de la apariencia", según la frase de Fichte. (PC I, 602)

The poet's task is to uncover and reveal through the written word the hidden truth and the unseen mystery of the world. For Cernuda, then, poetry is essentially an ethical endeavour, a quest to perceive and celebrate the sacred and transcendent reality which he believes lies behind the world's deceitful appearances. Throughout his poetic corpus, he undertakes an ethical journey as he seeks to examine the true nature of reality, understand his complex and conflictive relationship with the exterior world and discover and assert his own personal truth. In the concluding pages of 'Historial de un libro', he states with disarming frankness and humility that, "sólo he tratado, como todo hombre, de hallar mi verdad, la mía, que no será mejor ni peor que la de los otros, sino sólo diferente" (PC I, 659). This thesis analyses the pivotal role played by memory in the poet's search for what he calls "La verdad de sí mismo" (RD, 179). It proposes that through memory and poetry he explores, defines and creates the truth of his poetic identity and offers the reader a critical appraisal of his self, his experiences and his craft. It argues that memory become an increasingly

important analytical tool for the poet during the years of exile in Great Britain, America and Mexico. Through memory he constructs an ethical value system with which he affirms his identity in often hostile environments. This introductory chapter will outline the development of *La realidad y el deseo* and survey critical opinion on the ethical nature of Cernuda's poetry. In view of the growing body of critical work on Cernuda, my discussion will be limited to his principal critics.⁴ The final section of the introduction will establish the aims of the five chapters in this study.

O.2 Seville, Málaga, Madrid, Toulouse

When Cernuda was in his early twenties and a law student at the University of Seville, he recalls that he saw the world as if for the first time. The intensity of his vision led him to compose a series of poems of which none remain. Towards the end of his law studies, he made the acquaintance of Pedro Salinas. Salinas encouraged Cernuda to read the classics of Spanish literature as well as French poets such as Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Paul Réverdy and Lautréamont.⁵ Under Salinas' guidance, Cernuda also read the *Nouveaux Prétextes* and then *Morceaux Choisis* by André Gide. In 'Historial de un libro', he recalls how his discovery of Gide helped him to resolve and reconcile himself with his homosexuality, which he discreetly alludes to as "un problema vital mío decisivo" (PC I, 628). Nine of Cernuda's early poems appeared in the *Revista de Occidente* in 1925. Other prominent literary magazines such as *Litoral*, *La Verdad* and *Verso y Prosa* also published his work. His first book of poetry, *Perfil del aire*, which documents the melancholic emotions and half-conscious desires of adolescence, was published in 1927 as one of the supplements to the journal *Litoral*. The book, dedicated to Salinas, received mixed reviews which permanently embittered and haunted the poet.⁶ Cernuda's second book of poetry, *Egloga, elegía*,

⁴ For an excellent introductory update on criticism on Cernuda, see Salvador Jiménez-Fajardo (1989: 11-43). See also Richard Curry 'La crítica ante la poesía de Luis Cernuda: Cronología y bibliografía selecta comentada' (1985: 21-61).

⁵ For a detailed study of Cernuda's "biblioteca" during his formative years, see Manuel Ulacia (1984: 15-113).

⁶ See the acrimonious "A sus paisanos" (RD, 546-48). The book did receive some highly favourable reviews. The Catalan poet Lluís Montanyà extolled the craftsmanship of the poems in his review published in *L'Amic de les Arts* and José Bergamín highlighted the basic differences between Cernuda and Guillén. In his essay, 'El idealismo andaluz', published in *La Gaceta Literaria*, 2 (1927), he writes: "La poesía de Luis Cernuda, desnuda de todo parecido externo, es originalísima; tan nueva y viva como el brote primaveral de la planta [...], tan graciosa, tan inspirada. [...] La personalidad poética de Luis Cernuda se afirma con su librito: *Perfil del aire*, joven y perfecta; idealmente andaluza, su poesía tiene, sobre todo, la gracia, el angélico don andaluz — sevillano — de la gracia; [...] y tiene arquitectura ideal viva, ligera, erguida, nítida, como una Giralda. [...] Cernuda no es moderno, es

oda (1927-1928), influenced by both Garcilaso and Mallarmé, develops and deepens the thematic material of the first.⁷ By adopting a classical form and tone, he shuns literary fashion. He also defies criticism that *Perfil del aire* was, as Francisco Ayala claimed, “sin ninguna inquietud moderna”.⁸ The poet defended the book with Cocteau’s maxim: “Aquello que te censuren, cultívalo, porque eso eres tú” (PC I, 631).⁹ Cernuda subsequently reworked many of the poems. He changed the title to *Primeras poesías* when he incorporated it into the first edition of *La realidad y el deseo*, published to considerable critical acclaim in 1936 in the *Ediciones del Árbol* of the journal *Cruz y Raya*.

Cernuda’s father died in 1920 and when his mother died in July 1928 he collected his modest inheritance and left his native Seville. Upon leaving the city, he travelled to Málaga, Madrid and then Toulouse where he accepted a post as a *lecteur d’espagnol* at the École Normale. In Toulouse he completed the first eight Surrealist-influenced poems of *Un río, un amor* (1929). He returned to Madrid in the summer of 1929 and worked in the bookshop of León Sánchez Cuesta where he read the works of Aragon, Éluard, Breton and other Surrealist writers. Far from simply being a literary movement or fashion, for Cernuda Surrealism was “una corriente espiritual en la juventud de una época” (PC I, 634). His two Surrealist books, *Un río, un amor* (1929) and *Los placeres prohibidos* (1931), express his contempt for social convention and the values of a morally complacent and corrupt society. Cernuda’s fifth collection, *Donde habite el olvido* (1932-1933), influenced by Bécquer, is the account of a failed and unhappy love affair. It is composed of sixteen untitled poems and concludes with a titled poem, “Los fantasmas del deseo”. The book gives voice to the poet’s intense emotional despair and desolation. Although the collection was well-received by critics, in ‘Historial de un libro’ Cernuda judges it with his customary

nuevo, como lo son — y lo serán siempre — Salinas, Guillén, Espina, Dámaso Alonso, Aleixandre, Prados... o Federico García Lorca y Rafael Alberti”, quoted by Nigel Dennis (2004: 174-75). In ‘El crítico, el amigo y el poeta: Diálogo ejemplar’ Cernuda recalls Bergamín’s critical acumen: “José Bergamín, al publicarse *Perfil del aire*, escribió que no hallaba tal pretendida influencia de los versos de Guillén sobre los de Cernuda”, PC I, 613.

⁷ In a letter to Jaime Gil de Biedma dated 15 February 1963, Cernuda wrote that “Mallarmé no fue sólo maestro mío (con muy mal discípulo en mi caso) cuando yo era joven, sino que lo ha sido después y lo sigue siendo hoy. Le respeto en extremo y le admiro siempre”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 1101).

⁸ Quoted by Dennis (2004: 175). In response to claims that he had imitated Jorgé Guillén, Cernuda argued that *Perfil del aire* had been published one year before *Cántico*. He claimed that any similarities were due to Mallarmé, whom Guillén had read through Valéry. The issues relating to the critical reception of *Perfil del aire* have been thoroughly dealt with by Harris (1971). Harris has collated the reviews of Ayala, Juan Chabás, Esteban Salazar y Chapela in his critical edition of *Perfil del aire*.

⁹ See Cernuda’s elaborate defence of the book in ‘El crítico, el amigo y el poeta: Diálogo ejemplar’ (PC I, 607-24).

severity and exacting standards: “Si la sección segunda de *La Realidad y el Deseo* es una de las que menos me satisfacen en el libro, también es de éstas la sección quinta, *Donde habite el olvido*, aunque no por motivos estéticos, [...], sino éticos” (PC I, 639). He then adds that “su relectura me produce rubor y humillación” (PC I, 639). In the final poem of *Donde habite el olvido*, “Los fantasmas del deseo”, the poet asserts the cosmic and elemental power of desire. He also reflects on his amorous experiences and rigorously analyses rather than simply records his past. Throughout the sixth collection, *Invocaciones* (1934-1935), Cernuda begins to project his emotions onto symbolic personages and cultivates the contemplative poetry characteristic of his mature work. He also discovered Hölderlin half-way through writing the book.¹⁰ Many of Hölderlin’s favourite themes, such as the celebration of the gods of antiquity and the sacred nature of the Poet, appear in this collection.

O.3 Civil War and Exile: Great Britain, America and Mexico

At the beginning of the Spanish Civil War, Cernuda travelled to Paris as secretary to the Spanish Ambassador, Álvaro de Albornoz. He left Paris in September 1936 and returned to Madrid. He wrote articles for a wide variety of newspapers and contributed to numerous radio programmes designed to boost the morale of the defenders of the besieged city. In April 1937 he moved to Valencia and contributed to *Hora de España*. In February 1938 the English poet Stanley Richardson arranged for Cernuda to deliver a series of lectures in England on behalf of the Spanish Republic. Having completed the lecture tour, news of the development of the war reached Cernuda in Paris and prevented him from continuing his journey to Spain. In September 1938 he returned to England and, with the assistance of Stanley Richardson, he found a post as a Spanish teaching assistant at Cranleigh School in Surrey. In January 1939 he obtained a post as a *lector* at the University of Glasgow. Cernuda loathed the city of Glasgow, his teaching position and the Scottish people, denounced in “Un contemporáneo” (RD, 407-11) as “Aquella gente práctica y tacaña” (408). His seventh collection, *Las nubes* (1937-1940), begun in Spain, was completed in Glasgow. The poet also started work on *Ocnos* in Glasgow, prose poems which concentrate on his childhood and youth in Seville. In 1940 José Bergamín published the second edition of *La realidad y el deseo* in a volume titled *Poesías completas*.

¹⁰ For a lucid examination of the influence of Hölderlin on Cernuda, see Alexander Coleman ‘Hölderlin and Cernuda’ (1969: 28-42).

During his residence in Great Britain, he began to read and study English poetry, which he refers to as “la experiencia más considerable de mis años maduros” (PC I, 645).¹¹ He states that his discovery of English literature “corrigió y completó algo de lo que en mí y en mis versos requería dicha corrección” (PC I, 645). Accustomed to the verbal ingenuity and verbosity of French and Spanish baroque poetry, he admires English poetry for its plainness, intensity and simplicity. He recalls reading Shakespeare, Blake and Keats, then Browning, Yeats and Eliot. He also studied and wrote essays on Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Tennyson, Matthew Arnold, Swinburne and Gerard Manley Hopkins. His essays reveal a perceptive and critical mind as well as his profound spiritual affinity with the English Romantic poets. In his essay on Keats, he praises the “fidelidad con que vive su destino y la atención intensa con la que asiste a cada momento del mismo” (PC I, 338). He also underlines that Blake “buscaba la verdad, *su verdad*, ante todo” (PC I, 280). Cernuda greatly respected the concision, colloquial language and lack of rhetoric found in post-Romantic writers such as Browning and T. S. Eliot.¹² Through Browning, he learned to project his emotional experience onto literary, legendary or historical figures. He also admired and emulated the verbal limpidity and “blend of sharp image and natural speech” (Brian Hughes, 1987: 182) central to T. S. Eliot’s conception of poetry. Reflecting his assimilation and intensive readings of English poetry, in *Las nubes* he frequently adopts a detached and impartial tone and experiments with dramatic poetry.¹³ From *Las nubes* onwards, Cernuda’s predominant literary influences are Anglo-Saxon.

¹¹ For an interesting account of Cernuda’s British years, see Rafael Martínez Nadal (1983).

¹² See also Derek Harris (1973: 8). Cernuda criticised the poetry of Juan Ramón Jiménez for its overtly emotional and sentimental nature: “Jiménez rara vez ha mostrado curiosidad intelectual por sorprender lo que haya bajo la apariencia; ese atenerse a sus impresiones, ese conocer por sensaciones le bastó siempre. Es quizá el único escritor español de su tiempo para quien intelecto, pensamiento, razón, fueron nombres y nada más; ha vivido como si la inteligencia, que guía al hombre descubriendo lo que hay de verdadero tras de una impresión, lo que hay de objetivo tras de nuestra opinión subjetiva, no fuera cualidad humana”, PC I, 143.

¹³ For a discussion on *Las nubes* as a transitional volume to Cernuda’s mature meditative style, see Hughes (1987: 15-57). In ‘Historial de un libro’, Cernuda declares that his work as a teacher taught him the importance of presenting his experiences in as depersonalised a manner as possible: “El trabajo de las clases me hizo comprender como necesario que mis explicaciones llevaran a los estudiantes a ver por sí mismos aquello de que yo iba a hablarles: que mi tarea consistía en encaminarles y situarles ante la realidad de una obra literaria española. De ahí sólo un paso a comprender que también el trabajo poético creador exigía algo equivalente, no tratando de dar sólo al lector el efecto de mi experiencia, sino conduciéndole por el mismo camino que yo había recorrido, por los mismos estados que había experimentado y, al fin, dejarle solo frente al resultado”, PC I, 645.

In order to escape from the industrial city of Glasgow, Cernuda spent his summer vacations in Oxford.¹⁴ Having experienced an initial period of nostalgia for his homeland, during the highly productive years of *Como quien espera el alba* (1941-1944), he viewed his departure from Spain as a source of creative stimulus.¹⁵ He explains that while in Great Britain, “movido por la nostalgia de mi tierra, sólo pensaba en volver a ella, como si presintiera que, poco a poco, me iría distanciando hasta llegar a serme indiferente volver o no” (PC I, 644). In full maturity, he scrutinises his former experiences with both skill and subtlety and distances himself from the nostalgic elegiac voice detected in “Jardín antiguo” (RD, 297), “Elegía española [1]” (RD, 270-72) or “Un español habla de su tierra” (RD, 310-11) in *Las nubes*.

Cernuda completed *Como quien espera el alba* in 1944 in Cambridge. He worked as a *lector* at the University of Cambridge between 1943 and 1945. He also began *Vivir sin estar viviendo* (1944-1949) in Cambridge. He continued to work on the collection while he taught at the Spanish Institute in London. The book, which opens with a series of love poems, examines his solitary existence in exile as well as his increasingly complex relationship with his former youthful self. Cernuda moved to the United States in 1947 and accepted a teaching position at Mount Holyoke College, Massachusetts. He began his penultimate book of verse, *Con las horas contadas* (1950-1956), in Mount Holyoke College. Throughout the collection he meditates on his time-bound existence in exile in the United States, historical events and his personal and poetic past. Cernuda moved to Mexico in 1952, but due to visa problems

¹⁴ In ‘Historial de un libro’, he comments on his relentless need to travel and escape the immediate confines of his environment: “Una constante de mi vida ha sido actuar por reacción contra el medio donde me hallaba. Eso me ayudó a escapar al peligro de lo provinciano, habiendo pasado la niñez y juventud primera en Sevilla, donde la gente pretendía vivir, no en una capital de provincia más o menos agradable, sino en el ombligo del mundo, con la falta consiguiente de curiosidad hacia el resto de él. Eso me ayudó luego a escapar a las modas y complacencias literarias habituales en el ambiente madrileño, no menos provinciano por ser el de la capital”, PC I, 659.

¹⁵ In ‘Historial de un libro’, he recalls that “El otoño, invierno y primavera de 1941 a 1942 fue uno de los períodos de mi vida cuando más requerido me vi por temas y experiencias que buscaban expresión en el verso; a veces, no terminado aún un poema, otro quería surgir”, PC I, 648. He also affirms that the experience of physical exile enriched his poetry and played a crucial role in his poetic development: “Creo que es necesidad primera del poeta el reunir experiencia y conocimiento, y tanto mejor mientras que más variados sean. Unas palabras de Empédocles, aunque desligadas de su sentido original, referente según creo a la transmigración de las almas, ‘porque antes de ahora he sido un muchacho y una muchacha, un matorral y un pájaro, y un pez torpe en el mar’, me parecen expresar a maravilla esa sucesión varia y múltiple de experiencia y conocimiento que el poeta requiere, a falta de la cual su obra resulta pálida y estrecha. En mi caso particular, el cambio repetido de lugar, de país, de circunstancias, con la adaptación necesaria a los mismos, y la diferencia que el cambio me traía, sirvió de estímulo, y de alimento, a la mutación”, PC I, 639.

he was forced to return to the United States. His final book of poems, *Desolación de la quimera*, was written between 1956 and 1962. The majority of the poems were composed between 1960 and 1962 when he was a Visiting Professor in the University of California at Los Angeles and at San Francisco State College. The book explores his complex and difficult relationship with his homeland and reveals an increasing concern with his *leyenda* and the way in which the Spanish poetry reading public interpret him. The third edition of *La realidad y el deseo* was published in 1958. Cernuda died in Mexico, November 5 1963, of a heart attack.

O. 4 Critical Review and Aims of Thesis

[...] Las palabras de otros
El mito involuntarias tejen
De un existir cuando ya ausente o ido.
L.C., “Del otro lado”

Until the mid-1960s, Cernuda was considered by the Spanish literary establishment to be an aloof, effete and hermetic poet, alienated and estranged from the world around him.¹⁶ Following the publication of *Perfil del aire*, critics viewed him as a reserved, haughty and evasive writer who sought to withdraw from reality into an isolated and indolent existence. Cernuda's *leyenda* began with Salinas' description of him as “el más licenciado Vidriera de todos” (1958: 373) or Moreno Villa's view that he was a “jovencito fino y tímido, muy atildado y muy triste” (1944: 148).¹⁷ Since the 1960s considerable work has been done to dispel the myth of Cernuda as a disdainful and acerbic poet.¹⁸ Poets and critics such as José Angel Valente (1962), Octavio Paz

¹⁶ Cernuda refers to his social awkwardness and timidity as “Una incapacidad típica mía, la de serme difícil, en el trato con los demás, exteriorizar lo que llevo dentro, es decir, entrar en comunicación con los otros, aunque algunas veces lo desee”, PC I, 626. In his ‘Diario de un viaje’ written in 1933, he also speaks of his “sentimiento de extrañeza ante las gentes, ante el gran núcleo de las gentes”, PC II, 376.

¹⁷ For more detailed discussion of the creation of Cernuda's *leyenda*, see Harris (1973: 10-14). The critic Ricardo Gullón defined Cernuda as an “ausente” (1950: 35). He viewed him as a poet who was detached from the surrounding world and who existed in “un ámbito aparte” (1950: 35). Similarly, Birute Ciplijauskaite declared that Cernuda was “el poeta probablemente más huraño de todos” (1962: 197). The critic insisted that the writer was incapable of adapting to the world, establishing human relations and living outwith the realm of his imagination: “Está ya tan acostumbrado a vivir rodeado sólo de las creaciones de su propia mente – las cuales le obedecen siempre y se dejan regir mucho más fácilmente que los hombres –, que la verdadera compañía le molesta” (1962: 213).

¹⁸ Cernuda at once cultivated and detested his public image. In a letter to Nieves de Madariaga dated 23 February 1946, he admits that “Sé perfectamente que mi trato es difícil. Pero qué voy a hacerle. Acaso

(1977) and Derek Harris (1973) view Cernuda as a moralist, a poet who is faithful to his nature and his art throughout his poetic career. Valente highlights the concision and austerity of Cernuda's language and his "necesidad imperiosa de someter al ritmo interior del pensamiento poético el brillo pródigo de la genialidad verbal" (1962: 32). He argues that Cernuda's mature contemplative poetry renews the Castilian tradition of meditative poetry, practiced by Jorge Manrique, Francisco de Aldana, San Juan de la Cruz and Unamuno in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ He claims that Cernuda discovers the meditative tradition in English romantic and metaphysical poetry during the early years of his exile in Great Britain. He concludes that, "Por su triple contextura intelectual, estética y moral ha de considerarse esa obra como una de las piezas capitales en el desarrollo contemporáneo de nuestra poesía" (1962: 38). Like Valente, Paz (1977) stresses the poet's meditative disposition, his economic use of language, the gravity and lucidity of his thought. He also underlines Cernuda's critical and analytical faculties and his relentless search for self-knowledge:

En Cernuda espontaneidad y reflexión son inseparables y cada etapa de su obra es una nueva tentativa de expresión y una meditación sobre aquello que expresa. No cesa de avanzar hacia dentro de sí mismo y no cesa de preguntarse si avanza realmente. Así, *La realidad y el deseo* puede verse como una biografía espiritual, sucesión de momentos vividos y reflexión sobre esas experiencias vitales. De ahí su carácter moral. [...] Biografía poética, *La realidad y el deseo* es algo más: la historia de un espíritu que, al conocerse, se transfigura. (1977: 140-49)

Unlike previous criticism, Paz highlights the importance of Cernuda's homosexuality in both his work and life. The poet's exploration and affirmation of his "verdad diferente" (1977: 150) within the confines of a bourgeois society leads him to critique and defy conventional morality: "La poesía de Cernuda es una crítica de nuestros valores y creencias [...] su fecundidad espiritual consiste, precisamente, en que pone a prueba los sistemas de la moral colectiva" (1977: 139). Paz insists that it is impossible to gain a deep and precise understanding of *La realidad y el deseo* without appreciating the pivotal role played by erotic desire in the creative act: "se corre el riesgo de no comprender el significado de su obra si [...] se atenúa su

mi trabajo sea una compensación para quienes, con alguna simpatía hacia mí, se sienten ofendidos con aquella dificultad. Mi trabajo vale más que yo, y cambiando éste por aquél, quedándose con el trabajo y dejando la persona, se sale ganancioso", in *Epistolario* (2003: 413).

¹⁹ In his essay on Unamuno Cernuda states that "Unamuno sea probablemente el mayor poeta que España ha tenido en lo que va de siglo", PC I, 121.

homosexualidad, no porque su poesía pueda reducirse a esa pasión [...] sino porque ella es el punto de partida de su creación poética” (1977: 150). In the concluding section of his essay, the Mexican poet invites the reader to observe the care and precision with which Cernuda constructs his identity through the act of writing. He acutely observes that “Su libro fue su verdadera vida y fue construido hora a hora, como quien levanta una arquitectura. Edificó con tiempo vivo y su palabra fue *piedra de escándalo*. Nos ha dejado, en todos los sentidos, una obra *edificante*” (1977: 160).

Harris, influenced by the work of Paz, views *La realidad y el deseo* as a “journal of a voyage of experience whose purpose is to give coherence and meaning to that experience” (1973: 2). He believes that the conflict between reality and desire and the poet’s “struggle to end his sense of alienation in the world is the central experience that provides Cernuda with the material whose analysis leads him to the discovery and progressive understanding of his inner man” (1973: 19). His rigorous chronological and thematic study of Cernuda’s early and mature poetry examines how the poet seeks to come to “an acceptance of himself on a moral and spiritual level according to the dictates of his conscience” (1973: 17). Far from being an effete *licenciado Vidriera*, he argues that the poet endeavours to create a *mito personal* from his analysis of the circumstantial details of his life. His poetic biography produces “a universalised statement from his individual experience of life” (1973: 177). In keeping with Paz’s views, he concludes that Cernuda’s poetry is “an act of self-creation and self-redemption” (1973: 177).

Although Harris argues that Cernuda is not the “brittle man of glass found in the *leyenda* but [the] seeker after truth” (1973: 14), his study places considerable emphasis on the evasive and nostalgic role played by memory in *La realidad y el deseo*. In his chapter ‘The Hidden Garden’ he examines the various means through which the poet strives to achieve the desired state of *acorde* between himself and the world in his mature poetry. Focusing on *Las nubes*, he states that the writer’s idealised memory of his homeland offers him a “haven from the inimical world of exile” (1973: 89). He then observes that in *Como quien espera el alba* the theme of Spain is replaced by “an intense nostalgia for childhood and adolescence” (1973: 89). The critic also stresses the escapist dimension contained in the poet’s commemoration of his past in the prose poems. He notes that in *Ocnos* the memory of the secluded garden of youth enables Cernuda to “escape from an alien environment” (1973: 91) and “to go back to the moment [...] when self and world appeared to be in harmony”

(1973: 92). He also claims that the poet's discovery of Mexico allows him to resolve his "experience of alienation" and recapture "the idyllic world of his childhood" (1973: 95). The critic proposes that the poet's idealisation of Spain and Mexico are attempts to "substantiate the existence of a superior reality" and point to the "strong evasive tendency in Cernuda's character" (1973: 65). He then declares that "they are also symptoms of his commitment to his own values, to himself, and they therefore become negative manifestations of the concern with personal integrity that is the axis on which all his mature poetry turns" (1973: 65).

Philip Silver (1965) also places considerable emphasis on the evasive role played by memory in *La realidad y el deseo*. His monograph concentrates on the poet's search for a lost paradisiacal Eden of pre-adolescent innocence. Within this Eden, time is experienced as an "eternal present" (1965: 53) and the child enjoys an intuitive harmony with the world. The end of childhood signals a Fall into the world and the poet experiences a profound solitude. Silver claims that in Cernuda's lexicon the word *soledad* "means not merely aloneness but separateness, absolute and terrifying. His is an *ontological* solitude, an acute awareness of his particular separateness from the world and the other finite creatures in it" (1965: 43). He argues that the poet's "unifying concern" is his "thirst for eternity" (1965: 31), his desire to unite with creation and "experience again the world as the child does, [...], as eternal present" (1965: 35). For Silver, memory is the "ever powerful means, in Cernuda, of re-creating reality so that it conforms to desire" (1965: 117).

In his fifth chapter, which concentrates on the theme of Nature and Eden, Silver pays close attention to the prose poems of *Ocnos* and *Variaciones*. Like Harris, he claims that Cernuda escapes from the uncongenial British climate and imaginatively repossesses the Eden of his early years through the "mechanism of memory and active recall" (1965: 73).²⁰ He also interprets *Variaciones* as the

²⁰ Silver's interpretations of *Ocnos* have tended to dominate critical approaches to the book. Manuel Ramos Ortega, who provides a series of useful textual stylistic analyses, shares Silver's readings. He claims that "El nacimiento de *Ocnos* responde precisamente al intento de Cernuda por volver imaginariamente a Sevilla [...] La emoción del recuerdo es la única forma de recuperar, de alguna manera, los lugares desaparecidos para el poeta" (1982: 54-115). More recent work also concurs with these readings. Bernard Sicot has studied the network of enclosed gardens, circular patios and aquatic imagery in *Ocnos* and *Variaciones* from a psychoanalytical point of view. Although he brings new critical apparatus to the texts and draws fruitfully on the spatial theories of Bachelard and Georges Poulet, his thesis also tends to highlight the regressive role played by memory in the prose poems. He argues that the repetition of protective concave spaces creates "une espace gigogne" and relates to "le désir d'une mère" (1995: see particularly chapters one and two). In *Exilio, memoria e historia en la poesía de Luis Cernuda*, he pursues a similar line of argument. He claims that texts are closely related

celebration of an Edenic Andalusian paradise. He states that in Mexico “Desire and reality are no longer antithetical terms [...] and the thirst for eternity, [...], the longing to recapture that first experience of the timeless Eden of childhood, is mitigated” (1965: 159). In his final chapter he examines Cernuda’s view of Spanish history during the long years of geographical exile in Great Britain and America. He contends that the poet’s initial resentment against the Nationalist victors is replaced by “pure nostalgia as the poet becomes the Exile” (1965: 191). He claims that the poet expresses nostalgia for the pastoral Eden of Andalusia as well as the “community of belief embodied, [...], in the historical Spain of Philip the Second (1965: 189). Elizabeth Müller (1962) and Alexander Coleman (1969) also concur with Silver’s readings. Coleman declares that “Cernuda’s poetry is very much one of estrangement, nostalgia, and exile” (1969: 16). Like Silver, Müller believes that Cernuda is seeking to escape temporality. She claims that he finally achieves this when he discovers in Mexico the Andalusia of his childhood.

This thesis argues that the above readings only provide a partial view of Cernuda’s complex and subtle use of memory throughout *La realidad y el deseo*. The poet, a critical and shrewd observer of himself and his countrymen, vehemently denied that he experienced nostalgia for Spain. In “Ser de Sansueña” (RD, 417-19) from *Vivir sin estar viviendo* he describes his country as “la madrastra/Original de tantos” (417) and as “la tierra imposible” (417). In “Díptico español” (RD, 501-07) from *Desolación de la quimera* he states that he is linked to his country by his language and his poetic vocation rather than by any sentimental attachment. By restricting his highly skilled use of memory to nostalgia for his childhood, youth or homeland, critics have overlooked how he uses memory as an instrument of self-discovery, self-analysis and self-criticism. Given his distaste for Spanish modernism’s “ciega fe en la emoción” (PC II, 610) together with his preference for and creation of a dispassionate poetry, the above readings have, in my view, accorded too much importance to the role played by nostalgia in his mature poetry. Moreover, the emphasis on nostalgia presents him as a poet who is seeking to escape from reality rather than as an ethical poet who is seeking to affirm his own personal truth. In his essay ‘Tres poetas metafísicos’ (1941), written in the early years of exile in Scotland, he declares that

“al esquema relegación/ regreso/ escritura. [...] En estos poemarios [...] se da algo muy parecido a una reacción contra un mundo extraño y hostil, contra ‘un universo que no lo ama’” (2003: 46).

Su realidad sólo puede hallarla el hombre, relativamente, en la aprobación y satisfacción de la conciencia; aprobación y satisfacción nacidas del equilibrio entre esa porción espiritual y esa material que componen la existencia, guiadas por el distante estímulo de una virtud en parte ética y en parte estética. Así acompañará y medirá el hombre su naturaleza propia y las acciones “que han de ser compañeras de la vida”. (PC I, 513-14)

This study claims that he seeks, through memory and poetry, to assess his identity and create his own personal reality in accordance with the ethical demands of his art. The first chapter focuses on *Un río, un amor, Los placeres prohibidos, Donde habite el olvido* and *Invocaciones*. The chapter examines, through a series of detailed close textual readings, the increasingly analytical role played by memory in his early poetry. Rather than reading the pre-exilic poetry in terms of a conflict between reality and desire as Harris and Silver have done, I argue that Cernuda uses memory as a meditative tool in order to examine the nature of his erotic desire and his craft. The chapter also explores the complexity of his concept of oblivion. Despite the fact that references to oblivion occur in both *Primeras poesías* and the *Égloga, elegía, oda*, this thesis does not focus on either of these two books. The interplay between memory and oblivion only occurs in *Un río, un amor* after the poet has left his native Seville.

Critical commentary on the role played by oblivion in *La realidad y el deseo* has been confined to brief but perceptive remarks. Manuel Ulacia recognises that oblivion “tiene distintas lecturas posibles” (1984: 125). He notes that, “por una parte, puede interpretarse como la disolución del yo que se da en el momento del éxtasis amoroso; pero también puede interpretarse en su sentido más literal: el olvido de un amor como requisito para que otro lo sustituya” (1984: 125). José Olivio Jiménez (1962) also restricts his analysis of oblivion to two categories. He observes that,

El olvido se presenta, pues, bajo dos especies en la poesía de Cernuda. Una, más limitada, en el sentido todavía concreto de mecanismo psicológico de negación de una experiencia anterior. La otra, que es una ampliación de la primera y con ella indiscriminada, será ya el olvido como realidad de negación absoluta, como sucedáneo existencial de la muerte. (1962: 71)

In order to rectify the absence of a systematic study of Cernuda’s concept of oblivion, Ibon Zubiaur (2002) studies the various values and meanings assumed by the term throughout *La realidad y el deseo*. He divides the writer’s use of oblivion into four categories: an “olvido social”, which refers to the relegation of a poet’s work by

society, an “olvido nirvanático”, which relates to the desire to negate the past, an “olvido erótico” o “místico” and an “olvido superador”.²¹ Although the first chapter refers to aspects of Zubiaur’s comprehensive examination of oblivion, particularly his concept of a mystical or erotic oblivion, it places greater emphasis on the dialogue which takes place between recall and forgetting throughout the four books.²²

The second chapter concentrates on a selection of texts from *Las nubes*, *Como quien espera el alba*, *Vivir sin estar viviendo* and *Con las horas contadas*. Given the limits of the study, it does not examine the ethical role played by memory in *Desolación de la quimera* nor does it offer a complete study of the poetry contained in the four books under review. It focuses on those texts which most clearly illustrate how the poet’s use of memory develops from nostalgia for the homeland in *Las nubes* to the contemplation of his increasingly divided inner world in his later collections. It argues that the solitude of physical exile forces the poet to seek redemption within his self, his past and his craft. It proposes, as in the concluding section of the first chapter, that he uses memory in order to scrutinise the nature and purpose of his poetry. This chapter also draws on the work of Paul Ricœur and Michel de Certeau in order to study the complex interplay between memory and oblivion, memory and time in *Como quien espera el alba*, *Vivir sin estar viviendo* and *Con las horas contadas*. In introducing new theoretical approaches to *La realidad y el deseo*, this thesis follows Jiménez-Fajardo’s recommendation that critical work on Cernuda should use a “variety of analytical instruments” (1989: 7) and elucidate areas of his work that still remain in obscurity. Where it has helped to clarify the issues I have chosen to deal with, this thesis also refers to the work of Edward Said, Hélène Cixous and Gaston Bachelard.

Chapters three, four and five, linked by the theme of the returning exile, examine the meditative and ethical role played by memory in Cernuda’s prose poems, *Ocnos* and *Variaciones*. In contrast to Harris and Silvers’ readings, this study does not

²¹ See his fifth chapter ‘El olvido’ (2002: 179-230).

²² Michael Ugarte recognises that “Memory and [...] oblivion, occupy important places in Cernuda’s poetry” (1989: 174). Focusing on *Un río, un amor, Donde habite el olvido* and Cernuda’s mature exilic poetry, he provides a broad and somewhat general overview of the various meanings assumed by the term “olvido” in *La realidad y el deseo* (1989: 174-83). Commenting on *Como quien espera el alba*, Jiménez-Fajardo makes the highly pertinent remark that “Few poets have been as aware as Cernuda of the consequent relationship between our memory of ourselves and our sense of selfhood, of the increasing threat that time poses to our very identity, not merely in our future death but in our forgetting. That is why oblivion itself must become for him a species of memory and must be integrated into the present, to expand the minute point in time that this present is: the more we salvage, the more we are” (1978: 71).

interpret the poems as the celebration of an Edenic paradise nor does it consider that the collections are “negative manifestations of the poet’s concern with personal integrity” (1973: 65). The third and fourth chapters situate the prose poems in the European tradition of meditative poetry and analyse the increasingly philosophical role played by memory throughout the three editions of *Ocnos*. Due to the length of the prose poems, they will not be produced in full and it is presumed that the reader will have access to the books. The final chapter focuses on *Variaciones*. It proposes that at the end of his exilic journeys, Cernuda neither rediscovers nor returns to an Edenic paradise. Faithful to his exilic condition and his poetic vocation, it argues that he adopts the point of view of both an observer and an outsider to the reality of Mexico. Throughout the book, he engages in a constant journey of “moral investigation” (Jiménez-Fajardo, 1989: 29) and meditates on the creative process itself.

CHAPTER ONE

Exile in Spain: Memory, Desire and Oblivion: From *Un río, un amor* to *Invocaciones*

Vivo un solo deseo,
Un afán claro, unánime;
Afán de amor y de olvido.
L.C., VII *Primeras poesías*

1.0 Introduction

Cernuda's Surrealist-influenced collections, *Un río, un amor* (1929) and *Los placeres prohibidos* (1931), written without corrections and in two short bursts of concentrated creative activity, mark a turning point in his poetry.²³ Whereas the delicate Symbolist style compositions of *Primeras poesías* (1924-1927) and the mannered elegiac *Égloga, Elegía, Oda* (1927-1928) evoke the awakening of youthful desire in the insulated confines of the adolescent's room, the Surrealist collections recount the poet's discovery of external reality, his acceptance of his homosexuality and his intense emotional turmoil as he strives and fails to realise his youthful erotic dreams.²⁴ His unbending commitment to his poetic vocation and his growing awareness of his homosexuality led him to experience an acute sense of alienation within the confines of conventional society. The poet recalls that "Un mozo solo, [...], no podía menos de sentir hostilidad hacia esa sociedad en medio de la cual vivía como extraño. Otro

²³ In his article on the irreverent and elegant Jacques Vaché (1929), in which Cernuda praises the French poet's rebellious and capricious spirit, he claims that "disorder in order" is the essence of Surrealism: "Ese niño que destroza el juguete preferido, se revuelve contra la persona que más quiere, sintiendo en ello placer y dolor, un placer morboso; ese niño, repito, es el que años más tarde será un espíritu de esta especie inaudita a la cual pertenece Vaché. Imposible sentirse unido a nada; si una inclinación, un amor le atan surge en él rápidamente ese instinto fundamental con un sarcasmo a veces, siempre con la imposibilidad de sostener su vida en algo. Y así, maldiciendo, llorando, burlándose, desfilan hacia la muerte estos espíritus para quienes 'orgullo' no fue una palabra vana. [...] Esa situación espiritual, ese desorden en el orden es lo que constituye en esencia la obra suprarrealista", PC II, 22-23.

²⁴ In 'Historial de un libro', Cernuda records his dissatisfaction with the restrained *Égloga, Elegía, Oda*, claiming that "Tales ejercicios sobre formas poéticas clásicas fueron sin duda provechosos para mi adiestramiento técnico; pero no dejaba de darme cuenta cómo mucha parte viva y esencial en mí no hallaba expresión en dichos poemas. Unas palabras de Paul Éluard, 'y sin embargo nunca he encontrado lo que escribo en lo que amo', aunque al revés, 'y sin embargo nunca he encontrado lo que amo en lo que escribo', cifraban mi decepción frente a aquellas tres composiciones", PC I, 631-32. In contrast, he states that Surrealism allowed him to express his subconscious desires and explore aspects of his deeper self. Reflecting on his decision to abandon Surrealism, he concludes that "Éste había deparado ya su beneficio, sacando a luz lo que yacía en mi subconciencia, lo que hasta su advenimiento permaneció dentro de mí en ceguera y silencio", PC I, 638.

motivo de desacuerdo, aún más hondo, existía en mí; pero ahí prefiero no entrar ahora” (PC I, 632).²⁵

Crucially, *Un río, un amor* also signals the writer’s acquisition of a “faculty of memory” (Harris, 1973: 39) as he recalls the frustrated hopes and aspirations of his adolescence from his temporary residence in France. The book, then, alerts the reader to the salient role played by memory and its counterpart, oblivion, in Cernuda’s early poetry. Given that prior readings of *La realidad y el deseo* have tended to characterise the early poetry as a fall from an Edenic period of innocence, critics have restricted their remarks on memory in the pre-exilic poetry to nostalgia for the innocence of childhood.²⁶ Consequently, insufficient critical attention has been paid to the analytical and meditative role played by memory in Cernuda’s early poetry. Focusing on *Un río, un amor*, the first section of this chapter will argue that the poet’s unsuccessful love affair leads him to experience a metaphysical crisis and a crisis of faith in the act of writing itself. Concentrating on a selection of verse and prose poems from *Los placeres prohibidos*, it will then examine how the poet uses memory as a meditative tool as he seeks to understand his former amorous experiences and the dynamic nature of desire. The third section of the chapter will focus on *Donde habite el olvido* (1932-1933), again written in response to a failed love affair. Attention will be drawn to the various meanings assumed by the word “olvido” in the collection, to the continual interaction between memory and oblivion throughout the book and the poet’s manipulation of tense sequences in order to portray his “fall” or exile from adolescent desire. Finally, in the light of the poet’s belief in a superior hidden reality outlined in his view of poetry in ‘Palabras antes de una lectura’ (1935), this chapter will study the metaphysical, contemplative and ethical role played by memory in *Invocaciones* (1934-1935) as the poet explores his poetic condition and the sources of his poetic instincts.

²⁵ Cernuda’s letter to Higinio Capote, dated 6 September 1928, provides the reader with a vital insight into his deep-rooted sense of alienation, melancholy and sexual frustration: “Vuelvo otra vez a la tristeza. Verdaderamente no puedo vivir sin tener al lado algo o alguien por quien sentir afecto. Y estoy solo [...] Pero no estoy en mi sitio; lo siento físicamente y espiritualmente. Lo mismo me ocurrirá en Madrid. Pero ‘¡qué le vas a hacer! La vida es así’, como dice un tango que oímos la otra noche en Eritaña. Ya no puedo volverme atrás. Esto no se lo diría a Salinas; ya sé lo que diría: ‘¡Falta de vitalidad!’ No lo creo así. Sé lo que me falta; pero mejor sería que no lo supiera”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 90). Given his experience of dislocation, psychological unease and sexual repression, it is unsurprising that Cernuda identified with the “malestar y osadía” (PC I, 632) voiced in the early works of Aragon, Breton, Éluard and Crevel.

²⁶ See Silver (1965: 64), José Capote Benot (1976: 133).

1.1 The Experience of Exile in *Un río, un amor*

J'ai plus de souvenirs
que si j'avais mille ans.
Charles Baudelaire

According to Harris, the “‘crisis’ poetry” (1998: 12) of *Un río, un amor* and *Los placeres prohibidos* records the painful experiences the poet encountered in the search to fulfil the dream of desire first formulated in *Primeras poesías* (1973: 33-34). Adopting a biographical approach to the texts, he states that the books are “concerned in part with what seems to have been an experience of unrequited love, or at least of a failed dream of love” (1973: 34). The critic then examines how the symbols of hope and promise from *Primeras poesías* are replaced by ones of mutilation and destruction. He observes that the clear blue sky of youth becomes a “cielo engañoso” (RD, 151) or a “cielo de vergüenza” (RD, 169) and that the “futuras auroras” (RD, 161) of the poet’s dreams are reduced to “remendadas/Como harapos de rey” (RD, 161). In keeping with Harris’ readings, there are frequent allusions in *Un río, un amor* to a fall from a time of innocence, to “ese país perdido/Que un día abandonamos sin saberlo” (RD, 161). In “Daytona” (RD, 154-55), the speaker briefly evokes the idyllic and ingenuous days of his youth: “Hubo un día en que el día no engañaba” (154). He then recalls how the flower of desire was destroyed by an anonymous assailant. The event took place with such speed that the world neither noticed nor lamented its occurrence:

Mas hoy es imposible
Buscar la luz entre barcas nocturnas;
Alguien cortó la piedra en flor,
Sin que pudiera el mundo
Incendiar la tristeza.
(154)

Throughout the book, Cernuda creates a clear division between the reality of his loveless existence in often desolate urban environments and the world of his dreams which permit him to create and escape into a series of utopic landscapes. In “Quisiera estar solo en el sur” (RD, 143-44), inspired by the title of a fox-trot (see Harris, 1973:

41), the speaker doubts whether he will ever inhabit or see his peaceful Southern idyll: “Quizá mis lentos ojos no verán más el sur/De ligeros paisajes dormidos en el aire” (143).²⁷ He then re-creates the “ligeros paisajes” through the act of writing, fixing them in his memory. Although he describes the South as a “desierto”, it is a vibrant and fertile land, blessed with natural beauty (“flores”, “caballos furiosos” [143]) and filled with perpetual music: “El sur es un desierto que llora mientras canta,/Y esa voz no se extingue como pájaro muerto” (143). The rain, mist and fog of the South are endowed with positive natural and human qualities. The rain is defined as a “rosa entreabierto” (144), the traditional symbol for poetry,²⁸ and its grey mist is equated to a joyous “risa blanca” (144). In this oneiric world, there is a delicate equilibrium between light and darkness: “Su oscuridad, su luz son bellezas iguales” (144).

As the poet oscillates between rage, frustration and a world-weary cynicism, he encloses the reader in his dark and disturbed frame of mind. In “Mares escarlata” (RD, 158) a single mollusc groan is converted into the moaning of waves which surge and crash over smoking cities and in “Linterna roja” (RD, 157-58) the speaker’s contemplation of the transient nature of life leads to the stark realisation that “mi vida es ahora un hombre melancólico/Sin saber otra cosa que su llanto” (158). In “Como el viento” (RD, 148), the poet compares his own inner alterity and incessant movement with that of the wind. Representing sexual and psychic pain and solitude, the wind moves sobbing and screaming through the night, its torment heightened by the indifference of the delicate rain. By placing a semi-colon at the end of the first three stanzas, the poet forces the reader to pause and reflect on the wind’s suffering. The final two short rapid lines of the third stanza, with its parallel structures, enumeration and anaphoric repetition of “Su”, emphasise the speed of the wind’s aimless flight:

Sí, como el viento al que un alba le revela
Su tristeza errabunda por la tierra,

²⁷ Silver defines the opening poems of the collection, “Quisiera estar solo en el sur” (RD, 143-44) and “Sombras blancas” (RD, 144), as “essays in nostalgia” for Andalusia written from the poet’s temporary exile in France (1965: 65). This view has been refuted by Cernuda. He explains that it was jazz music rather than nostalgia which inspired several of the book’s opening poems: “Dado mi gusto por los aires de jazz, recorría catálogos de discos y, a veces, un título me sugería posibilidades poéticas, como este de *I want to be alone in the South*, del cual salió el poemita segundo de la colección susodicha, y que algunos, erróneamente, interpretaron como expresión nostálgica de Andalucía. En París había visto la primera película sonora, cuyo título, *Sombras blancas en los mares del Sur*, también me dio ocasión para el tercer poema de la colección”, PC I, 635.

²⁸ See also Ulacia (1984: 151).

Su tristeza sin llanto,
Su fuga sin objeto;
(148)

It is not until the final stanza that the poetic voice identifies with that of the wind: “Como él mismo extranjero,/Como el viento huyo lejos”. The lengthy comparison between the speaker and the wind contrasts with the startling brevity of the final line. Switching abruptly from the present tense to the preterite, the speaker opposes being and non-being and contrasts past and present existences: “Y sin embargo vine como luz”.

Despite the anguished and often bitter tone contained in many of the poems in the collection, it is restrictive to understand the book simply in terms of a conflict between reality and desire or as the expression of the poet’s disillusionment with the innocent dreams of youth. It is vital to underline that Cernuda’s experience of “amor menospreciado” (RD, 150) also leads him to doubt the existence of a structured divine universe and the value of his creative activities. Indeed, James Valender (1989) argues that Cernuda’s Surrealist poems not only communicate the emotion of an individual experience, but also place this experience within the context of a particular vision of the world (1989: 81). The critic claims that this vision is that of a world without a God, “a notion that is perfectly summed up in the title Cernuda originally intended to give to his first surrealist collection: ‘Cielo sin dueño’” (1989: 81). In “Destierro” (RD, 146-47), for example, the poem’s protagonist, referred to off-handedly as “él”, is isolated from both the cosmos and humanity:

Una luz lejos piensa
Como a través de un cielo.
Todos acaso duermen,
Mientras él lleva su destino a solas.
(146)

Weary of both life and death, the figure is accompanied only by a shadow: “Le abandona la noche y la aurora lo encuentra,/Tras sus huellas la sombra tenazmente” (147).²⁹ The nocturnal scene in “Razón de las lágrimas” (RD, 159) is denied even the

²⁹ Valender notes that in *Un río, un amor* Man’s position in the universe is presented in terms similar to those used by Gérard de Nerval in “Le Christ aux Oliviers”. Just as man is unable to communicate with his fellow man or with God in “Destierro”, he notes that in Nerval’s first sonnet Christ turns to his

slightest glimmer of a Divine being. The magnitude of the night's sadness refuses to be contained by any frontiers: "La noche por ser triste carece de fronteras". Night also acquires a violent and rebellious shadow which demolishes "muros débiles". When the poet offers a glimpse into what lies beyond the night, he describes snake-filled abysses sealed by darkness:

Más allá se estremecen los abismos
Poblados de serpientes entre pluma,
Cabecera de enfermos
No mirando otra cosa que la noche.
Mientras cierran el aire entre los labios.
(159)

The poet underscores the sexual nature of the night which assumes the provocative demeanour of a street prostitute: "La noche, la noche deslumbrante,/Que junto a las esquinas retuerce sus caderas". He concludes the poem with a final disconcerting line which describes the night, the poem's protagonist and humanity itself suspended in a state of uncertainty and anticipation: "Aguardando, quién sabe,/Como yo, como todos".

The book's opening poem "Remordimiento en traje de noche" (RD, 143) and "Cuerpo en pena" (RD, 144-46) skilfully explore the futility of the poet's existence following the loss of love as well as his sense of metaphysical alienation. In "Remordimiento en traje de noche" guilt is personified as a grey figure who walks through a misty city street. Although the use of the definite article locates the reader in a specific street ("Un hombre gris avanza por *la* calle de niebla"; my emphasis), no other element of concrete reality is present in the scene. The semblance of normality created by the opening description of the spectral figure is swiftly undercut by the comparison of the man's hollow body to a prairie, to the sea and to the wind. The reference to the prairie and the sea disorients the reader after the narrow and highly focused viewpoint of the city street contained in the first line. These vast empty

sleeping disciples, raises his arms to heaven and cries out: "Frères, je vous trompais: Abîme! abîme! abîme!/Le dieu manque à l'autel, où je suis la victime [...] Dieu n'est pas! Dieu n'est plus!" (1989: 81). In the second sonnet, the critic notes that all Christ sees is a void: "En cherchant l'œil de Dieu, je n'ai vu qu'une orbite/Vaste, noire et sans fond, d'où la nuit qui l'habite/Rayonne sur le monde et s'épaissit toujours./ Un arc-en-ciel étrange entoure ce puits sombre,/Seuil de l'ancien chaos dont le néant est l'ombre,/Spirale engloutissant les Mondes et les Jours!" (1989: 81-82). Cernuda translated the first poem of the cycle about the time of writing *Un río, un amor*.

landscapes are then likened to “Desiertos tan amargos bajo un cielo implacable”. The grey man, the “pampa”, the “mar” and the “viento” all lie beneath an equally hostile sky. The command and the interrogation contained in the final stanza (“No estrechéis esa mano/¿No sentís a los muertos?”) jolt and confuse the reader. The poem’s stark interrogation implicates the reader in the world’s indifference towards the dead: “¿No sentís a los muertos? Mas la tierra está sorda”.³⁰

The “ahogado” in “Cuerpo en pena”, written in refined alexandrines, exists in a similarly desolate world.³¹ The poem’s opening two stanzas evoke the eerie silence of his underwater prison composed of “Árboles sin colores y pájaros callados” (144). Only shadows move and flicker: “Las sombras indecisas alargándose tiemblan,/Mas el viento no mueve sus alas irisadas” (145). The “ahogado” finds respite from his “prisión delicada” (145) through recollection: “Si el ahogado sacude sus lívidos recuerdos,/Halla un golpe de luz, la memoria del aire” (145). The energy contained in the verb “sacudir” (145) and the sudden force of the “golpe” (145) encapsulate the life-giving power of memory which revives him from his sterile vacuum. Despite the potent flash of memory, oblivion exerts an equal control over the “ahogado”, starving him of light and binding him to death:

Un vidrio denso tiembla delante de las cosas,
 Un vidrio que despierta formas color de olvido;
 Olvidos de tristeza, de un amor, de la vida,
 Ahogados como un cuerpo sin luz, sin aire, muerto.
 (145)

Traces of the past then persist in the form of tantalising “Flores de luz” (145) which still the water with their “fulgor” (145). They are likened to smiles and “miradas

³⁰ Cyril Brian Morris notes that French Surrealist practice exploited the “tragic possibilities” contained in the figure of the urban vagabond which influenced the writings of not only Cernuda, but also of Hinojosa, Aleixandre and Foix (1972: 74). He notes that the solitary nomadic figure is woven throughout French Surrealist texts: “In *Etes-vous fous?* Crevel’s command to man to ‘continue, solitaire, ton voyage dans le chaos du temps’ echoed the precept ‘Va...marche toujours devant toi’ pronounced by Lautréamont, whose ‘voyageur égaré’ became orphaned and stateless like Rimbaud, who appeared ‘sans mère, sans pays’” (1972: 75).

³¹ Harris (1973: 39, n20) observes that the poem bears a striking similarity to Paul Éluard’s “Armure de proie le parfum noir rayonne” from *L’Amour la Poésie*. Cernuda translated six pieces from *L’Amour la Poésie*, which, accompanied by an introductory essay, were published by the magazine *Litoral* in June 1929. For an examination of the sources of many of Cernuda’s Surrealist texts, see Harris (1989: 58-79). For a rigorous and subtle analysis of the hybridisation of Surrealist writing processes and neoromantic, Expressionist thematic concerns and attitudes in *Un río, un amor* and *Los placeres prohibidos*, see also Harris (1998).

alegres” (145). The seventh stanza then re-invokes the notion of the “vidrio denso” (145) and describes the “errantes perspectivas” (145) created by the shimmering light on the surface of the water:

Desdobra sus espejos la prisión delicada;
Claridad sinuosa, errantes perspectivas.
(145)

As the “ahogado” speeds across the open sea in pursuit of youthful desire, the accumulation of references to lightness (*Atravesar ligero*, *El ahogado ligero*; my emphasis [146]) and the repetition of the phrase “Hacia lo lejos” (146) emphasise his dizzying and aimless motion. He is compared to an “astro apagado” (146), indicating that he too forms part of the empty “fondo nocturno” (146). The vivid “golpe de luz” (146) of memory is replaced by an all-encompassing darkness:

En plena mar al fin, sin rumbo, a toda vela;
Hacia lo lejos, más, hacia la flor sin nombre.
Atravesar ligero como pájaro herido
Ese cristal confuso, esas luces extrañas.

Pálido entre las ondas cada vez más opacas
El ahogado ligero se pierde ciegamente
En el fondo nocturno como un astro apagado.
Hacia lo lejos, sí, hacia el aire sin nombre.
(146)

In the light of this vision of a godless universe, the term “olvido” becomes a haunting and obsessive concept, synonymous with the poet’s sense of divine void and absence. As in “Remordimiento en traje de noche” and “Cuerpo en pena”, “Decidme anoche” (RD, 148-50) opens with a description of a misty and frozen landscape. Only the “niebla” appears to be alive. The adjectives “oscuras” (148) and “ciego” (148) create a dark and forbidding atmosphere while the “rígidas espinas” (148) suggest pain and suffering:

La presencia del frío junto al miedo invisible
Hiela a gotas oscuras la sangre entre la niebla,
Entre la niebla viva, hacia la niebla vaga
Por un espacio ciego de rígidas espinas.
(148)

The second stanza widens the poem's spatial perspective as the speaker declares that "desiertos blancos representan el mundo" (149). With subtle evocations of childhood innocence, the arid deserts are described as "espacios pequeños como tímida mano" (149). The poet then reinforces the idea of death as he depicts the earth sleeping "bajo una luz sin vida" (149). As in "Como el viento", he personifies pain as a lost and errant ghost who is denied a voice and who is condemned to wander through the night, a "prisionero de nadie" (149). Man fails to communicate with the Heavens and his creative efforts appear futile and ineffectual beneath the scorching sun which beats down on the white desert: "canta risas o plumas atravesando espacio/bajo un sol calcinante reflejado en la arena" (149). In the eighth stanza, the speaker declares that the earth's debilitating cold is linked to the absence of memory:

¿Dónde palpita el hielo? Dentro, aquí, entre la vida,
En un centro perdido de apagados recuerdos,
De huesos ateridos en donde silba el aire
Con un rumor de hojas que se van una a una.
(150)

Despite the fact that "Cuerpo en pena", "Remordimiento en traje de noche" and "Decidme anoche" examine the senselessness of the poet's life and the void which in his eyes lies at the heart of the universe, they are relatively easy poems to comprehend and interpret. There are, however, several texts in *Un río, un amor* which resist interpretation and which depict an even more chaotic universe. In the perplexing "Habitación de al lado" (RD, 151), for example, the reader is drawn into a world of temporal confusion which defies the boundaries of reason and logic. Adopting a casual and nonchalant tone, the speaker declares that

A través de una noche en pleno día
Vagamente he conocido a la muerte.
No la acompaña ningún lebré;
(151)

Death lives among "estanques disecados" and the poet intertwines the concrete and the nebulous as he describes grey ghosts composed of "piedra nebulosa". The nightmare scenario continues in the second stanza in which the speaker urges the reader to gaze upon defeated white shadows in a desert-like land: "Mirad vencido olvido y miedo a tantas sombras blancas/Por las pálidas dunas de la vida". Amidst the

white pools and woods of this land, a hunter pursues velvet: “Con sus blancas lagunas, con sus bosques/En donde el cazador si quiere da caza al terciopelo”. As Harris notes (1998: 166), the laconic “si quiere” picks up on the speaker’s indolent stance in the opening lines of the poem: “*Vagamente* he conocido a la muerte” (my emphasis). The fourth stanza then projects a startling image of cosmic disorder. The deceitful sky is populated by “durmientes” who march like clouds and by clashing and bored hands who “cazan terciopelos o nubes descuidadas”. The repetition of the reference to hunted velvet refers the reader back to the hunter of the second stanza. The activation or personification of the hands as “aburridas” creates a tight link between boredom and violence, indolence and aggression. The poem ends with the paradoxical line: “Sin vida está viviendo solo profundamente”. Far from illuminating or clarifying the sense of the poem, this detached line disquiets the reader, permitting the poet to close the text with a vision of an arbitrary universe inhabited by unnamed and solitary figures.

Interwoven throughout these disturbing texts is a cluster of subtle, sardonic and self-reflective poems in which the poet questions the meaningfulness of language itself. In “Dejadme solo” (RD, 163-64) the speaker playfully reduces the concept of truth to a mere colour: “Una verdad es color de ceniza,/Otra verdad es color de planeta” (163). Given that the arbitrary images of “color de ceniza” and “color de planeta” have no connection with the notion of truth, the speaker deliberately teases and bewilders the reader. Toying with the reader through the repetition of the noun “verdad”, he makes the nonsensical claim that “Mas todas las verdades, desde el suelo hasta el suelo,/No valen la verdad sin color de verdades” (163). The phrase “desde el suelo hasta el suelo” (163) refutes any sense of movement or progression and encloses the reader in the speaker’s capricious mood. He then considers the seductive power of a lie which imprisons him in its thorns:

En cuanto a la mentira, basta decirle ‘quiero’
Para que brote entre las piedras
Su flor, que en vez de hojas luce besos,
Espinas en lugar de espinas.
(163)

In “Vieja ribera” (RD, 165), the speaker recalls how much it has rained since his childhood. He looks back to his youth in an elegiac mood: “Tanto ha llovido desde

entonces,/Entonces, cuando los dientes no eran carne, sino días”. The notion of the innocent child connects the sequence of peculiar images contained in the first stanza.³² Teeth are likened to tiny days and a sleepy “río ignorante” calls on its parents. The second stanza then offers a brief but incisive commentary on the lack of meaning inherent in an affirmation or a negation. The poet defines “sí” and “no” as “dos alas pequeñas” which brings to mind the idea of flight and motion and conveys the fickle and unstable nature of language. The following three lines describe a sky within a sky, love within love and oblivion within oblivion and present the reader with a labyrinthine conception of language in which meaning is constantly deferred:

Unos dicen que sí, otros dicen que no;
Mas sí y no son dos alas pequeñas,
Equilibrio de un cielo dentro de otro cielo,
Como un amor está dentro de otro,
Como el olvido está dentro del olvido.³³
(165)

The poet’s awareness of the fluid and elusive nature of language, split between negations and affirmations, lies and truths, leads him to doubt the purpose of his own creative activities.³⁴ In “Drama o puerta cerrada” (RD, 162-63), language is considered to be a fragile defence against time. As Morris notes, human activities, whether potentially creative (“esculpir biografías” [163]) or pointlessly contradictory (“contar afirmaciones/O negaciones” [163]) are “seen to be abortive when overshadowed by time” (1989: 54). Through the incantatory-like “Sólo sabemos” (163), the speaker derides our attempts to respond to and forge permanence from flux:

³² For an excellent reading of this poem, see Harris (1991: 170-72).

³³ Morris observes that the Galician writer and poet Rosalía de Castro, whom Cernuda discusses in an essay in ‘Estudios sobre poesía española contemporánea’ (1957), also repeats emotive words and phrases. He likens Cernuda’s despondent statement that “oblivion lies within oblivion” to the following stanza from *Follas novas* (1880): “A un batido, outro batido,/a un-ha dor, outro delor,/tras d’un olvido, outro olvido,/tras d’un amor, outro amor” (1972: 84). It is interesting to note that Cernuda recalls and cites these lines in ‘Diario de un viaje’: “Estaba mal a gusto. Todas estas historias de ausencias, de distancias, de amores sucesivos [...] Recordé los versos: *Tras d’un olvido, outro olvido/Tras d’un amor, outro amor*”, PC II, 362.

³⁴ In his essay on Éluard (1929), in which he censures Spanish poetry for its “temperamento exclusivamente verbalista”, Cernuda expresses a similar distrust of the written word. He draws an important distinction between “poesía” and “palabras”: “Amamos o, mejor, se ama demasiado la palabra para ser románticos; sólo interesan las palabras, no la poesía. Y si esta última necesita de aquéllas, esas palabras son ya ciertamente muy distintas, bien que, como las otras, como todas las palabras, traicionen también”, PC II, 16. In the short story ‘El indolente’ (1929), Don Míster also declares that language has the power to betray its user. He states that “Las palabras deforman nuestro corazón; son exageradas y olvidadizas como los hombres, y no es menos inútil confiar en unos que en otras”, PC II, 277. For a detailed discussion of Cernuda’s “anxiety about the nature of language and meaning themselves” in *Un río, un amor*, see Neil McKinlay (1999: 144-53).

Sólo sabemos esculpir biografías
En músicas hostiles;
Sólo sabemos contar afirmaciones
O negaciones, cabellera de noche;
Sólo sabemos invocar como niños al frío
Por miedo de irnos solos a la sombra del tiempo.
(163)

In “Oscuridad completa” (RD, 150), the speaker fails to comprehend why he confides and expresses his dreams, which are as transient as clouds and snow, in the form of words. The replication of “palabras” coupled with the alliteration of the “p” in “Palabras” and “perdidos” and the “v” in “verter” and “vagamente” reduces the tools of his craft to a series of contrived and hollow echoes:

No sé por qué he de cantar
O verter de mis labios vagamente palabras;
Palabras de mis ojos,
Palabras de mis sueños perdidos en la nieve.

De mis sueños copiando los colores de nubes,
De mis sueños copiando nubes sobre la pampa.
(150)

Just as the aimless protagonist of “Desdicha” (RD, 155-56) is surrounded by monotonous words (“Palabras hacia el techo,/Palabras hacia el suelo” [155-56]), in “Estoy cansado” (RD, 152) the poet’s satiation with words traps him in his own poem. He ridicules his role as a poet and compares his lethargic creative efforts to the stammerings of a parrot. As he distances himself from his own creative act, “Estoy cansado” reveals the poet’s early capacity for self-irony, self-parody and self-criticism:

Estar cansado tiene plumas,
Tiene plumas graciosas como un loro,
Plumas que desde luego nunca vuelan,
Mas balbucean igual que loro.
(152)

Creating a series of tedious rhymes out of “casas” and “cosas”, “cansado” and “cansado”, the speaker professes his weariness with the impermanent nature of existence. The poem then turns back on itself as he contemplates his own fatigue. By closing the poem with the image of the melancholy parrot, he undermines his efforts

as a writer. Sound dominates meaning as the adjective “cansado” reverberates throughout the final stanza and the speaker mimics the incessant stutterings of a parrot:

Estoy cansado de las casas,
Prontamente en ruinas sin un gesto;
Estoy cansado de las cosas,
Con un latir de seda vueltas luego de espaldas.
[...]
Estoy cansado del estar cansado
Entre plumas ligeras sagazmente,
Plumas del loro aquel tan familiar o triste,
El loro aquel del siempre estar cansado.
(152)

1.2 Rebellion and Meditation in *Los placeres prohibidos*

Un hombre que natural y secretamente
esté en contradicción con el orden exterior
no puede conformarse con seguir [...]
el curso de lo habitual.
L.C., ‘Unidad y Diversidad’

Following the loss of love in *Un río, un amor*, which Cernuda transformed into a metaphysical and linguistic crisis, in *Los placeres prohibidos* he scorns societal sexual norms in order to assert the elemental and transcendent power of homosexual desire. Written at the same time as his prose declarations of the existence of a “realidad más noble, pura y espiritual” which lies behind “esa realidad visible” (PC II, 38), in the first poem of the collection, “Diré como nacisteis” (RD, 173-74), he depicts homosexual desire as a celestial force which is morally superior to the heterosexual world. He denounces the hypocrisy and corruption of society composed of “realidades vacías, Leyes hediondas, códigos, ratas de paisajes derruidos” (174).³⁵ He also

³⁵ Cernuda’s preface to his poems in Gerardo Diego’s anthology of *Poesía española contemporánea* (1932) vividly expresses his hostility and contempt for the values of a society which “chupa, agosta, destruye las energías jóvenes”, PC II, 63. He declares that “No valía la pena de ir poco a poco olvidando la realidad para que ahora fuese a recordarla, y ante qué gentes. La detesto como detesto todo lo que a ella pertenece: mis amigos, mi familia, mi país.

No sé nada, no quiero nada, no espero nada. Y si aún pudiera esperar algo, sólo sería morir allí donde no hubiese penetrado aún esta grotesca civilización que envanece a los hombres”, PC II, 64.

celebrates the rebellious and furious spirit of homosexual desire which can only exist in “la vida sin muros” (173). In the poem’s fourth stanza, the poet provides a rapid series of definitions of desire in which he blurs the boundaries between the cosmic and the terrestrial, the human and the non-human, the natural and the mechanical:

Placeres prohibidos, planetas terrenales,
Miembros de mármol con un sabor de estío,
Jugo de esponjas abandonadas por el mar,
Flores de hierro, resonantes como el pecho de un hombre.
(173)

Whereas homosexual desire is described as “Cielos, cielos relampagueantes que aniquilan” (174), the world of convention is reduced to dark “estatuas anónimas,/Sombras de sombras, miseria, preceptos de niebla” (174).³⁶ The poem closes with a warning for society as the speaker declares that a single brilliant spark of desire is capable of destroying the heterosexual world:

Una chispa de aquellos placeres
Brilla en la hora vengativa,
Su fulgor puede destruir vuestro mundo.
(174)

Given that traditional morality prevents man from expressing and celebrating the truth of his sexual identity, in “Si el hombre pudiera decir” (RD, 179-80) the act of writing becomes an act of defiance against sexual taboos. The poet states that if man were able to “decir lo que ama” (179), he would be able to free desire from the constraints

In the biting and satirical “Vientres sentados” (RD, 713-14), excluded from *Los placeres prohibidos*, Cernuda describes the edicts and laws of society as “Henchidas necedades/Dictámenes que se escurren entre las rendijas como ratas” (713).

³⁶ Julián Jiménez Heffernan makes the interesting suggestion that Cernuda’s “escenas de fracaso cósmico, ‘cielos, cielos relampagueantes que aniquilan” (2002: 111) draw, consciously or unconsciously, on the imagery connected with the neoplatonic metaphysics of a chaotic and disordered universe developed by Italian philosophers such as Giordano Bruno (2002: 112). He argues that “En [...] *Los placeres prohibidos*, reaparecen escenas de fracaso cósmico [...]. Parecen apuntar a la anarquía celeste que garantiza la libertad, vastedad y pluralidad del deseo *furioso* neoplatónico (Ficino, Bruno)” (2002: 111). He notes that this “metafísica de la indeterminación, del desorden, de la transformación y el caos” (2002: 107) infiltrated the writings of Shakespeare, Donne and Marvell. He suggests that when Cernuda reads and translates Shakespeare during his residence in England “se reencuentra [...] con su concepción juvenil del amor como deseo nacido de la imposibilidad, deseo nacido en un mundo imposible, desordenado, sin cielo” (2002: 113).

of society and of the flesh, revealing only “la verdad de su amor” (179). Unlike “Dejadme solo” from *Un río, un amor*, in which the repetition of the word “verdad” reduced the noun to a series of meaningless echoes, in this poem the multiplication of the word cleanses it from its previous sardonic use. By triumphantly repeating “verdad”, the poet restores its supreme moral value as he announces his wish to proclaim to mankind “la verdad ignorada,/La verdad de su amor verdadero” (179).

In view of the poet’s decision to celebrate the forbidden fruits of desire and announce the “truth” of desire, the memory of former erotic experiences assumes a vital importance in the book. Through memory, the poet seeks to reach a deeper understanding of the nature of his erotic desire and of his personal identity. He therefore adopts a quieter and more elegiac tone as he meditates in a series of oneiric and allegorical verse and prose poems on his past. This more self-reflective tone contrasts with the violent voice of rebellion contained in “Diré como nacisteis”. The penultimate poem of the collection, “Veía sentado” (RD, 193-94), provides the reader with an excellent example of Cernuda’s early and highly developed analytical powers. In the opening stanza, the speaker’s langorous “vago ademán de olvido” (193) contrasts sharply with the intense concentration and acute self-consciousness of his retrospective gaze:

Veía sentado junto al agua
Con vago ademán de olvido,
Veía las hojas, los días, los semblantes,
El fondo siempre pálido del cielo,
Conversando indiferentes entre ellos mismos.

Veía la luz agitarse eficazmente,
Un pequeño lagarto de visita,
Las piedrecillas vanidosas
Disputando el lugar a las tristes hierbas.
(193)

The use of the adjective “indiferentes” (193) to describe the leaves and days chatting among themselves underlines the poem’s listless atmosphere and establishes the speaker’s detachment from scenes of adolescence. In the third verse, his mnemonic gaze acquires several depths and layers as he becomes both the observer and the observed and studies his youth which is “ni ganada ni perdida” (193). As his gaze narrows to scrutinise his “cuerpo distante” (194), the repetition of the adjective

“extraño” (194) heightens the speaker’s sense of separation from both his body and his self which are conceived as separate entities: “Veía mi cuerpo distante, tan extraño/Como yo mismo, allá en extraña hora” (194). Having situated his alienation on both a corporeal and a temporal plane, his gaze widens to include the “canosos muros” (194) of the garden who murmur “vagas blasfemias” (194). In order to illustrate his growing sense of distance from his body, he switches from the possessive adjective (“mi cuerpo”) to the indefinite article: “Veía al inclinarme sobre la verdad/*Un* cuerpo que no era el cuerpo mío” (194; my emphasis).

The dream-like quality contained in “Veía sentado” recurs in the ten prose poems written between March and April 1931. In his analysis of the poems, Valender observes that they are characterised by a formal unity and a contraction or concentration in the means of expression (1989: 91-92). He notes that with the exception of the untitled text, six of the poems are composed of four short paragraphs and the three poems that differ, “Sentado sobre un golfo de sombra” (RD, 186-87), “Había en el fondo del mar” (RD, 192-93) and “Era un poco de arena” (RD, 708), offer only slight variations on this basic model rather than structures with a different rhythm of development (1989: 92). As the critic correctly points out, these formal guidelines helped the poet to concentrate and unify his experience (1989: 92). Cernuda also creates a series of tight thematic connections between the poems. “Esperaba solo” (RD, 181), “En medio de la multitud” (RD, 176-77) and “Sentado sobre un golfo de sombra” (RD, 186) all explore the ephemeral nature of desire and the poet’s solitary existence. All three texts have strong connections with the writer’s self-portraits as an aimless urban wanderer in *Un río, un amor*. Nonetheless, it is important to underline that the poet’s chiselled prose, careful structuring of the material and, in the case of “Sentado sobre un golfo de sombra”, adoption of the “tú” mode of address, permit him to examine and reflect upon his exilic state with a greater degree of detachment than in the previous book. In “En medio de la multitud” the protagonist wanders “sin rumbo” (177) through an urban landscape in which bodies dissolve upon physical contact: “Un cuerpo se derritió con leve susurro al tropezarme” (177). In the poem’s third stanza or paragraph, the protagonist’s lack of solidity extends to his own body: “No sentía mis pies. Quise cogerlos en mi mano, y no hallé mis manos; quise gritar, y no hallé mi voz. La niebla me envolvía” (177). Similarly, in “Sentado sobre un golfo de sombra” the speaker’s being and existence

are reduced to mere shadows: “Sentado sobre un golfo de sombra vas siendo ya sombra tú todo. Sombra tu cabeza, sombra tu vientre, sombra tu vida misma.”

Both “Pasión por pasión” (RD, 185) and “Estaba tendido” (RD, 179) analyse in greater depth the dynamic nature of desire. Just as he receives a fleeting glimpse of the “ojos tan rubios” (176) of an anonymous passer-by in “En medio de la multitud”, in “Pasión por pasión” pleasure is personified as a figure dressed in a torn cape with “una flor mordida” in the corner of its lips.³⁷ As in “En medio de la multitud” the gaze is the means through which the speaker experiences desire: “Le miré: en sus ojos vacíos había dos relojes pequeños; uno marchaba en sentido contrario al otro.” Desire, however, does not only contain and distort time, its energy also causes cosmic disturbances: “A su paso unas estrellas se apagaban, otras se encendían.” Faced with the continuous movement and surge of desire, the speaker is reduced to an impotent figure and he concludes the poem with an ironic reflection on the appeal of oblivion, symbolised by a headless man:

[...] Quise

deternerle; mi brazo quedó inmóvil. Lloré, lloré tanto, que hubiera podido llenar sus órbitas vacías. Entonces amaneció.

Comprendí por qué llaman prudente a un hombre sin cabeza.

(185)

Cernuda uses the form of the prose poem to greatest effect in “Estaba tendido” (RD, 179), revealing his skill in shaping his recollections into an analytical narrative sequence. Balancing recall and explanation, fact and interpretation, he reveals that loss is inherent to the erotic experience as the desired body, which exceeds physical matter, resists the confines of possession. The opening two paragraphs of the prose poem, each composed of three sentences, follow a parallel pattern based on the description of the lover’s body, the action of kissing the lover and the lover’s reaction to the speaker’s embrace. As desire is motivated by and subject to the passage of time, represented by the continuous flow of the river, the desired body becomes as fluid and elusive as the water. When the corporal and the spiritual, the material and the immaterial fuse in the speaker’s kiss, the winged and silken body dissolves, leaving the speaker with only a shadowy recollection of its presence:

³⁷ The fleeting connection established between the poet and the passer-by through the gaze recalls Baudelaire’s “A une passante”. See Luis Fernández-Cifuentes (2002: 51-67) for a detailed analysis of the connections between Baudelaire’s urban gaze, as analysed by Walter Benjamin, and Cernuda’s.

Estaba tendido y tenía entre mis brazos un cuerpo como seda. Lo besé en los labios, porque el río pasaba por debajo. Entonces se burló de mi amor.

Sus espaldas parecían dos alas plegadas. Lo besé en las espaldas, porque el agua sonaba debajo de nosotros. Entonces lloró al sentir la quemadura de mis labios.

Era un cuerpo tan maravilloso que se desvaneció entre mis brazos. Besé su huella; mis lágrimas la borraron. Como el agua continuaba fluyendo, dejé caer en ella un puñal, un ala y una sombra.³⁸

De mi mismo cuerpo recorté otra sombra, que sólo me sigue a la mañana. Del puñal y el ala, nada sé.

(179)

In the verse poem “No decía palabras” (RD, 178), the poet expands upon the reflections contained in the above poems regarding the dynamic energy of desire. Commenting on the poem’s opening stanza, Harris claims that the writer evokes with “quiet sadness” his previous “instinctive, innocent approach to love, and the painful vulnerability created by this innocence” (1973: 37). While the insistent use of negation in the first stanza invites such a reading, the critic’s stress on the writer’s transition from innocence to disillusionment overlooks how Cernuda’s recollection of his adolescent “cuerpo interrogante” leads to a deeper understanding of the radical questioning spirit of desire, a spirit which refuses the confines of concrete answers and a fixed place of dwelling:

No decía palabras,
Acercaba tan sólo un cuerpo interrogante,
Porque ignoraba que el deseo es una pregunta
Cuya respuesta no existe,
Una hoja cuya rama no existe,
Un mundo cuyo cielo no existe.
(178)

The transition from a delicate self-standing leaf to a world without a sky inflates desire, creating a sense of infinite expansion and possibility.³⁹ The tertiary repetition

³⁸ The act of kissing the absent lover recalls the closing two paragraphs of Éluard’s prose poem “Les lumières dictées” from *Au défaut du silence* (1925):

“Et toi, tu te dissimulais comme une épée dans la dérouté, tu t’immobilisais, orgueil, sur le large visage de quelque déesse méprisante et masquée. Toute brillante d’amour, tu fascinais l’univers ignorant.

Je t’ai saisie et depuis, ivre de larmes, je baise partout pour toi l’espace abandonné.”
(1968: 166)

³⁹ Jiménez Heffernan, like Silver, notes that in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare offers a precise formulation of the “incontención, la ilimitación, la infinitud de este amor-deseo eternamente

of the phrase “no existe” also implies that desire surpasses the boundaries of human knowledge and language in order to enter a realm that can only be designated through negation or silence. In the second and third stanzas, he describes the surge of anguish caused by desire which, ignited by a light touch or a brief glance, challenges the self-contained limits of the speaker’s body and transforms it into a dreaming and questioning force. As desire splits the human body in two, the loss of the speaker’s corporeal identity leads him to yearn for a profound mental, physical and sexual union:⁴⁰

La angustia se abre paso entre los huesos,
Remonta por las venas
Hasta abrirse en la piel,
Surtidores de sueño
Hechos carne en interrogación vuelta a las nubes.

Un roce al paso,
Una mirada fugaz entre las sombras,
Bastan para que el cuerpo se abra en dos,
Ávido de recibir en sí mismo
Otro cuerpo que sueñe;
Mitad y mitad, sueño y sueño, carne y carne,
Iguales en figura, iguales en amor, iguales en deseo.

Aunque sólo sea una esperanza,
Porque el deseo es una pregunta cuya respuesta nadie sabe.
(178)

Despite the speaker’s longing to unite with “otro cuerpo que sueñe”, the closing line of the poem ensures that desire remains a potential force rather than a closed, finite and realised act. Indeed in “Qué ruido tan triste” (RD, 177-78) the consummation of desire is presented as a sordid experience which transforms the delicate human hand into a waterfall of “Manos ligeras, manos egoístas, manos obscenas” (177) and whose

insatisfecho” (2002: 118). He quotes: “This is the monstrosity of love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confined; that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit” (2002: 118). In his translation of the play, Cernuda writes: “Ésa es la monstruosidad del amor, señora, que la voluntad es infinita y la obra esclava de lo finito”, PC II, 580.

⁴⁰ The image of the body splitting in two recalls Georges Bataille’s conviction that “Toute la mise en œuvre érotique a pour principe une destruction de la structure de l’être fermé” (1957: 22). For Bataille the erotic experience is “un état de communication, qui révèle la quête d’une continuité possible de l’être au delà du repli sur soi. Les corps s’ouvrent à la continuité [...]. [...] Ce qui est en jeu dans l’érotisme est toujours une dissolution des formes constituées” (1957: 22-23).

noise “Parece como el viento que se mece en otoño/Sobre adolescentes mutilados” (177).

Crucially, the poet’s heightened understanding of desire, which he describes in ‘Carta a Lafcadio Wluiki’ (1931) as “un afán sin nombre, un divino afán hostigándonos para levantar la vida hasta las estrellas” (PC I, 804), leads him to doubt the efficacy and the ability of words to convey its magnitude. In “Como leve sonido” (RD, 190-91), he compares the presence of a lover to a light sound, a rapid caress and a “fugaz deseo” (191). In the closing stanzas the poet attempts to represent desire through a system of paradoxes. Combining negation and affirmation, he struggles to define and evoke the transcendent presence of desire, which represents the very centre of his being and an external natural life force:

Como esta vida que no es mía
Y sin embargo es la mía,
Como este afán sin nombre
Que no me pertenece y sin embargo soy yo;

Como todo aquello que de cerca o de lejos
Me roza, me besa, me hiere,
Tu presencia está conmigo fuera y dentro,
Es mi vida misma y no es mi vida,
Así como una hoja y otra hoja
Son la apariencia del viento que las lleva.
(191)

“Te quiero” (RD, 191-92) provides the reader with an even more explicit example of the poet’s growing frustration with language. As the speaker recalls how he has used nature and the constantly shifting elements (“el viento”, “el sol”, “las nubes”, “las plantas”, “el agua” [191-92]) as vehicles to express his love, the rapid accumulation of the phrase “Te lo he dicho” (192) emphasises his exasperation with language. The poem terminates with the speaker’s attempts to surpass and exceed the restrictions of prior modes of communication and to give voice to his love through death and oblivion:

Te lo he dicho con el agua,
Vida luminosa que vela un fondo de sombra;
Te lo he dicho con el miedo,
Te lo he dicho con la alegría,
Con el hastío, con las terribles palabras.

Pero así no me basta:
Más allá de la vida,
Quiero decírtelo con la muerte;
Más allá del amor,
Quiero decírtelo con el olvido.⁴¹
(192)

The power contained in the word “olvido” is heightened if the poem is viewed in conjunction with the second stanza of “Si el hombre pudiera decir” in which the speaker longs for the “disappearance (ecstasy) or death” (de Certeau, 1986: 96) of the self within the bonds of desire:⁴²

Libertad no conozco sino la libertad de estar preso en alguien
Cuyo nombre no puedo oír sin escalofrío;
Alguien por quien me olvido de esta existencia mezquina,
Por quien el día y la noche son para mí lo que quiera,
Y mi cuerpo y espíritu flotan en su cuerpo y espíritu
Como leños perdidos que el mar anega o levanta
(180)

Thus, by transgressing the limitations and boundaries of the self, life and even love itself, in “Te quiero” oblivion acts as an invitation to silence, permitting the poet to preserve rather than circumscribe through words the “vastedad y pluralidad” (Jiménez Heffernan, 2002: 111) of desire and enter an autonomous realm which, as Soufas notes (1989b: 111), extends beyond poetic representation.

⁴¹ Harris notes that the poem’s provenance is Éluard’s “Je te l’ai dit pour les nuages” from *L’amour, la poésie* (1989: 64). Cernuda’s tight equation between desire and oblivion is also similar to Éluard’s claim in “L’aventure est pendue au cou de son rival” from *Défense de savoir* (1928) that “l’amour est au monde pour l’oubli du monde” (1968: 215-16).

⁴² In ‘Carta a Lafcadio Wluiki’, in which Cernuda recalls his initial discovery of the youthful, bold and hedonistic character of Lafcadio from André Gide’s *Les Caves du Vatican*, he exalts the power of oblivion to bind man to nature. Addressing Lafcadio, he declares that “Tu presencia me dice que debe amarse la vida y el aire y la tierra divinos que la rodean. [...] No desdeñar lo natural: amar. Y si se ama, si se ama apasionadamente, nos olvidaremos de nosotros mismos. Entonces estaremos salvados”, PC I, 804. In the short story ‘El viento en la colina’ (1938) oblivion is viewed as a redemptive force as it frees the lovers Albanio and Isabela from their former existences: “Nada los separaba. Su soledad protegía, como un vidrio transparente en un relicario, el frágil milagro de su amor. Ni siquiera los recuerdos se interponían entre ellos, porque el amor había borrado sus recuerdos y vivían reencarnados en nuevos cuerpos, olvidados de su existencia anterior”, PC II, 255.

1.3 Memory and Oblivion in *Donde habite el olvido* and *Invocaciones*

La razón era vuestra, mis amigos:
Es el olvido la verdad más alta.
De todos esos años ya pasados,
Llevándose mi vida, sólo quedan,
Como cirio que arde en cueva oscura
[...]
Recuerdos destinados a morir de mi olvido.
L.C., “*Apología pro vita sua*”

Given the existential importance assumed by desire in *Los placeres prohibidos*, the loss and failure of love for the second time in *La realidad y el deseo* imprisons Cernuda in a vacuous and numb state. In the epigraph that accompanies the book, in which he sarcastically likens love to the mating of hedgehogs, he asks

¿Qué queda de las alegrías y penas del amor cuando éste desaparece? Nada, o peor que nada; queda el recuerdo de un olvido. Y menos mal cuando no lo punza la sombra de aquellas espinas; de aquellas espinas, ya sabéis.⁴³

Las siguientes páginas son el recuerdo de un olvido.
(RD, 199)

His assertion that “Nada, o peor que nada” remains following the passage of love recalls his claim in “Vieja ribera” that “un amor está dentro de otro./Como el olvido está dentro del olvido” (165) and invites the reader to detect and descend into his complex exploration of the concept of oblivion. Similarly, the description of the seventeen poems as the “recuerdo de un olvido” alerts the reader to the intricate dialogue that takes place between recall and forgetting throughout the book. In the book’s opening poem the poet seeks to escape from the recollection of desire and dissolve his existence into a death-like state. As numerous critics have observed,

⁴³ Zubiaur (2002: 63, n51) notes that the epigraph comes from Schopenhauer’s *Parerga und Paralipomena* II. He offers a translation from the original: “Una sociedad de puercoespines se apretujó, en un frío día de invierno, muy próximos y juntos, para protegerse del helamiento mediante el calor recíproco. Sin embargo, pronto sintieron los pinchazos recíprocos, lo cual les alejó de nuevo uno del otro. Ahora bien, cuando la necesidad de calentarse les hacía juntarse de nuevo, se repetía aquel segundo mal, de modo que eran arrojados alternativamente entre ambos sufrimientos, hasta que hubieron descubierto una distancia moderada entre uno y otro, en la que mejor podían soportarlo. –Así empuja la necesidad de sociedad, nacida del vacío y la monotonía del propio interior, a los hombres uno hacia el otro; pero sus muchas cualidades repulsivas e inaguantables defectos les repelen de nuevo uno del otro”.

Cernuda uses Bécquer's *rima* LXVI as the poem's point of departure.⁴⁴ In the second stanza of the *rima* Bécquer asks

¿Adónde voy? El más sombrío y triste
de los páramos cruza;
valle de eternas nieves y de eternas
melancólicas brumas.
En donde esté una piedra solitaria
sin inscripción alguna,
donde habite el olvido,
allí estará mi tumba.⁴⁵

Far from simply replicating the *rima*, Cernuda's poem deepens and nuances Bécquer's description of the locus of oblivion. Whereas the speaker in Bécquer's *rima* regrets the fact that his life ends with an inscriptionless stone, the speaker in Cernuda's text yearns for his identity to be contracted to the mere *memory* of a stone. By imagining himself as the memory of a static tombstone, buried and forgotten among nettles, the poet negates the fluid, elemental and dynamic world of desire celebrated throughout *Los placeres prohibidos*. In view of the importance of the poem, I will quote it in full:

Donde habite el olvido,
En los vastos jardines sin aurora;
Donde yo sólo sea
Memoria de una piedra sepultada entre ortigas
Sobre la cual el viento escapa a sus insomnios.

Donde mi nombre deje
Al cuerpo que designa en brazos de los siglos,
Donde el deseo no exista.

En esa gran región donde el amor, ángel terrible,
No esconda como acero
En mi pecho su ala,
Sonriendo lleno de gracia aérea mientras crece el tormento.

Allá donde termine este afán que exige un dueño a imagen suya,
Sometiendo a otra vida su vida,
Sin más horizonte que otros ojos frente a frente.

⁴⁴ See Ulacia (1984: 99), see Harris (1973: 60), see Jiménez-Fajardo (1978: 38).

⁴⁵ Bécquer (1946: 464-65).

Donde penas y dichas no sean más que nombres,
Cielo y tierra nativos en torno de un recuerdo;
Donde al fin quede libre sin saberlo yo mismo,
Disuelto en niebla, ausencia,
Ausencia leve como carne de niño.

Allá, allá lejos;
Donde habite el olvido.
(201)

Given that memory speaks directly to the temporal axis of identity, the speaker attempts to evade recollection by imagining the vast windswept gardens of oblivion as free from time, “sin aurora”, and by structuring the poem around the spatial marker “Donde”. The poem’s opening stanza contains several references to concrete aspects of reality: “jardines”, “piedra”, “ortigas”. The second stanza, however, moves to a more abstract realm as the speaker envisages his name being separated from his body: “Donde mi nombre deje/Al cuerpo que designa en brazos de los siglos”. The reference to the distant location of oblivion (“*Allá* donde termine”; my emphasis) signals the speaker’s desire to escape from the tyranny of desire into a remote and dematerialised world in which suffering and happiness become mere “nombres”. Jiménez-Fajardo acutely observes that the poem’s main theme, the suppression of erotic desire, is reflected by the absence of any direct reference in the text to the speaker’s wishes. He observes that the elimination of phrases such as “I want to go where” or “I would like to go” gives greater emphasis to the object of the wish while also obliging the reader to “fill in’ the missing statement” (1978: 39). Richard Seybolt also notes that the poem is composed of “a series of adverbial clauses that constitute a chain of incomplete sentences” (1986-87: 130). As the reader waits for the independent clauses to appear, the linguistic disjunction opens up gaps, silences and absences in the text itself. Cernuda also multiplies negatives throughout the poem as he equates oblivion with the cessation of narcissistic desire. The insistent use of negation (“no exista”, “No esconda”, “Donde penas y dichas *no* sean más que nombres”; my emphasis) imbues the poem with an increasing air of levity and detachment from the material world. The poem’s process of abstraction reaches its peak in the closing two stanzas through the reiteration of the noun “ausencia” and the repeated reference to the distant location of oblivion: “Allá, allá lejos;/Donde habite el olvido”.

Rather than simply referring to the poet’s desire to forget the past and escape from the memory of desire, in *Donde habite el olvido* “olvido” becomes a subtle and

polysemic term. As the poet meditates on the all-consuming and dual nature of love, which is both divine and demonic, in the second and sixth poems of the collection oblivion signals the negation, death and dissolution of the individual self within *Deseo*. In the second poem of the collection (RD, 202), which is singularly difficult to analyse, the poet defines desire as “ese azulado afán” which rises towards “las estrellas futuras”:

Como una vela sobre el mar
Resume ese azulado afán que se levanta
Hasta las estrellas futuras,
Hecho escala de olas
Por donde pies divinos descienden al abismo,
También tu forma misma,
Ángel, demonio, sueño de un amor soñado,
Resumen en mí un afán que en otro tiempo levantaba
Hasta las nubes sus olas melancólicas.
(202)

The stanza interweaves the spiritual and the erotic, the divine and the demonic dimensions of desire in a highly subtle and complex manner. The references to light and elevation (“ese azulado afán que se levanta”, “estrellas futuras”) are juxtaposed in the central section of the stanza with a description of “pies divinos” which descend into an abyss. In the second stanza the speaker contemplates the sea and longs to descend into its waves:

Sintiendo todavía los pulsos de ese afán,
Yo, el más enamorado,
En las orillas del amor,
Sin que una luz me vea
Definitivamente muerto o vivo,
Contemplo sus olas y quisiera anegarme,
Deseando perdidamente
Descender, como los ángeles aquellos por la escala de espuma,
Hasta el fondo del mismo amor que ningún hombre ha visto.
(202)

There exists an equally delicate balance between being and non-being, life and death in the sixth poem of the collection. The poet claims that

El mar es un olvido,

Una canción, un labio;
El mar es un amante,
Fiel respuesta al deseo.
[...]
Es como un ruiseñor,
Y sus aguas son plumas,
Impulsos que levantan
A las frías estrellas.

Sus caricias son sueño,
Entreabren la muerte,
Son lunas accesibles,
Son la vida más alta.
(205)

As the sea's soporific caresses simultaneously "Entreabren la muerte" and lead to "la vida más alta", the use of the gerund in the poem's closing two lines suspends the poet and the reader in a realm in which the boundaries between existence and non-existence become indistinct: "Sobre espaldas oscuras/Las olas van gozando".⁴⁶

Despite the fact that the poet strives to forget his past in the opening poem of the collection, memories of adolescence and of desire persist throughout the book. Indeed, Harris underlines that it "is not only the memory of lost love that pains Cernuda, he is grieved just as strongly by the recollection of the innocent dreams of his adolescence" (1973: 58). The critic claims that a "concern with lost innocence is even more pronounced in these poems than in his surrealist poetry" (1973: 58). Commenting on poem VII (RD, 205-06), Harris states that it illustrates the "painful nostalgia Cernuda feels for the time of his adolescence; his youth is seen now, without its accompanying melancholy and repression, as the halcyon days of his life" (1973: 58-59). In keeping with this reading, in the poem's opening stanza the writer portrays himself as an ethereal and indolent creature: "Cosa grácil, visible por penumbra y

⁴⁶ In the closing lines of "El joven marino" (RD, 236-42) from *Invocaciones* death and oblivion become the ultimate form of the transcendence of the self and the final affirmation of the poet's desire: "Y cuán dulce será rodar, igual que tú, del otro lado, en el olvido./Así tu muerte despierta en mí el deseo de la muerte./Como tu vida despertaba en mí el deseo de la vida" (242). Bataille observes that there is a close connection between death and the erotic experience which he terms "la petite mort" (1957: 262). As in poem VI, he notes that within the erotic-mystic experience the division between life and death is a fragile one: "Ce désir de chavirer, qui travaille intimement chaque être humain, diffère néanmoins du désir de mourir en ce qu'il est ambigu: c'est le désir de mourir sans doute, mais c'est en même temps le désir de vivre, aux limites du possible et de l'impossible, avec une intensité toujours plus grande. C'est le désir de vivre en cessant de vivre ou de mourir sans cesser de vivre, le désir d'un état extrême que sainte Thérèse peut-être seule a dépeint assez fortement par ces mots: 'Je meurs de ne pas mourir!'" (1957: 262).

reflejo” (205). The poet also comments on the physical pain caused by this memory: “Y extraño es, si ese recuerdo busco,/Que tanto, tanto duela sobre el cuerpo de hoy” (205). Nonetheless, in the third stanza he offers a more nuanced view of his youth and he depicts the emotional vacuity and sterility of his adolescence which gave birth to but which failed to realise the dream of desire. He likens his present empty and frustrated existence to that of his adolescence:

Ni gozo ni pena; fui niño
Prisionero entre muros cambiantes;
Historias como cuerpos, cristales como cielos,
Sueño luego, un sueño más alto que la vida.

Cuando la muerte quiera
Una verdad quitar de entre mis manos,
Las hallará vacías, como en la adolescencia
Ardientes de deseo, tendidas hacia el aire.
(206)

Moreover, in poem X (RD, 208-09) he depicts his exilic state in terms of a fall from the experience of erotic desire rather than from a timeless period of childhood innocence. The repetition of “Bajo” in the poem’s opening lines conveys the pressure and constriction of his fallen condition while the violence implicit in the verb “arrojar” (208) encapsulates his sudden expulsion from his erotic Eden. The solitude of adolescence is now accompanied by the solitude of “amor caído” (208):

Bajo el anochecer inmenso,
Bajo la lluvia desatada, iba
Como un ángel que arrojan
De aquel edén nativo.

Absorto el cuerpo aún desnudo,
Todo frío ante la brusca tristeza,
Lo que en la luz fue impulso, las alas,
Antes candor erguido,
A la espalda pesaban sordamente.
[...]
Entre precipitadas formas vagas,
Vasta estela de luto sin retorno,
Arrastraba dos lentas soledades,
Su soledad de nuevo, la del amor caído.
(208)

Addressing himself in the second person, in the penultimate stanza he likens himself to a beggar who is condemned to wander in a self-perpetuating cycle of desire and memory. The four interlocking gerunds reveal the extent to which recollection and desire have become inextricably linked:

Quisiste siempre, al fin sabes
Cómo ha muerto la luz, tu luz un día,
Mientras vas, errabundo mendigo, recordando, deseando;
Recordando, deseando.
(209)

As desire exists only within the realm of memory, it becomes leaden and heavy, binding the poet to his fallen state: “Pesa, pesa el deseo recordado” (209).⁴⁷ Far from signifying nostalgia for a former Edenic childhood, in poems III and IV the act of recollection severs the poet’s identity between different existential and temporal planes of being. In poem III (RD, 202-03), the poet depicts himself as a mere echo:

Soy eco de algo;
Lo estrechan mis brazos siendo aire,
Lo miran mis ojos siendo sombra,
Lo besan mis labios siendo sueño.
(203)

The three parallel structures and the repetition of the neuter article “lo” reproduce visually and aurally for the reader Cernuda’s conviction that his identity persists only as a tantalising echo. The fragility of his sense of self is further heightened by the vagueness of the pronoun “algo” and by the transformation of his arms, eyes and lips into intangible air, shadow and dream. In the poem’s closing lines the use of the perfect tense illustrates the recent nature of the loss of love, underlining both the proximity and the inaccessibility of his former state of plenitude: “He amado, ya no amo más;/He reído, tampoco río” (203). In poem IV (RD, 203-04), Cernuda’s sense

⁴⁷ Cernuda’s depiction of memory as a leaden force recalls Bergamín’s evocation of the pressure of memory and oblivion, the past and the future in *Poesía, III: Apartada orilla* (1971-72) ([n.d]: 135): “Me pesa la memoria y me pesa el olvido./Me pesan los recuerdos como las esperanzas./Me pesan como un sueño pesaroso en que siento/el peso de la sangre caerme sobre el alma.//¡Ay!, con tanto pesar, con tanta pesadumbre,/mi corazón no puede, mi corazón se cansa:/precipita en mi pecho su palpitar oscuro,/llamando a mis oídos como a golpes de aldaba”.

of scission between past and present becomes more acute. The poem opens with the bold statement that

Yo fui.

Columna ardiente, luna de primavera,
Mar dorado, ojos grandes.
(203)

The use of the preterite in the opening line emphasises that the unity of his existence resides in a completed and irrecuperable past experience. The typographical space between the first line and the four nominal phrases, which represent a series of mnemonic flashes, also illuminates the degree of separation between past and present. The third stanza recalls the ascension and levity of desire: “Canté, subí/Fui luz un día” (203). As desire is “Arrastrado en la llama” (203), its loss is viewed in terms of a fall into the darkness of external reality: “Caí en lo negro,/En el mundo insaciable” (204). Like the previous poem, IV closes with the perfect tense, emphasising that the writer’s identity is no more than a flickering trace of a prior state of unity.⁴⁸ Rather than narrating his fall from desire, in the ninth poem (RD, 207-08) Cernuda evokes with remarkable subtlety and economy of expression the resulting state of ontological nullity:

Era un sueño, aire
Tranquilo en la nada;
Al abrir los ojos
Las ramas perdían.

Exhalaba el tiempo
Luces vegetales,
Amores caídos,
Tristeza sin donde.

Volvía la sombra;
Agua eran sus labios.
Cristal, soledades,
La frente, la lámpara.

⁴⁸ See Curry (1989: 116-18) for an alternative analysis of the play of tenses in this poem. The critic offers the interesting suggestion that there are two principal falls in the poetry of Cernuda, “the fall into temporality (birth) and the fall into consciousness of temporality (the break with adolescence)” (1989: 128).

Pasión sin figura,
Pena sin historia;
Como herida al pecho,
Un beso, el deseo.

No sabes, no sabes.
(207-08)

The description of the dream as “aire/Tranquilo en la nada” (207) suspends the reader in a still and weightless vacuum. As Seybolt notes (1986-87: 132), Cernuda fails to provide an object for the verb “perdían”. Thus, as in the opening poem of the collection, the poet permits the reader to experience, through the poem’s lack of completion, the void left by the loss of love. The series of nouns contained in the final two lines of the third stanza (“Cristal, soledades,/La frente, la lámpara”) deftly evoke the poet’s melancholy and solitary life which is illuminated only by the light of a lamp.⁴⁹ Given that memory severs his identity between past and present existences, in the eleventh poem (RD, 209-10) he rejects any possibility of returning to or recalling his past. As traces of his past persist like “una luz lejana” (210), he seeks a form of death or oblivion which extinguishes even oblivion itself:

No, no quisiera volver,
Sino morir aún más,
Arrancar una sombra,
Olvidar un olvido.
(210)

Nonetheless, in the final poem of the collection, Cernuda emerges from the book’s intricate spiral of recall and forgetting with the renewed conviction that desire is connected to the existence of a “mundo divino” (RD, 217).⁵⁰ As in poems such as

⁴⁹ The poem recalls Cernuda’s claim in ‘El espíritu lírico’ (1932) that “Sólo en la vacación del amor las fuerzas líricas se aplican para tender a la poesía el pobre lazo del verso. En tal sentido, el poeta escribe sus versos cuando no puede hallar otra forma más real a su deseo. Por ello un poema es casi siempre un fantasma, algo que se arrastra lánguidamente en busca de su propia realidad”, PC, II 48.

⁵⁰ It is important to note that oblivion is not simply a nihilistic concept which refers to the negation of memory and the eradication of the past in *La realidad y el deseo*. Ricœur offers a subtle distinction between negative and positive forms of forgetting. Whereas “l’oubli par effacement de traces” (2000: 540) entails the destruction or the erosion of the contents of memory, he claims that within “l’oubli de réserve” (2000: 541) oblivion acts as a positive resource open to recollection. Far from being antithetical terms, for Ricœur memory and oblivion are in fact inextricably linked as recall is made possible only by a prior forgetting. In this light, the poet’s wish for oblivion in *Donde habite el olvido* facilitates and gives rise to the process of recollection which he pursues throughout *Invocaciones*. Zubiaur also notes that oblivion plays a positive role in *La realidad y el deseo*. He stresses that “El desenvolvimiento de la singladura experiencial no puede darse sin Olvido: su ausencia supondría estancamiento. El gran afán rector, ‘Afán de amor y de olvido’, puede cobrar así también este sentido:

“Quisiera saber por qué esta muerte” (RD, 183) from *Los placeres prohibidos* in which he describes an adolescent as a “Huracán ignorante” (183) and a “recuerdo de siglos” (183), in this text he develops a pantheistic concept of love. In order to highlight its importance and to distinguish it from the previous texts in the collection, Cernuda gives this poem a title: “Los fantasmas del deseo” (RD, 216-18). As he re-examines and re-affirms his faith in the elemental nature of desire, he situates his personal experience of love in a broader metaphysical context. In “Los fantasmas del deseo” the poet strives, through memory, to order and unify his experiences and to gain a deeper understanding of the sacred nature of love, which belongs to the earth rather than to a specific person:

El amor no tiene esta o aquella forma,
No puede detenerse en criatura alguna;
Todas son por igual viles y soñadoras.
Placer que nunca muere,
Beso que nunca muere,
Sólo en ti misma encuentro, tierra mía.
(217)

The poet then declares that the true nature of life resides in the land rather than in the “radiantes cuerpos” (217) of his past and he longs to “ver unos instantes/Este mundo divino que ahora es mío (217). The poem closes with the assertion that personalised love is a lie: “La caricia es mentira, el amor es mentira, la amistad es mentira” (218). Only the eternal spirit of Desire, which renews itself like nature and which belongs to mankind as a whole, remains following the loss of love:

Tú sola quedas con el deseo,
Con el deseo que aparente ser mío y ni siquiera es mío,
Sino el deseo de todos,
Malvados, inocentes,
Enamorados o canallas.
(218)

In keeping with his vision of desire as an omnipresent force, in several poems in *Invocaciones*, originally titled *Invocaciones a las gracias del mundo*, the poet depicts desire as an integral part of the natural world. In the two delicate poems “El

el de darse al Deseo, sí, pero también al Olvido, para dejar atrás deseos viejos y poder abrirse a nuevos” (2002: 221).

viento de septiembre entre los chopos” (RD, 225-27) and “No es nada, es un suspiro” (RD, 227-28) desire brings him into contact with “esa zona de sombra y de niebla” which he claims in ‘Palabras’ “flota en torno de los cuerpos humanos” (PC I, 604). Just as desire is unnamed in “No es nada, es un suspiro”, in “El viento de septiembre entre los chopos” it appears only as an elusive and flickering shadow:⁵¹

Por este clima lúcido,
Furor estival muerto,
Mi vano afán persigue
Un algo entre los bosques.

Un no sé qué, una sombra,
Cuerpo de mi deseo,
Arbórea dicha acaso
Junto a un río tranquilo.
(225)

As the speaker listens to the song of the wind, the light alliteration of the “s” and the accumulation of phonic patterns in the eighth stanza serve to emphasise the “Susurrante armonía” (226) of the landscape:

Hundo mi cabellera,
Busco labios, miradas,
Tras las inquietas hojas,
De estos cuerpos esbeltos
(226; my emphasis)

As in the final stanza of “No es nada, es un suspiro” in which death transforms man into a mere “latir de aire” and a “Suspiro” within “manos poderosas” (228), the speaker seeks an all-encompassing form of oblivion. As he renounces life, desire and song, his wish for a state of dispossession is akin to what Valente terms in mystic writing as “un estado de receptividad y apertura máximas, de transparencia y disponibilidad absolutas”:⁵²

⁵¹ “El viento de septiembre entre los chopos” has strong connections with Bécquer’s *rima* V and *rima* X. See also Harris (1973: 122) and Ulacia (1984: 103-05). Ulacia notes that both poets draw parallels between music and desire. He compares the seventh stanza of “El viento de septiembre entre los chopos” with the seventh stanza of *rima* V: “Yo canto con la alondra/y zumbo con la abeja,/yo imito los ruidos/que en la alta noche sueñan” (Bécquer, 1946: 431). Cernuda writes: “Corre allí, entre las cañas,/Susurrante armonía;/Canta una voz, cantando/Como yo mismo, lejos” (RD, 226).

⁵² (1991: 93). Citing San Juan de la Cruz, he claims that “En tal estado la naturaleza se transforma; el espíritu queda transformado o transfigurado por el conocimiento experimental o por la experiencia unitiva de lo uno: *cesó todo y dejéme./dejando mi cuidado/entre las azucenas olvidado*” (1991: 94).

Altas sombras mortales:
Vida, afán, canto, os dejo.
Quiero anegar mi espíritu
Hecho gloria amarilla.
(227)

Throughout *Invocaciones*, then, Cernuda seeks to transmit through the written word his flashes of insight into the true nature and complexion of reality. He also undertakes a lengthy process of recollection and self-examination and dedicates the book's ten poems to aspects of his existence with which, as Harris notes (1973: 66), he feels a particular bond: the ideal of desire, his childhood and his poetic vocation. Crucially, the poet's re-appraisal of his past is closely linked to his ideas on poetry outlined in the theoretical essay 'Palabras antes de una lectura'. In this essay, in which he defines poetry as the expression of an elusive and mysterious "fuerza daimónica" (PC I, 605), he claims that it is the task of the poet to attempt to possess "la idea divina del mundo" (PC I, 602) and to "fijar el espectáculo transitorio que percibe" (PC I, 603). Cernuda declares that

[...] la definición es inevitable y se nos presenta casi fatalmente: la poesía fija a la belleza efímera. Gracias a ella lo sobrenatural y lo humano se unen en bodas espirituales, engendrando celestes criaturas, como en los mitos griegos del amor de un dios hacia un mortal nacieron seres semi-divinos. (PC I, 604)

Memory, then, plays both a metaphysical and an ethical role in *Invocaciones* as the poet creates a series of divine figures who enshrine the invisible and ephemeral beauty of the world, "el misterio de la creación, la hermosura oculta del mundo" (PC I, 602). "Por unos tulipanes amarillos" (RD, 228-30) and "A un muchacho andaluz" (RD, 221-22) submerge the reader in a mythological world based on the landscape of the poet's native Andalusia. Far from simply presenting the reader with a nostalgic, evasive or idealised vision of former lovers or of his homeland, in each poem the poet deals with his recollections in a highly creative and sophisticated manner. Through memory and poetry he commemorates the "truth" of desire, which, as in "Los fantasmas del deseo", is bound to the vital life-giving world of nature. In "Por unos tulipanes amarillos" (RD, 228-30) the speaker recalls how the fleeting visit of "algún dios" (228) awoke desire in him through the gift of brilliant tulips:

Veíamos tan sólo
Una luz virgen, pétalo voluptuoso toda ella,
Que ondulaba en sus manos bajo la sonrisa insegura,
Como si temiera la tierra.
(228-29)

The union between the poet and the “etéreo visitante” (228), sealed by “un aletear de labio a labio” (229), links the human and the non-human and leads to the speaker’s gentle awakening:

Sellé el pacto, unidos el cielo con la tierra,
Y entonces la vida abrió los ojos sin malicia,
Con absorta delicadeza, como niño reciente.
(229)

As the encounter elevates the speaker from his “yacija del mortal más sombrío” (229), he attempts to fix its “belleza efímera” (PC I, 604) within memory before he contemplates the “Dura melancolía” (230) occasioned by the passage of love. The contrast between the verb “palpitar” (229) and the adverbial “fija” (229) conveys his struggle to preserve the “verdad del amor” (229) as a live force which will persist in a memory that transcends his own:

Y dormí duramente la verdad del amor, para que no pasara
Y palpitará fija en la memoria de alguien,
Amante, dios o la muerte en su día.
(229)

In “A un muchacho andaluz” (RD, 221-22) it is the poet’s own memory which conserves and commemorates the “truth” of desire. The physique of the “muchacho andaluz” is indistinguishable from that of the sea and the immense sky:

¿Eras emanación del mar cercano?
Eras el mar aún más
Que las aguas henchidas con su aliento,
Encauzadas en río sobre tu tierra abierta,
Bajo el inmenso cielo con nubes que se orlaban de rotos resplandores

Eras el mar aún más
Tras de las pobres telas que ocultaban tu cuerpo;

Eras forma primera
Eras fuerza inconsciente de su propia hermosura.
(221)

The speaker recalls how nature sent the “muchacho” to him as a “verdad tangible” (222) and he alternates between the present and the past tense, transforming memory into an act of faith in the ideal of desire:

Eras tú una verdad,
Sola verdad que busco,
Más que verdad de amor, verdad de vida;
[...]
Creí en ti, muchachillo.
(222)

Rejecting the Christian world of “dioses crucificados,/Tristes dioses” (222), he venerates his adolescent pagan god. As the focus of his memory becomes the sole recollection of the figure, it binds him to his “dios” (222) and to his native seascape:

Cuando el mar evidente,
Con el irrefutable sol de mediodía,
Suspendía mi cuerpo
En esa abdicación del hombre ante su dios,
Un resto de memoria
Levantaba tu imagen como recuerdo único.

Y entonces,
Con sus luces el violento Atlántico,
Tantas dunas profusas, tu Conquero nativo,
Estaban en mí mismo dichos en tu figura,
Divina ya para mi afán con ellos,
[...](222)

In contrast to the poet’s faith in the “seres semi-divinos” (PC I, 604) of former lovers, in the venomous “La gloria del poeta” (RD, 230-33) he addresses his inner daemon and denounces the material values of a self-satisfied modern society which has lost all contact with the “elemento misterioso [...] de la vida” (PC I, 604). As Coleman notes (1969: 154), the devil is a metaphor for the poet’s “acute critical faculty” and “the force within him that drives him to write”. According to Cernuda, the poet and the devil are “chispas de un mismo fuego” (231). Both the poet and his creative alter-ego are condemned to exist in “una extraña creación, donde los

hombres/Se acaban como un fósforo al trepar los fatigosos años de sus vidas” (231). In the central section of the text, the speaker castigates the shallow conventions of society. Whereas the poet and his daemon yearn for sensuality and beauty (“Nuestra palabra anhela/El muchacho semejante a una rama florida” [231]), the speaker denounces the pragmatism of modern society. He scorns and insults the institution of marriage, man’s slavish devotion to the working week and his attempts to codify beauty:

Los hombres tú los conoces, hermano mío;⁵³
Mírales cómo enderezan su invisible corona
Mientras se borran en la sombra con sus mujeres al brazo,
Carga de suficiencia inconsciente,
Llevando a comedida distancia del pecho,
Como sacerdotes católicos la forma de su triste dios,
Los hijos conseguidos en unos minutos que se hurtaron al sueño
Para dedicarlos a la cohabitación, en la densa tiniebla conyugal
De sus cubiles, escalonados los unos sobre los otros.
Mírales perdidos en la naturaleza,
Cómo enferman entre los graciosos castaños o los taciturnos plátanos.
[...]
Mira cómo desertan de su trabajo el séptimo día autorizado,
Mientras la caja, el mostrador, la clínica, el bufete, el despacho oficial
Dejan pasar el aire con callado rumor por su ámbito solitario.
[...]
Oye sus marmóreos preceptos
Sobre lo útil, lo normal y lo hermoso;
Óyeles dictar la ley al mundo, acotar el amor, dar canon a la belleza
inexpresable,
[...] (231-32)

Acutely aware that a “solemne erudito” (233) will appropriate his words for material gain, the speaker professes his weariness with the “vana tarea de las palabras” (233). Speaking directly with the figure of the devil, he seeks oblivion, plenitude and release in death:

Es hora ya, es más que tiempo
De que tus manos cedan a mi vida
El amargo puñal codiciado del poeta;

⁵³ This line brings to mind Baudelaire’s “Au lecteur”. In the final stanza, Baudelaire addresses the reader as his double: “C’est l’Ennui ! – l’œil chargé d’un pleur involontaire,/Il rêve d’échafauds en fumant son houka./Tu le connais, lecteur, ce monstre délicat,/ Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère!” (1991: 56).

De que lo hundas, con sólo un golpe limpio,
En este pecho sonoro y vibrante, idéntico a un laúd,
Donde la muerte únicamente,
La muerte únicamente,
Puede hacer resonar la melodía prometida.
(233)

In the light of Cernuda's radical experience of dislocation in society, in "Soliloquio del farero" (RD, 223-25), "Himno a la tristeza" (RD, 242-46) and "A las estatuas de los dioses" (RD, 246-48) his celebration of solitude and his creation of an archaic and mythical memory based on his recollection of the ancient pagan gods provides him with a vital sanctuary in "Esta sucia tierra donde el poeta se ahoga" (RD, 233). Like "Por unos tulipanes amarillos" and "A un muchacho andaluz", "Soliloquio del farero" demonstrates the highly skilled and subtle way in which the poet recalls and appraises his past in his pre-exilic poetry. As Cernuda becomes increasingly preoccupied with the place and the role of the poet in a complacent, conformist and materially driven society, he draws on his recollections in order to define and affirm his poetic identity and create an ethical value system with which to sustain this identity in a hostile society. In "Soliloquio del farero", the poet assumes the guise of a lighthouse-keeper and considers the salient role which solitude has played throughout his life. The poem is an early example of Cernuda's attempt to project his experience onto an imaginary personage in order to distance himself from his personal emotions and his personal past. The opening stanzas recall his hermetic childhood. The child, still and silent in a dark corner, sought and found his "auroras futuras" (223) and "furtivos nocturnos" (223) in the quiet radiance of solitude. Its brilliant light shone into the "pobres guaridas de la tierra" (223), illuminating his existence:

Cómo llenarte, soledad,
Sino contigo misma.

De niño, entre las pobres guaridas de la tierra,
Quieto en ángulo oscuro,
Buscaba en ti, encendida guirnalda,
Mis auroras futuras y furtivos nocturnos,
Y en ti los vislumbraba,
Naturales y exactos, también libres y fieles,
A semejanza mía,
A semejanza tuya, eterna soledad.
(223)

As a youth, the speaker betrayed the child's commitment to solitude and his brilliant clear-sighted vision in the search for human company and transient worldly pleasures:

Quería una verdad que a ti te traicionase,
Olvidando en mi afán
Cómo las alas fugitivas su propia nube crean.
[...]
Te negué por bien poco;
Por menudos amores ni ciertos ni fingidos,
Por quietas amistades de sillón y de gesto,
Por un nombre de reducida cola en un mundo fantasma,
Por los viejos placeres prohibidos,
[...] (223-24)

Nevertheless, solitude permits the speaker to recover fragments of his earlier self and to regain the child's pure and privileged communion with the cosmos and nature:

Por ti me encuentro ahora el eco de la antigua persona
Que yo fui,
[...]
Por ti me encuentro ahora, constelados hallazgos,
Limpios de otro deseo,
El sol, mi dios, la noche rumorosa,
La lluvia, intimidad de siempre,
El bosque y su alentar pagano,
El mar, el mar como su nombre hermoso;
[...]
Te encuentro a ti, tú, soledad tan mía,
[...] (224)

The childhood memory of the opening stanzas then develops into a carefully elaborated meditation on the mission and the vocation of the poet and his role in society.⁵⁴ As he contemplates the sea, the lighthouse-keeper defines himself as a “diamante que gira advirtiendo a los hombres” (224). Isolated from humanity, he is only capable of expressing and extending an impersonal love towards mankind: “Y así, lejos de ellos,/Ya olvidados sus nombres, los amo en muchedumbres” (224). Through the figure of the lighthouse-keeper, Cernuda portrays the Poet as a seer and a

⁵⁴ Jaime Gil de Biedma offers a characteristically insightful and perceptive commentary on the poem: “En un principio advertimos que el autor transfiere al protagonista mucho de su personal vicisitud humana, de su propia historia del corazón; luego percibimos que es el poeta quien habla, no el hombre; finalmente caemos en la cuenta de que no nos está hablando sólo en nombre del poeta” (1977: 30).

visionary, the consciousness and the conscience of man. The closing section of the poem, like the first, exalts the supreme value of solitude, which the lighthouse-keeper describes as his “pasión” (225) and his “verdad solitaria” (225). By linking the opening and closing stanzas of the poem, Cernuda implies that solitude is the poet’s original and final destiny and the pre-condition of all his creative activities:⁵⁵

Acodado al balcón miro insaciable el oleaje,
Oigo sus oscuras imprecaciones,
Contemplo sus blancas caricias;
Y erguido desde cuna vigilante
Soy en la noche un diamante que gira advirtiendo a los hombres,
Por quienes vivo, aún cuando no los vea;
Y así, lejos de ellos,
Ya olvidados sus nombres, los amo en muchedumbres,
[...]
Por ti, mi soledad, los busqué un día;
En ti, mi soledad, los amo ahora.
(224-25)

Just as he claims that solitude is his “verdad solitaria” (225) in “Soliloquio del farero”, in “Himno a la tristeza” (RD, 242-46) Cernuda draws on Melancholy as his muse and sustenance. As seen in “Soliloquio del farero” solitude permits the poet to regain the child’s still communion with the world. Similarly, Melancholy preserves and returns to the lover “Con renovado encanto verdeante/La estampa inconsciente de su dicha perdida” (244). Acting as a bridge between the past and the future, the god provides man with an overarching and divine form of memory, permitting him to recuperate

[...] las horas
Del pasado; fuertes bajo el hechizo
De tu mirada inmensa
Como guerrero intacto
En su fuerza desnudo tras de broquel bronceo,
Serenos vamos bajo los blancos arcos del futuro.
(244)

⁵⁵ In ‘Palabras’, Cernuda speaks of “esa soledad esencial suya donde [el poeta] cree escuchar las divinas voces”, PC I, 601.

Moreover, as the speaker meditates on the poet's solitary and anonymous existence, he seeks strength and comfort in the restorative powers of Melancholy:

Viven y mueren a solas los poetas,
Restituyendo en claras lágrimas
La polvorienta agua salobre,
Y en alta gloria resplandeciente
La esquiva ojeada del magnate henchido,
Mientras sus nombres suenan
Con el viento en las rocas,
Entre el hosco rumor de torrentes oscuros,
Allá por los espacios donde el hombre
Nunca puso sus plantas.

¿Quién sino tú cuida sus vidas, les da fuerzas
Para alzar la mirada entre tanta miseria,
En la hermosura perdidos ciegamente?
¿Quién sino tú, amante y madre eterna?
(244-45)

The poem, inspired by his readings and translations of Hölderlin, is the first text in the collection addressed to the ancient gods of antiquity.⁵⁶ Far from being mere literary devices, the gods, as Harris underlines, assume an ethical and religious role for the writer as they personify “love, poetry, strength and beauty, the symbols of values and beliefs lost or ignored by modern man” (1973: 69). Indeed, in his introductory note to his translations on Hölderlin Cernuda declares that the pagan myths enshrine the sacred and suprahuman beauty of the world:

Siempre extrañará a alguno la hermosa diversidad de la naturaleza y la horrible vulgaridad del hombre. Y siempre la naturaleza, a pesar de esto, parece reclamar la presencia de un ser hermoso y distinto entre sus perennes gracias inconscientes. De ahí la recóndita eternidad de los mitos paganos, que de manera tan perfecta respondieron a ese tácito deseo de la tierra con sus símbolos, divinos y humanizados a un tiempo mismo. El amor, la poesía, la fuerza, la belleza, todos estos remotos impulsos que mueven al mundo, a pesar de la inmensa fealdad que los hombres arrojan diariamente sobre ellos para deformarlos o destruirlos, no son simples palabras; son algo que aquella religión supo simbolizar externamente a través

⁵⁶ Cernuda declares that he learned from Hölderlin a new vision of the world and a new poetic technique: “Cansado de la estrechez en preferencias poéticas de los surrealistas franceses, [...], mi interés de lector comenzó a orientarse hacia otros poetas de lengua alemana e inglesa [...] Al ir descubriendo, palabra por palabra, el texto de Hölderlin, la hondura y hermosura poética del mismo parecían levantarme hacia lo más alto que pueda ofrecernos la poesía. Así aprendía, no sólo una visión nueva del mundo, sino, consonante con ella, una técnica nueva de la expresión poética”, PC I, 640-41.

de criaturas ideales, cuyo recuerdo aún puede estremecer la imaginación humana. (PC II, 103)

The gods also represent the very sources of his poetic instincts. In the prose poem “El poeta y los mitos” (RD, 560-61), he recalls that

Bien temprano en la vida, antes que leyese versos algunos, cayó en tus manos un libro de mitología. Aquellas páginas te revelaron un mundo donde la poesía, vivificándolo como la llama al leño, trasmataba lo real.

[...]

Que tú no comprendieras entonces la casualidad profunda que une ciertos mitos con ciertas formas intemporales de la vida, poco importa: cualquier aspiración que haya en ti hacia la poesía, aquellos mitos helénicos fueron quienes la provocaron y la orientaron. (561)

Thus, the poet’s recollection of the ancient gods forms a vital part of his ethical enquiry into the metaphysical nature of poetry, his poetic condition and identity in *Invocaciones*. Cernuda offers a more comprehensive vision and lament for the lost age of harmony between man and the gods in the final poem of *Invocaciones*. Rather than seeking a force “más fuerte que nosotros,/Que tuviera en memoria nuestro olvido” (245), he transforms his own memory into a sacred space, ensuring that it becomes the repository for forgotten values. Although the statues now lie abandoned and mutilated in the confines of city parks, he remembers the delicate equilibrium between the gods and men. In the second stanza, he evokes a world in which men were a faithful reflection of the “verdad” (246) of the gods and in which life “no era un delirio sombrío” (246). He recognises that the “tiempos heroicos y frágiles” (247) and the former epoch of harmony between the gods, man and nature are now preserved and sanctified only within the “memoria del poeta” (247):

Reflejo de vuestra verdad, las criaturas
Adictas y libres como el agua iban;
Aún no había mordido la brillante maldad
Sus cuerpos llenos de majestad y gracia.
En vosotros creían y vosotros existíais;
La vida no era un delirio sombrío.

[...]

La lluvia con la luz resbalan
Sobre tanta muerte memorable,
Mientras desfilan a lo lejos muchedumbres

Que antaño impíamente desertaron

Vuestros marmóreos altares
Santificados en la memoria del poeta.
(246-47)

As he urges the statues not to judge man's fallen state, he conjectures that the faith of the poet "Tal vez [...] os devuelva el cielo" (247). The poem closes with a sharply drawn portrait of the poet who recalls the gods' former grace and glory:

En tanto el poeta, en la noche otoñal,
Bajo el blanco embeleso lunático,
Mira las ramas que el verdor abandona
Nevarse de luz beatamente,
Y sueña con vuestro tronco de oro
Y vuestra faz cegadora,
Lejos de los hombres,
Allá en la altura impenetrable.
(247-48)

In conclusion, in *Un río, un amor*, *Los placeres prohibidos*, *Donde habite el olvido* and *Invocaciones*, memory, desire and oblivion are tightly linked concepts which play a vital role in the configuration of the poet's identity and poetics. As the poet weaves his emotional torment into a vision of a radically unstable universe, in *Un río, un amor* he invites the reader to detect the interconnecting levels of discourse which he threads throughout poems such as "Como el viento", "Cuerpo en pena" and "Decidme anoche". His equation of the loss of memory to the loss of any divine order, the repetition of imagery relating to darkness, cold and immobility, and his ability to transform his personal sense of loss into a metaphysical sense of absence ensure that both poet and reader descend into the spiral of spiritual exile, travelling like the pale figures of "No intentemos el amor nunca" (RD, 156-57) "hacia nada" (156). Moreover, as the poet questions the function, purpose and stability of language, he exiles both himself and the reader from any secure notion of the written word. Deploying repetition and enumeration as well as adopting playful and ironic tones, poems such as "Vieja ribera" and "Drama o puerta cerrada" mock language's fragility in the face of flux while also opening up distressing silences in the face of time's flow. The act of writing becomes a self-defeating activity, forcing Cernuda to confide his recollections in errant words which stray further from rather than towards his past.

By sculpting his fragmented memories from *Un río, un amor* into carefully structured prose poems, in *Los placeres prohibidos* he creates a series of links

between the book's verse and prose texts. Consequently, poems such as "Estaba tendido" and "No decía palabras" provide the reader with retrospective meditations on the dynamic nature of desire which refuses the constraints of possession and, in "Te quiero", the limitations of language. Throughout *Donde habite el olvido*, Cernuda hones his use of language in order to depict both a dematerialised realm of non-being and his fall from adolescent desire. Just as the multiplication of negatives and his failure to complete independent clauses in the opening poem mirror his attempts to annihilate his past, in poems III and IV the alteration between different tenses reflects the disintegration of his sense of self following the expulsion from his erotic Eden. Poems II and VI also invite the reader to consider the richness and complexity inherent in Cernuda's concept of oblivion as he seeks to eclipse and transcend his own being in the memory of former erotic experiences.

In *Invocaciones* the poet transforms the disparate flashes of memory from *Donde habite el olvido* into "divine images" or "privileged memories" (Christopher Soufas, 1989a: 134, 159). In poems such as "El viento de septiembre entre los chopos", "Por unos tulipanes amarillos" and "A un muchacho andaluz" memory plays a dual role. Not only does it permit the poet to glimpse the hidden "'idea divina del mundo'" (PC I, 602), imbuing his wish for oblivion in "El viento de septiembre entre los chopos" with a clear mystical dimension, but it also enables him to affirm the ethical value of desire. Throughout the above poems, memory acts as a form of moral commitment to the "verdad del deseo" announced in *Los placeres prohibidos*. Moreover, as Cernuda becomes increasingly aware of the poet's isolation in society, he strives to exist, through his recollection of the "truth" of solitude and his memory of the ancient gods, within an alternative reality; exemplifying his claim in 'El espíritu lírico' that the poet's "sitio" "no está en parte alguna. [...] Es el 'extranjero'. Busca la realidad; es decir la verdad y la poesía. ¿Dónde están? Tal vez sea él mismo la verdad, él mismo la poesía" (PC II, 48).

CHAPTER TWO

Journeys into Memory: From *Las nubes* to *Con las horas contadas*

Cuando allá dicen unos
Que mis versos nacieron
De la separación y la nostalgia
Por la que fue mi tierra,
¿Sólo la más remota oyen entre mis voces?
L.C., “Díptico español”

2.0 Introduction

Michel de Certeau declares that memory is activated by and is inextricably linked to the experience of uprooting: “Comme les oiseaux qui ne pondent que dans le nid d’autres espèces, la mémoire produit dans un lieu qui ne lui est pas propre. Elle reçoit d’une circonstance étrangère sa forme et son implantation, même si le contenu (le détail manquant) vient d’elle. Sa mobilisation est indissociable d’une *altération*” (1990: 131). Throughout *Las nubes* (1937-1940), *Como quien espera el alba* (1941-1944), *Vivir sin estar viviendo* (1944-1949) and *Con las horas contadas* (1950-1956), the *altération* of physical displacement in Great Britain and America acts as the catalyst for a complex process of recall as the poet undertakes, through memory, a dynamic voyage of self-discovery. As the isolation of physical exile in Scotland, England and the United States focuses the poet’s self-contemplative gaze firmly on his past, he hones and refines the analytical role played by memory in the pre-exilic poetry of *Los placeres prohibidos* and *Invocaciones* studied in the previous chapter. In accordance with his cultivation of a restrained, depersonalised and subdued verse, throughout the four books analysed in this chapter Cernuda studiously avoids the sentimentality and excess of emotion inherent in nostalgia and appraises and recalls his past in a highly disciplined and meditative manner.

Nonetheless, as seen in the introduction to this thesis, critics have tended to equate his use of memory in his mature exilic verse poetry with nostalgia for Spain, for the “hidden garden of his adolescence” (Harris, 1973: 62) or for his childhood (Silver, 1965: 79). In order to provide a more nuanced view of Cernuda’s concept of memory, this chapter will analyse how his use of memory develops throughout the various chronological stages of physical exile. In the light of his geographical alienation in *Las nubes*, it will consider how memory anchors him in the nomadic

terrain of exile, permitting him to recover the landscape of his homeland. Concentrating on the final poem of the collection, “El ruiseñor sobre la piedra”, this chapter will argue that Cernuda deploys memory as a means of investigating his poetic condition and the sacred nature of poetry itself. Focusing on two key texts from *Como quien espera el alba*, “La familia” and “Vereda del cuco”, it will then consider how the poet draws on his recollections in order to define and analyse the nature of his personal identity. In view of the poet’s acute temporal awareness, the third section of the chapter will examine how memory becomes an unmoored, rootless and seductive force which gradually disrupts rather than unifies the poet’s sense of self. It will draw on both de Certeau and Ricœur’s theories on memory. This chapter will conclude with a close textual reading of “Nocturno yanqui” from *Con las horas contadas*. It will argue that in the final years of exile in the United States he uses memory in order to offer a critical reflection on the ethical quality and nature of his poetry.

2.1 Exile, Nostalgia and Meditation in *Las nubes*

During the Spanish Civil War, Cernuda composed eight poems, between February and October 1937, in which he avoided presenting a partisan or politically committed view of the conflict. Throughout these lengthy and often complex poems, he offers a moral rather than a narrow political interpretation of the war. He laments the fratricidal destruction of Spain, whom he addresses in “Elegía española [I]” (RD, 258-61) as an eternal maternal goddess, the “esencia misteriosa/De nuestra raza” (258). He also reflects upon the general futility of man’s endeavours. “Noche de luna” (RD, 251-54) considers man’s fallen condition and the transience of his existence. The moon, described as “Aquella diosa virgen” (251), impassively watches over the self-destructive actions of mankind and his “luchas fratricidas” (251). Cernuda’s ability to draw abstract and universal meaning from a single event, even an event as violent as the Civil War, prepares the reader for the meditative quality of his mature work and for the contemplative, often cerebral role played by memory in his exilic poetry. The elegies, originally published in *Hora de España*, were later incorporated into *Las nubes*.

The elegies also focus on the poet’s radical alienation and role in society, preoccupations which recur throughout Cernuda’s early and mature verse. In “A un poeta muerto” (F. G. L.) (RD, 254-58), written after the brutal murder of Lorca,

Cernuda denounces the hatred which he believes is inherent in the Spanish character. The dead poet, once a vibrant life force, is seen to be the victim of an arid land and a “pueblo hosco y duro” (254).⁵⁷ In the elegy, as in ‘Palabras antes de una lectura’ (1935), “Soliloquio del farero”, “Himno a la tristeza” and “A las estatuas de los dioses” from *Invocaciones*, Cernuda views the poet as a prophetic and semi-divine figure who seeks to illuminate the world of men. Despite the incomprehension of men, it is the task of the poet to redeem life with his “don ilustre” (255). The poet, possessed by an inner daemonic power, brings meaning and clarity to opaque words. Only the poet

ilumina las palabras opacas
 Por el oculto fuego originario.
 (255)

This concept of the poet as a potent spiritual being, blessed with a natural vitality and an “ansia divina” (257), plays a pivotal role in shaping Cernuda’s use of memory in exile. In keeping with his vision of the poet as a guide and truth-bearer, throughout his exilic journeys studied in this chapter he searches in his memories for sacred and privileged forms of knowledge, often discovering and quietly imparting ethical truths and lessons to himself and the reader. Far from simply seeking to escape from the harsh realities of exile in Great Britain or America into the nostalgic recollection of his youth or his homeland, he strives, through memory and poetry, to uncover “la verdad oculta” (RD, 371) of his self, experiences and craft.⁵⁸

Despite the trauma and shock of physical exile in Great Britain, documented in much of his correspondence during this period, throughout the book Cernuda surveys the desolate world of exile with a disciplined, trained and dispassionate gaze.⁵⁹ Woven throughout the book is a series of urban portraits dominated by images

⁵⁷ In ‘Líneas sobre los poetas y para los poetas en los días actuales’ (1937), Cernuda stresses that society is invariably hostile to the Poet. He states that “El poeta es fatalmente un revolucionario [...]; un revolucionario con plena conciencia de su responsabilidad. [...] En el pecho se debatían la convicción inquebrantable de la eterna hostilidad hacia el poeta en cualquier régimen político, y la adhesión, también inquebrantable, del poeta que en este trance español le ha tocado vivir a la causa popular”, PC II, 121-22.

⁵⁸ In his essay on León Felipe, Cernuda insists that a poet’s experiences and sufferings “no valen más ni menos que el dolor y la angustia de otro hombre cualquiera; cuando pueden cobrar algún valor singular es cuando quedan transformados en poesía, que es cuando desaparecen como tal dolor o angustia personal del poeta”, PC I, 159.

⁵⁹ In a letter to Nieves de Madariaga dated 19 December 1941, Cernuda claimed that his situation in exile in Glasgow was alleviated only by writing poetry: “La falta de luz es algo que yo no puedo

of entrapment and uprooting.⁶⁰ As in the prose poems “Ciudad caledonia” (RD, 594-95) and “El parque” (RD, 604-05) from *Ocnos*, “Cementerio en la ciudad” (RD, 295-96) and “Gaviotas en los parques” (RD, 309-10) evoke the desolate landscape of Glasgow. “Cementerio en la ciudad”, in particular, testifies to the acute powers of observation and contemplation attained and developed by the writer in his mature poetry.⁶¹ The opening stanza presents a precise description of a graveyard. The poet simply enumerates what he sees before him:

Tras de la reja abierta entre los muros,
 La tierra negra sin árboles ni hierba,
 Con bancos de madera donde allá a la tarde
 Se sientan silenciosos unos viejos.
 (295)

Although two silent old men sit on wooden benches, their human presence neither enlivens nor alleviates the bleakness of the scene. The observer’s gaze then widens to include the surrounding neighbourhood. The curt and clipped descriptions of the “barrio” concentrate the reader’s attention and compel him to focus on the poverty of the city:

En torno están las casas, cerca hay tiendas,
 Calles por las que juegan niños, y los trenes
 Pasan al lado de las tumbas. Es un barrio pobre.
 (296)

The second stanza describes the damp cloths which hang from the windows of tomb-like houses. This simple detail serves to highlight the dismal nature of the city

soportar, y noto ya el cansancio en la vista [...]. He trabajado y trabajo bastante. [...] Lo que me alienta es que sólo he nacido para eso: y sean cosas sin interés o con interés, para publicar o para perderlas inéditas, debo escribir de todos modos”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 308-09).

⁶⁰ Said offers a succinct definition of geographical exile. He defines exile as a discontinuous state of existence which forces an unhealable rift between “a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted” (2001: 173). Similarly Cixous underlines the importance of the bond which exists between an exile and his former land. Playing on the noun “la terre” and the verb “faire taire”, she claims that “l’exil fait terre/taire. Mais je ne veux pas que l’exil fasse taire, je veux que l’exil fasse terre [...]”. Je sens que cette tension, ce rapport contradictoire entre l’exil et la terre, est quelque chose pour moi de fondateur” (1990b: 215). Both these insights into the exilic condition echo throughout *Las nubes* in which the question of place and its relation to the poet’s identity arises with persistent urgency.

⁶¹ In ‘Presentación a una lectura poética’ (1946), Cernuda underlines that the poet must be able to contemplate external reality as lucidly and objectively as possible. He states that “el poeta debe contar mucho con esa posibilidad de desprendimiento humano, de no escuchar en nosotros sino lo que es resultado de contemplación desinteresada, despersonalizada, diría, de las cosas”, PC II, 770.

in which the “muertos/Clandestinos” (296) lie under worn gravestones. The penultimate stanza focuses on the barren terrain of both the graveyard and the city: “Ni una hoja ni un pájaro. La piedra nada más. La tierra” (296). The double negative in the poem’s sixteenth line underlines the lifeless and negated world of the city in which there is no means of forgetting or evading pain. Life itself is debased and sordid. It moves among the tombstones like a prostitute who “Prosigue su negocio bajo la noche inmóvil” (296). The poem closes at dusk, yet nightfall brings neither peace nor respite for the dead. Voices emanate from a nearby pub and a train rumbles past. Addressing the awakened dead, the speaker informs them that the train does not herald the announcement of Judgement Day. As he urges the disturbed bodies to sleep, he conjectures that “Acaso Dios también se olvida de vosotros” (296). This statement places the suffering of the anonymous dead in a wider metaphysical context. Not only do they lie in a prison-like cemetery, but they are also casually abandoned by an absent and forgetful God.

Just as the dead lie in an arid graveyard, the birds in “Gaviotas en los parques” are trapped in a “ciudad levítica” (309) composed of “piedras oscuras bajo un cielo sombrío” (309). Questioning their presence amidst the smoke and dirt of the city’s parks, the speaker wonders whether they have been blown inland from their native ports by an ill-fated wind or by “una mano inconsciente” (309). The use of the preterite underlines the finality of the birds’ exile from their nests: “Lejos quedó su nido de los mares, mecido por tormentas/De invierno, en calma luminosa los veranos” (310). As he listens to their cry which resembles the “grito de almas en destierro” (310), the speaker concludes the poem with the acerbic comment that “Quien con alas las hizo, el espacio les niega” (310).

The imprisoned birds act as a potent symbol for the writer’s experience of displacement in Great Britain which he examines in depth in “Impresión de destierro” (RD, 294-95). In contrast to the poem’s title, which prepares the reader for a general impression or overview of the exilic experience, the text is framed with precise spatial and temporal references as the speaker recalls a literary evening in London. The adjectives “viejo” and “gris” are repeated throughout the opening stanza, conveying with economic control his weary interior and exterior landscapes:

Fue la pasada primavera,
Hace ahora casi un año,

En un salón del viejo Temple, en Londres,
Con viejos muebles. Las ventanas daban,
Tras edificios viejos, a lo lejos,
Entre la hierba el gris relámpago del río.
Todo era gris y estaba fatigado
Igual que el iris de una perla enferma.
(294)

By comparing the view of London to a sick pearl, the contrast between the expanse of the cityscape and the delicacy of the pearl, whose purity and perfection have been tainted, imbues the poem with a sense of unreality. The use of synaesthetic description in the closing three lines of the stanza heightens the speaker's detached and dream-like state:

Eran señores viejos, viejas damas,
En los sombreros plumas polvorientas;
Un susurro de voces allá por los rincones,
Junto a mesas con tulipanes amarillos,
Retratos de familia y teteras vacías.
La sombra que caía
Con un olor a gato,
Despertaba ruidos en cocinas.
(294)

In the third stanza, the speaker's gaze rests on a nearby silent figure and he scrutinises his disquieting sensation of *desdoblamiento*. As in the allegorical poem "Lázaro" (RD, 289-93), in which Cernuda likens himself to a corpse awakening from death, the speaker describes himself as a "muerto que volviera/Desde la tumba a una fiesta mundana" (294). Crucially, the word "España" uttered from a corner of the room intensifies his experience of internal division. As he likens the word to a tear falling, "Densa como una lágrima cayendo" (295), the use of the gerund momentarily suspends the temporal action of the poem. The pause created in the stanza intensifies the charge and impact of the following line: "Brotó de pronto una palabra: España" (295). Outside he is pursued by "aquel hombre silencioso" (295) whose foreign accent is tinged with "Un acento de niño en voz envejecida" (295). As the shadowy figure stops and declares that "'España ha muerto'" (295), the speaker's fragmentary glimpses of his former self cease. The poem concludes with a stark moment of self-dispossession:

[...] Había
Una súbita esquina en la calleja.
Le vi borrarse entre la sombra húmeda.
(295)

Whereas the experience of physical exile entails a state of geographical loss, the splintering and the duplication of the self, in *Las nubes* memory permits the poet to recuperate the landscape of his past and attenuate, as the critic Sicot claims, the “sentimiento de ser extraño de sí mismo” (2003: 63). This critic observes that throughout his exilic writing, memory enables Cernuda to secure and affirm “‘el vínculo memoria/ identidad personal’, necesario en una situación de exilio en la que el sujeto, español y andaluz, se ve confrontado, especialmente en el mundo anglosajón, con una alteridad globalmente hostil” (2003: 63-64). Indeed, in poems such as “Un español habla de su tierra” (RD, 310-11) he creates a clear distinction between the external world of exile and the internal world of memory. Jolting the reader from the peace and tranquility of his recollections which evoke the “playas, parameras” (310) and “castillos, ermitas,/Cortijos y conventos” (310) of Spain, an anonymous Spaniard suddenly condemns the nationalist victors and laments the state of exile:

Ellos, los vencedores
Caínes sempiternos,
De todo me arrancaron.
Me dejan el destierro.
(310)

Deprived of a territory and severed from his past, the speaker recognises the vicarious nature of his existence, which is sustained only by recollection:

Amargos son los días
De la vida, viviendo
Sólo una larga espera
A fuerza de recuerdos.
(311)

Rather than evoking the general topography of his homeland, in “Jardín antiguo” (RD, 297) and the dramatic poem “Resaca en Sansueña” (RD, 277-81), the poet’s recollections cling to and recreate specific places from his childhood in

Andalusia. Repelled by the bleakness, materialism and utilitarian work ethic of Glasgow, Cernuda draws on his memories of his youth in Seville in order to create a more vibrant and serene southern world. In “Jardín antiguo”, the speaker longs to return to what Bachelard terms the “espaces de la stabilité de l’être” which are free from temporal flux.⁶² While describing the arches, magnolias and lemon trees of the hidden garden of adolescence, the poet deploys verbs which denote permanence and tranquility, such as “guardar” and “flotar”. Parallel structures are also repeated throughout the poem. As the speaker’s urge to awaken dormant senses grows more acute, the poet repeats “de nuevo” in stanzas one and two and “otra vez” in stanzas three and four. Moreover, as memory caresses the speaker, he attempts to possess the garden through sight and he explicitly states his need to view the static landscape of his adolescence. In the final stanza, the most intimate verb, “sentir”, leads to the poem’s conclusion. The speaker yearns to experience a return of youthful desire, although he gently acknowledges the illusory nature of this desire:

Sentir otra vez, como entonces,
 La espina aguda del deseo,
 Mientras la juventud pasada
 Vuelve. Sueño de un dios sin tiempo.
 (297)

The dramatic poem “Resaca en Sansueña” presents a similar, highly idealised view of the poet’s native land. Through memory, the poet retreats to a private haven and basks in the luminous landscape of Andalusia. Although memory clearly plays a nostalgic role in the text, it is important to stress that the act of recollection also allows the poet to elaborate a highly distinctive moral code, based on the beauty, humility and grace of the inhabitants of Sansueña.⁶³ Indeed, Cernuda weaves an

⁶² Bachelard (1967: 27). Bachelard underlines the tight link which exists between memory and physical space. He claims that “La mémoire — chose étrange! — n’enregistre pas la durée concrète, la durée au sens bergsonien. On ne peut revivre les durées abolies. [...] C’est par l’espace, c’est dans l’espace que nous trouvons les beaux fossiles de durée concrétisés par de longs séjours. [...] Les souvenirs sont immobiles, d’autant plus solides qu’ils sont mieux spatialisés” (1967: 28).

⁶³ The poem heralds a thematic return to the Edenic vision of Andalusia formulated in texts such as “A un muchacho andaluz” (RD, 221-22) and “El joven marino” (RD, 236-42) from *Invocaciones*, the short story ‘El indolente’ (1929) and the elaborate essay ‘Divagación sobre la Andalucía romántica’ (1935). In the essay, Cernuda writes: “Confesaré que sólo encuentro apetecible un edén donde mis ojos vean el mar transparente y la luz radiante de este mundo; donde los cuerpos sean jóvenes, oscuros y ligeros; donde el tiempo se deslice insensiblemente entre las hojas de las palmas y el lánguido aroma de las flores meridionales. Un edén, en suma, que para mí bien pudiera estar situado en Andalucía”, PC II,

ethical value judgment into the very fabric of the poem. He contrasts the dishonesty of urban dwellers with the innocent and indolent existence of the creatures of Sansueña:

Las mentiras solemnes no devoran sus vidas
Como en el triste infierno de las ciudades grises.
Aquí el ocio es costumbre. Su juventud espera.
La hermosura se precia. No alienta la codicia.
(278)

The final poem of the collection, “El ruiseñor sobre la piedra” (RD, 313-18), develops in greater depth and with greater skill the contrast between the utilitarian values of northern societies and the aesthetic values of the south. The poem, chronologically the first text in *La realidad y el deseo* linked to the figure of Philip II of Spain, provides the reader with a vital insight into the increasingly philosophical role played by memory in Cernuda’s exilic texts. As Harris notes (1973: 86), the Escorial, the “hermana de los dioses” (315), enshrines the eternal spirit of Spain evoked in the two “Elegías españolas” composed during and shortly after the Civil War. Just as the speaker in the first elegy refers to Spain as a maternal figure, in this text the speaker seeks solace and protection in the paternal walls of the edifice. The light of the Escorial, preserved in memory, is sufficient to erase the “sombra/Nórdica” (315) of the northern world of exile. The Escorial, an image of titanic strength, harmony and will, embodies the very life of Spain itself. The poem closes with the triumphant assertion that

[...] eres la vida misma
Nuestra, mas no percedera
Sino eterna, con sus tercos anhelos
Conseguidos por siempre y nuevos siempre
Bajo una luz sin sombras.
(317)

It is, however, vital to underline that the poem’s patriotic concerns are deftly integrated into a probing analysis on the nature of art, the poet’s task and the poet’s condition. The poet describes the building through a series of metaphors which highlight its contradictory characteristics. He deliberately contrasts the interior and

83. Harris (1973: 87, n41) claims that the most well known use of the symbol of Sansueña occurs in Fray Luis de León’s “Profecía del Tajo”, line 24.

the exterior of the building. Like a fruit, the edifice is “propicio y jugoso” (313) inside and “recio” (313) outside. The building is also likened to a serene lily and a nightingale. The delicacy of the lily contrasts with the solidity of the building’s stonework. Aware that this vision of the building is based entirely on memory, on a mental construct, the speaker then states that “Así, Escorial, te mira mi recuerdo” (313). Although the speaker vividly recalls the south of Spain, he directs his memory to the grey “sierra” of Castile where he finds a spiritual homeland: “Y allí encuentra regazo, alma con alma” (313).⁶⁴ Having deliberately controlled and manipulated his memory, the fourth stanza closes with a meditation on the ephemeral nature of life, the poet’s tragic idleness and the vital role played by memory in his creative activities and discourse in exile:

[...] Pero en la vida todo
 Huye cuando el amor quiere fijarlo.
 Así también mi tierra la he perdido,
 Y si hoy hablo de ti es buscando recuerdos
 En el trágico ocio del poeta.
 (315)

In the seventh and eighth stanzas, the speaker deftly intertwines a series of moral questions and value judgements into his celebration of the building which ensure that the poem becomes a carefully constructed meditation on the fleeting nature of beauty. The building is defined with two striking oxymorons: “Agua esculpida eres,/Música helada en piedra” (316). At once static and dynamic, transient and permanent, the monastery soars to the sky. For the speaker, the powerful and graceful architecture of the edifice is

El himno de los hombres
 Que no supieron cosas útiles
 Y despreciaron cosas prácticas
 (316).

⁶⁴ In ‘Mito poético de Castilla’ (1943), Cernuda throws some light on his decision to celebrate the Escorial in “El ruiseñor” and on his very particular brand of patriotism. He describes the Castilian mystic tradition as “la más noble expresión de nuestra tierra y espíritu”, PC II, 243. He then states that “mucho se ha escrito ya, quizá demasiado, en torno a lo que representa la mole de El Escorial, pero nunca se dijo, [...], cómo allí está expresado en piedra, y con majestad sin par, un esquema político equivalente al esquema metafísico que sistematizan los escritores místicos, que así como hay una metafísica castellana, y una poética, [...], hay también una política en todo conforme a éste”, PC II, 243-44.

Scorning the pragmatism of the north, which enslaves men, the speaker extols the divine uselessness and beauty of the Escorial. He claims that a modest blade of grass is worth more than industrialised society, denounced as “el horrible mundo práctico” (316). True beauty, both fragile and futile, is a dream, a fact which only increases its value:

¿Qué es lo útil, lo práctico,
Sino la vieja añagaza diabólica
De esclavizar al hombre
Al infierno en el mundo?

Tú, hermosa imagen nuestra.
Eres inútil como el lirio.
Pero ¿cuáles ojos humanos
Sabrían prescindir de una flor viva?
Junto a una sola hoja de hierba,
¿Qué vale el horrible mundo práctico
Y útil, pesadilla del norte,
Vómito de la niebla y el fastidio?
Lo hermoso es lo que pasa
Negándose a servir. Lo hermoso, lo que amamos,
Tú sabes que es un sueño y que por eso
Es más hermoso aún para nosotros.
(316-17)

The penultimate stanza then draws subtle parallels between the ideal poetic act, which is free from self-interest or vanity, and the creative efforts of the Escorial. The building, like the poet, exists in complete solitude and refuses to serve a practical or useful function in society:⁶⁵

Tú conoces las horas
Largas del ocio dulce,
Pasadas en vivir de cara al cielo
(317)

⁶⁵ In his essay ‘Poesía popular’ (1941), Cernuda states that “el poeta es precisamente un hombre que no sirve para otra cosa sino para escribir versos, y en esa limitación radica su propia grandeza. [...] El poeta [...] tiene una razón fatal, anterior a su propia existencia y superior a su propia voluntad, que le lleva a escribir versos, tarea que por lo demás ni él ni los demás consideran hoy como profesión social”, PC I, 472.

The Escorial exalts, without any need for praise or recognition, the divine world of beauty. Its hymn to beauty is compared to the gratuitous song of a nightingale: “Divinamente solo/Sube su canto puro a las estrellas” (317). The speaker then states that he addresses the Escorial in the same pure and selfless manner: “Así te canto ahora, porque eres/Alegre” (317). His song, his act of creation fuses with that of the Escorial, the nightingale and the builders of the Escorial. Crucially, then, Cernuda’s meditation on the Escorial permits him to affirm his faith in his own poetic enterprise in exile. Like the edifice and the lone bird, the exiled poet has no audience, yet he is driven, out of love, to create moments of divine, self-sufficient beauty. Thus, far from simply offering the reader a nostalgic vision of his homeland, in this intricate and multi-layered text, the poet affirms, through memory, the intrinsic value of the life of the spirit and man’s creative efforts. Moreover, by transforming a concrete recollection into an abstract meditation on the sanctity of art, his own poetic condition and vocation, he begins to construct a complex aesthetic and ethical value system with which he is able to affirm his poetic identity in exile, a task to which he returns in earnest in *Como quien espera el alba*.

2.2 Memory, Knowledge and Self-Definition in *Como quien espera el alba*

Ya restituye el alma a soledad sin esperar de nadie
Si no es de su conciencia
L.C., “Góngora”

Images of gardens, corners, fountains and patios recur throughout *Como quien espera el alba* allowing Cernuda to weave an intricate network of mnemonic returns to his homeland. The poet’s nostalgia for the enclosed garden of youth and the landscape of Andalusia, voiced in “Jardín antiguo” and “Resaca en Sansueña”, is also expressed in “Tierra nativa” (RD, 329-30) and “Elegía anticipada” (RD, 358-60). In both poems the poet yearns for and recreates the ethereal light and peace of his homeland.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, in the calmer and more philosophical mood of *Como quien espera el alba*, in which the poet frequently enters into dialogue with his *hombre interior* (see

⁶⁶ In a letter to Jacobo Muñoz dated 18 June 1961, Cernuda expresses his distaste for the poem “Tierra nativa”. He writes: “Acaso [...] ‘Tierra nativa’ [...] insista en la nota de nostalgia de la tierra nativa, que no quisiera subrayar mucho, tanto más cuanto que [...] no aparecerían otros donde suena la nota opuesta: la de antipatía o, por lo menos, de despego a la misma”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 938).

also Harris 1973: 158), memory becomes increasingly a quest for self-knowledge and an act of self-definition. Rather than lamenting the fact of physical exile as in “Un español habla de su tierra”, Cernuda uses the solitude of exile as a necessary condition for a profound and rigorous meditation on his personal history.⁶⁷ Consequently, instead of focusing on former places and monuments as in *Las nubes*, in *Como quien espera el alba* the poet’s mnemonic gaze narrows and retracts in order to concentrate on the exploration and analysis of his inner world.⁶⁸ In “Amando en el tiempo” (RD, 370), he states that life must be learned on one’s own and through one’s own efforts: “Pero la vida solos la aprendemos” (370). In keeping with this view of existence as a continuous cycle of personal discovery, in poems such as “La familia” (RD, 334-37) and “Vereda del cuco” (RD, 375-79) he draws on his own memories in order to reach a deeper understanding of himself and former events in his life. In both texts, memory plays a profoundly didactic and ethical role as the poet, addressing himself in the vocative “tú”, seeks to learn from prior experiences and discover the intimate truth of his identity.

The pensive tone, concealed depth and fusion of emotion and intellect in the deceptively simple poem “Jardín” alert the reader to the skill and control with which the poet examines his past in *Como quien espera el alba*. Whereas in “Jardín antiguo”, structured around a series of infinitives relating to sensory perception (“Oír”, “Ver”, “Sentir” [297]), the speaker simply wishes to recapture the silence and beauty of the landscape of his past, in “Jardín” the speaker meditates upon the transcendent calm experienced in the garden and on the passage of time. By carefully developing and deepening the subject matter from a poem in the previous book,

⁶⁷ In ‘Presentación a lectura poética’ (1946), Cernuda offers a stoic acceptance of exile. He also highlights its salutary effects for a writer: “Hace unos ocho años que dejé España, y la experiencia principal de esos años ha sido para mí, precisamente, el alejamiento de mi propia tierra. Digo alejamiento, y no empleo la hermosa palabra destierro, para evitar que otros pongan ahí la entonación patética que yo no pongo. [...] Para quien vive separado de su tierra, si alcanzó ya esa edad en que se ha completado la formación del hombre, ello no significa pérdida ni desventaja alguna. Con él lleva, fundido inseparablemente, el espíritu de su tradición, de su lengua, de su gente, pero desprendido de todo lazo de comunidad inmediata [...]. Y esto le permite conocer mejor su tierra, a distancia y en silencio, gozando [...] de magnífica independencia”, PC II, 770. In his essay on Unamuno, Cernuda comments on Unamuno’s creative output during his exile in France: “Fue época de bastante actividad poética para Unamuno, como es frecuente que ocurra al poeta cuando un acontecimiento exterior trastorna su vida”, PC I, 126.

⁶⁸ Many of the poet’s letters reflect his mood of calm resignation during this period. In a letter to Concha de Albornoz dated 30 January 1943, he claims that “Aunque estos años he sabido lo que en verdad puede llamarse soledad, ver, sentir, comprender lo absurdo e inútil de todo y el aislamiento completo en que el hombre vive, la locura común, que es el único lazo para la mayoría, he sentido al mismo tiempo un alivio. Puesto que todo es absurdo e irremediable ¿por qué no aceptarlo así?”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 334-35).

Cernuda invites the reader to observe the increased degree of detachment and objectivity with which he recalls and analyses his past in exile. The speaker's observation of concrete reality leads to a deliberation on the fragility of beauty and the ephemeral nature of peace and serenity. In order to facilitate a close reading of the poem, I will quote it in full:

Desde un rincón sentado,
Mira la luz, la hierba,
Los troncos, la musgosa
Piedra que mide el tiempo

Al sol en la glorieta,
Y las ninfeas, copos
De sueño sobre el agua
Inmóvil de la fuente.

Allá en alto la trama
Traslúcida de hojas,
El cielo con su pálido
Azul, las nubes blancas.

Un mirlo dulcemente
Canta, tal la voz misma
Del jardín que te hablara.
En la hora apacible

Mira bien con tus ojos,
Como si acariciaras
Todo. Gratitud debes
De tan puro sosiego,

Libre de gozo y pena,
A la luz, porque pronto,
Tal tú de aquí, se parte.
A lo lejos escuchas

La pisada ilusoria
Del tiempo, que se mueve
Hacia el invierno. Entonces
Tu pensamiento y este
Jardín que así contemplas
Por la luz traspasado,
Han de yacer con largo
Sueño, mudos, sombríos.
(333-34)

The speaker, located in a seated corner of the garden, instructs himself to study the light, grass, trunks and the mossy stone “que mide el tiempo” (332). The text, then, unfolds as a result of the injunction “Mira”. It is important to note that the command is also addressed to the reader. Consequently, the reader’s visual senses are sharpened as he too studies the surrounding scenery. The imperative ensures that the reader becomes taut and alert, fully prepared to follow the poet’s thought process as it develops throughout the poem. The still water of the fountain underlines the garden’s serenity while the equation of the water-lilies to “copos/De sueño” (333) imbues the scene with an ethereal quality. The reference to time in the opening stanza (“Piedra que mide el tiempo” [332]) also prepares the reader for the ensuing examination of the effects of the passage of time on both the speaker and on the garden. In the third stanza, the deictic “Allá” gently orientates the reader’s and the observer’s gaze upwards from the garden to the pale blue sky. The white clouds against the sky resemble the water-lilies on the pond, which creates a symmetry between horizontal and vertical planes of vision. The song of a lone blackbird introduces a sonorous element to the garden in the fourth stanza and a second injunction to study the garden appears in the fifth. The speaker qualifies the verb “Mirar” with the adverb “bien” as if aware of the transient nature of the garden’s beauty: “Mira bien con tus ojos,/Como si acariciaras/Todo” (333). The garden’s tranquility must be savoured, preserved in the speaker’s gaze. The second appearance of the command “Mira” also signals the beginning of the speaker’s analysis of his fleeting bond with the place. He considers the debt of gratitude which he owes to the stillness experienced in the garden. As he reflects upon the brevity of his moment of harmony in the garden, his aural senses are awakened once more. This time, however, he listens not to the blackbird’s song, but to the “pisada ilusoria” (333) of time which moves towards winter. In keeping with the speaker’s heightened awareness of time, the rhythm of the poem accelerates. Stanzas four, five, six and seven are all linked by *enjambement*, their uninterrupted flow mirroring that of time itself. In the final stanza, the speaker imagines that the garden and his own contemplative frame of mind will alter in winter, both rendered mute and somber. By closing the poem with the adjective “sombrios” (334), the poet deliberately contrasts the gloom of winter with the translucent white sky described in the third stanza. Darkness replaces light, silence replaces communication.

By deploying the vocative “tú”, the speaker gently but firmly instructs himself to be attentive to the lessons learned from this close scrutiny of nature. The “tú” form

of self-address and the writer's disciplined efforts to address himself as if the "object of someone else's observation" (Coleman, 1969: 139-40) permit him to distance himself from his experiences, his past and his own self, ensuring that his mature poetry becomes "an interior dialogue investigating his character and circumstances" (Harris, 1973: 145).⁶⁹ As Jiménez-Fajardo acutely observes, the use of the "tú" implies that the poet is engaged in a process of self-examination and self-discovery. He notes that given that this "teaching situation is aimed at the self, it is as if one part of Cernuda were lending the ability to speak to another, mute part of himself" (1978: 81). Certainly, in both "La familia" (RD, 334-37) and "Vereda del cuco" (RD, 375-79), the poet seeks to awaken and enter into dialogue with former or forgotten aspects of his existence, continually striving, through memory, to reach a more complete definition of his identity in exile.

The salient role played by memory in "La familia" is indicated by the dual repetition of the verb "Recuerdas" (334) in the first line of the poem. The poem opens with a question as the speaker attempts to recall former family suppers from his childhood. The scene is initially distant and dream-like, "remota como sueño al alba" (334). In order to clarify and define the precise contours and details of the memory, the speaker proceeds to describe the family gatherings. Through the act of writing, he relives and fixes flickering and remote recollections in poetry. The heavy silence and closed curtains convey the austere and insular nature of the family, described coldly as "Aquel concilio familiar" (334). The speaker also underlines the lack of communication between family members. Individual gazes do not connect with one another and he detects the haunting emptiness and extreme bitterness which lie beneath the surface of their ordered, ritualistic existences. The comparison of the meal to the mass underscores the oppressive solemnity of the family:

Presidían mudos, graves, la penumbra,
Ojos que no miraban los ojos de los otros,

⁶⁹ Hilda Pato notes that the "'tú' es *otro* en cuanto al hablante, y este hecho dota al discurso realizado en esa persona de la virtud de crear un grado de distancia entre el poeta y su experiencia. Se logra así una destilación del pensamiento, un distanciamiento de la emoción o sentimentalidad inmediata, que facilita la observación y la meditación" (1986: 231). She also makes the pertinent and interesting point that the use of the "tú" "no aleja al lector [...], sino que invoca su presta presencia en el *acto del poema*, invita su actuación y su juicio" (1986: 231). For Olivio Jiménez "[el] uso de una segunda persona, de un tú, apuntaría a la única alteridad posible, [...], de un poeta que canta desde los posos más hondos de su soledad" (1962: 58).

Mientras sus manos pálidas alzaban como hostia
Un pedazo de pan, un fruto, una copa con agua,
Y aunque entonces vivían en ellos presentiste,
Tras la carne vestida, el doliente fantasma
Que al rezo de los otros nunca calma
La amargura de haber vivido inútilmente.
(334-35)

His recollections then focus on the material goods which his parents gave to him as a child and on the moral code which they later attempted to instill in him and to which he could not submit. He recalls how he constructed his own personal ethical code based on his “difference”: his commitment to solitude and to the free spirit of generous, unshackled love. Whereas during his childhood, the core of his selfhood remained hidden and concealed, “como alimaña en cueva oscura” (336), through memory and poetry the speaker makes a bold assertion of his personal identity which is based on the relentless pursuit of his own truth:

Pero algo más había, agazapado
Dentro de ti, como alimaña en cueva oscura,
Que no te dieron ellos, y eso eres:
Fuerza de soledad, en ti pensarte vivo,
Ganando tu verdad con tus errores.
Así, tan libremente, el agua brota y corre,
Sin servidumbre de mover batanes,
Irreductible al mar, que es su destino.
(335-36; my emphasis)

It is precisely this personal vigilance and fidelity to the dictates of his poetic conscience which underlies and drives Cernuda’s lengthy meditation on love in the final poem of the collection, “Vereda del cuco”. The poem is, as Harris notes, an exploration of the poet’s “relationship with desire since the time of his adolescence” (1973: 125). In the opening stanza, the speaker recalls the frequency of former journeys to a spring first visited during his adolescence. The twin notions of a search and a journey contained in the stanza emphasise that for the poet the act of recollection is an open-ended quest for knowledge and truth. The speaker remembers how he used to gaze with silent wonder at his own image in the water, transfixed by its “encanto ineludible” (375). His reflection was at once similar and remote, “Propicia y enemiga” (375). The speaker then examines the memory of his former

narcissistic gaze more closely. The reader is confronted with an intricate play of self-reflections as the speaker contemplates his former self considering its destiny or its future self:⁷⁰

Cuántas veces has ido en otro tiempo
Camino de esta fuente,
Buscando por la senda oscura
Adonde mana el agua,
Para quedar inmóvil en su orilla,
Mirando con asombro mudo
Cómo allá, entre la hondura,
Con gesto semejante aunque remoto,
Surgía otra apariencia
De encanto ineludible,
Propicia y enemiga,
Y tú la contemplabas,
Como aquel que contempla
Revelarse el destino
Sobre la arena en signos inconstantes.
(375)

The stanza, then, progresses from the recollection of past events to an intellectual analysis of their significance. As the poet's gaze moves from external reality to the realm of cognition, he invites the reader to travel with him into his creative imagination or the "espacios interiores de la conciencia" (Brian Hughes, 2002: 238). The second and third stanzas, which focus on the recollection of the youth's and then the adult's visits to the fountain, follow the same structure as the first. Both stanzas commence with the physical act of traveling to the water and then elucidate the meaning of the journey. The second stanza recalls the adolescent's shy discovery of his tentative desire in the spring: "por esa pausa tímida aprendías/A conocer tu sed aún inexperta" (376). The third stanza concentrates on the man's visit to the spring. Having drunk from the water, he is unable to leave it, bound to its "fondo insidioso" (376). The juxtaposition between "tierra" and "luz" (376) in lines thirty-three and thirty-four neatly encapsulates the tension between the physical and metaphysical, concrete and spiritual dimensions of desire:

⁷⁰ Jiménez-Fajardo (1978: 93) also makes this point in his intricate close textual analysis. He acutely observes that "the multiplicity of mirror images is [...] continued in the very *dédoublement* represented by the 'you' voice" (1978: 93).

Vencido el niño, el hombre que ya eras
 Fue al venero, cuyo fondo insidioso
 Recela la agonía,
 La lucha con la sombra profunda de la tierra
 Para alcanzar la luz, y bebiste del agua,
 Tornándose tu sed luego más viva
 (376)

This fourth stanza serves as a bridge between the speaker's reflections on his own personal experiences of desire and his meditation on the supra-personal force of love. As in the opening line of the poem, the speaker again recalls the frequency of all previous journeys to the fountain: "Cuántas veces pisaste/Este sendero oscuro" (377). The stanza closes with a celebration of the eternal nature of love as opposed to the transitory physical forms in which love manifests itself: "Que el amor es lo eterno y no lo amado" (377).⁷¹ The quiet profundity of this statement prepares the reader for the ecstasy and rapture of the fifth stanza which rejoices in the spiritual stage of love. The fountain metaphor, as Silver underlines (1965: 115), is finally made explicit: "Es el amor fuente de todo" (377). The speaker celebrates the passion and the risk of love in terms which recall the paradoxical mystical language of Saint John of the Cross. He triumphantly extols the divine and radiant force of the fountain which sustains and purifies light, nature and even language itself:

Hay júbilo en la luz porque brilla esa fuente,
 Encierra al dios la espiga porque mana esa fuente,
 Voz pura es la palabra porque suena esa fuente,
 Y la muerte es de ella el fondo codiciable.
 Extático en su orilla,
 Oh tormento divino,
 Oh divino deleite,⁷²
 Bebías de tu sed y de la fuente a un tiempo,
 Sabiendo a eternidad tu sed y el agua.
 (377)

The final three stanzas meditate on the transcendent and cyclical nature of love. The speaker dismisses the fact that he has been exiled from the shores of the pool. With calm certainty, he states that former experiences of love will remain with

⁷¹ This is a restatement of the lines "No es el amor quien muere,/Somos nosotros mismos" from the seventh poem of *Donde habite el olvido* (RD, 210).

⁷² These lines recall San Juan de la Cruz's "¡Oh llama de amor viva": "¡Oh cauterio suave! ¡Oh regalada llaga!" (1940: 804). See also Harris (1973: 127), Silver (1965: 115) and Jiménez-Fajardo (1978: 94).

him, continually shaping his future and his identity: “Lo que el amor te ha dado/Contigo ha de quedar, y es tu destino” (378). The reference to destiny connects the first and the sixth stanzas, endowing the poem with a tight structural cohesion. In keeping with the speaker’s intuitions of the mystical life-giving power of love, the stanza concludes with the realisation that the death of the physical body is the necessary testament to a greater Platonic form of love:

Ni sin muerte es el cuerpo
Testigo del amor, fe del amor eterno,
Razón del mundo que rige las estrellas.⁷³
(378)

In the penultimate stanza, the speaker gazes at “otras formas juveniles” (378) which remind him of his former self and image in the fountain. He wonders whether or not his experiences of love are rekindled and mirrored in others and part of the continuous cycle of human passion and creative energy. The poem closes with a moment of profound calm. The speaker accepts that although his personal amorous experiences may have passed, his present and past selves (“Eres tú, y son los idos” [378]) seek and find the “realidad profunda” (379) of love through the eyes of a new generation. The “realidad profunda” (379) of love, like the phoenix, dies and is re-born with each newcomer to the water. It is vital to note that the closing stanza re-deploys the concept of the “fuego originario” (379) previously used in relation with the poet’s role as a truth-bearer in the Lorca elegy. By re-invoking the poet’s superior insight into the true complexion of reality, the speaker urges the reader to view the new generation as a spiritual community who search for, find and flee eastwards with the mysterious forms of knowledge discovered in the fountain. The poem’s conclusion also re-invokes the notion of a search, which links the first and the last stanzas of the poem. The quest for the pure flame of knowledge by the poet or the new generation is, like the quest for love, endlessly re-begun:

Aunque tu día haya pasado,
Eres tú, y son los idos,

⁷³ In a letter to Nieves de Madariaga dated 29 January 1943, Cernuda claimed that “El filósofo, el poeta y el místico tienen la intuición más alta de la creación, y las fronteras que les separan son demasiado sutiles para que no se confundan un poco”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 332-33). In ‘Málaga-París. Líneas con ocasión de un poeta’ (1931), he also stated that “la filosofía y la poesía son, en suma, las dos ramas más altas del árbol humano”, PC II, 31.

Quienes por estos ojos nuevos buscan
En la haz de la fuente
La realidad profunda,
Íntima y perdurable;
Eres tú, y son los idos,
Quienes por estos cuerpos nuevos vuelven
A la vereda oscura,
Y ante el tránsito ciego de la noche
Huyen hacia el oriente,
Dueños del sortilegio,
Conocedores del fuego originario,
La pira donde el fénix muere y nace.
(379)

Throughout this elegant and quietly triumphant text, the poet explores the origins of his sexual desire. The entire poem develops from a single recollection, revealing the skill with which Cernuda weaves his memories into an elaborate and carefully constructed thought process. The balance between recall and analysis, concrete detail and abstract thought ensures that the poem moves swiftly and seamlessly from the memory of the initial tremors of narcissistic desire into an exaltation of the mystical joys of love. Thus, by recalling and exploring his past, the poet uncovers its hidden truth, enters into a silent fraternity with others and creates a sense of universal meaning from his personal recollections. Moreover, by tracing the various stages of desire from youth to manhood, he draws together disparate recollections into a single aesthetic vision which exalts not only the metaphysical nature of desire, but also the very sources of his creativity. Crucially, the celebration of former erotic experiences is also a celebration of his craft which, as the speaker in “A un poeta futuro” (RD, 339-43) claims, is directly inspired and motivated by love: “Nunca han de comprender que si mi lengua/El mundo cantó un día, fue amor quien la inspiraba” (341).⁷⁴

⁷⁴ See also the prose poem “El acorde” (RD, 613-14).

2.3 Memories and Time: From *Como quien espera el alba* to *Con las horas contadas*

Lo lejano es lo íntimo
José Bergamín

Many of the compositions in *Como quien espera el alba* contain references to and reflections on the passage of time. The poet's concern with temporality is a recurring theme in both "Amando en el tiempo" (RD, 370) and "Mutabilidad" (RD, 344). Just as the speaker in "Amando en el tiempo" melancholically accepts the transience of youthful beauty, the brief text "Mutabilidad" meditates on the fleeting nature of beauty and desire. The poet's temporal consciousness has an important effect on his mnemonic discourse and his treatment of memory in *Como quien espera el alba* and in the subsequent collections analysed in this chapter, *Vivir sin estar viviendo* and *Con las horas contadas*. As the distance between the poet and his memories grows and his awareness of time intensifies, memory enters into what Ricœur calls a dialectic of "appropriation and distanciation", simultaneously drawing the writer towards and exiling him from his past.⁷⁵ In "Primavera vieja" (RD, 349-50) the speaker realises that a return to his homeland will induce a somnambulant-like state, which is at once seductive and deceptive: "Pasar aquellas calles, mientras crece,/La luna por el aire, será soñar despierto" (349). Deploying the future tense he projects himself into his past, imagining the cry of swallows and "la honda voz de la tierra" (349). He then switches from the future to the conditional tense as he considers the fragility of the return, possible only in a hypothetical realm. Depicting himself as a "fantasma/Que vuelve" (349) he concedes that the return would illuminate only life's beauty and futility: "llorarías pensando/Cuán bella fue la vida y cuán inútil" (349). In "Hacia la tierra" (RD, 361-62), the speaker explores how the paradisiacal terrain of youth becomes both a haven and a trap. He declares that

Posibles paraísos
O infiernos ya no entiende
El alma sino en tierra. (362)

⁷⁵ Ricœur (1976: 43). For a detailed analysis of the interaction between Cernuda's temporal awareness and his treatment of memory, see 'Memories and the Problem of Time' in Harris (1973: 130-37). For a brief but concise examination of the changing role of memory from *Las nubes* to *Desolación de la quimera*, see Sicot's 'Cernuda y los avatares de la memoria' (2003: 53-61).

Using a series of fleeting images, he attempts to define the vague “Algo” (361) which severs him from scenes of youth. The *enjambement* and the physical space between the first and the second stanzas serve to intensify the growing separation between the speaker and his past:

Cuando tiempo y distancia
Engañan los recuerdos,
¿Quién lo ignora?, es amargo
Volver. Porque interpuesto

Algo está entre los ojos
Y la imagen primera,
Mudando duramente
Amor en extrañeza.

Es acaso un espacio
Vacío, una luz ida,
Ajada en toda cosa
Ya la hermosura viva.
(361)

Thus, in *Como quien espera el alba*, Cernuda’s mnemonic returns steadily disturb the solidity of his carefully chiselled “recuerdos” in *Las nubes*. Indeed, de Certeau underlines that throughout the process of recall, “les détails ne sont jamais *ce* qu’ils sont: ni objets, car ils échappent comme tels; ni fragments, car ils donnent aussi l’ensemble qu’ils oublient; ni totalités, puisqu’ils ne se suffisent pas; ni stables, puisque chaque rappel les altère” (1990: 133).

Far from storing or registering former places or states of being as in “Jardín antiguo” or “Resaca en Sansueña” from *Las nubes*, in “Otros tulipanes amarillos” (RD, 363-65) the poet’s memory responds to the sensory triggers of the present and becomes an elusive and fugitive force.⁷⁶ The bright flash of tulips in a misty British spring produces a disorientating series of recollections of former desire. As if preparing the reader for the ensuing analysis of memory’s pernicious power, the poet’s descriptions of the pale spring light confuse the ground between reality and dream:

⁷⁶ According to de Certeau, memory is an “anti-musée” (1990: 162), “déplaçable, mobile, sans lieu fixe” (1990: 131). He highlights that “Sous sa forme pratique, la mémoire n’a pas une organisation toute prête qu’elle caserait là. Elle se mobilise relativement à ce qui arrive — une surprise, qu’elle est habile à transformer en occasion. Elle ne se loge que dans une rencontre fortuite, chez l’autre. [...] La mémoire vient d’ailleurs, elle est ailleurs qu’en elle-même, et elle déplace. Les tactiques de son art renvoient à ce qu’elle est, et à son inquiétante familiarité” (1990: 130-32).

Primavera con niebla, amarga, sin perfume,
De verde y gris tan vago tal si el halo
De plata que la envuelve luz no fuera,
Más sueño; [...]
(363)

The use of synaesthesia also emphasises the awakening of the speaker's visual and aural senses, and the assonantal rhyme between "vivo" and "son perdido" (363) intensifies the sonorous call of the flowers:

[...], sobre la tierra anima
Tulipanes dorados, cuyo color tan vivo
Es como son perdido por el aire sordo.
(363)

Although the tulips have a strong sensual lure, the speaker struggles to locate the source of his memory and he frames the second stanza with sharp interrogations. The repetition of the demonstrative pronoun "ésta" (363) and the adjective "otro" (363) conveys memory's disruptive power, forcing two realities to occur simultaneously:

¿Dónde recuerdas tú de otra primavera,
En otra tierra y tiempo, mojada como ésta
Con lluvia leve, como ésta cifrada
En otros tulipanes amarillos?
Entonces algo más florecía, aunque no en tierra;
En ti. Tanta luz amarilla duele ahora,
O ¿no será el recuerdo lo que duele?⁷⁷
(363)

This text offers a skilled play of perspectives on a single memory. As the speaker deftly alternates between the general and the personal, objective and subjective observations, his narrative voice gains in depth and complexity. In the third stanza, he intertwines his meditations on lost desire with an examination of memory's seductive power. Reflecting on the cruelty of the "primavera joven" (364) which

⁷⁷ The pressure of memory in this poem recalls Bécquer's *rima* LXIII: "Como enjambre de abejas irritadas,/De un oscuro rincón de la memoria/Salen a perseguirme los recuerdos/De las pasadas horas.//Yo los quiero ahuyentar. ¡Esfuerzo inútil!/Me rodean, me acosan,/Y unos tras otros a clavarme vienen/El agudo aguijón que el alma encona" (1946: 463). It is likely that Cernuda had these lines in mind during the composition of "Noche del hombre y su demonio" (RD, 366-70). Having been awoken from his sleep by the Devil, the man states that "En la hora feliz del hombre, cuando olvida,/Aguzas mi conciencia, mi tormento;/Como enjambre irritado los recuerdos atraes" (367).

“precipita/Al hombre por el viejo camino de los yerros” (364), he likens memory’s insistent call to a wing beating against a window:

Mas ésta que tu pecho inerme siempre
Toca ahora, como el ala un vidrio,
No te seduce ya con presagios ilusorios,
Sino con unos ecos, con algunos recuerdos.⁷⁸
(364)

Rather than returning to a sharply defined person or place, the memory of past desire assumes the vague form of “aquella sombra/Lejana” (364) which “la mano de la muerte puso en fuga/Como la mano nuestra en fuga pone al pájaro” (364). Exiled from the fixity and security of memory portrayed in *Las nubes*, the speaker adopts the first-person plural form of address as he muses on the transitory nature of existence:

Nuestra vida parece que está aquí: con hojas
Seguras en su rama, hasta que nazca el frío;
Con flores en su tallo, hasta que brote el viento;
Con luz allá en su cielo, hasta que surjan nubes.
(364)

In the final stanza, he contemplates the threat of oblivion and questions both himself and the reader:

¿Qué empresa nuestra es ésta, abandonada
Inútilmente un día? ¿Qué afectos imperiosos
Estos, con cuyos nombres se alimenta el olvido?
(364)

Reverting back to the “tú” mode of address, the speaker concludes his internal dialogue by considering the pressure of memory. The poem concludes with a sharp imperative as he commands himself to accept the chasm between past and present:

Ya en tu vida las sombras pesan más que los cuerpos;
Llámalos hoy, si hay alguno que escuche
Entre la hierba sola de esta primavera,

⁷⁸ Coleman (1969: 57) notes the similarity between Cernuda’s claim that “Es cruel la primavera joven, precipita/Al hombre por el viejo camino de los yerros/Con ramas de cerezo lo enajena./Con viento del sur tibio lo extravía” (RD, 364) and those of T. S. Eliot from “The Waste Land”: “‘April is the cruellest month, breeding/Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing/Memory and desire’”.

Y aprende ese silencio antes que el tiempo llegue.
(365)

The poem's tapestry of voices and its intricate dialogue between recall and oblivion introduce the reader to the complex process of recollection and self-examination which takes place in the following collection *Vivir sin estar viviendo*. Cernuda started *Vivir sin estar viviendo* in Cambridge (1944-1945) and completed it at Mount Holyoke College in the United States in 1949. At this point in his poetic career, the middle-aged poet, acutely aware of the passing of time, becomes increasingly preoccupied with the recollection of and the search for his former youthful self. Whereas in *Las nubes*, he frequently drew on his memories in order to seek solace from the external world of exile, in this book the act of recollection intensifies rather than releases him from his exilic condition. As he strives to recall and repossess his earlier self, he is unable to reconcile young and old, former and present identities.⁷⁹ The reality of his ageing physique conflicts with the memory of "aquel amigo joven" (391). Consequently, he experiences a profound sense of inner alienation which he explores in the difficult and disquieting texts "El intruso" (RD, 391), "La sombra" (RD, 415-16) and "Viendo volver" (RD, 430-31). Throughout these poems, the writer draws the reader into his fractured and splintered inner world or, in his own words, the realm of his "conciencia/Desacordada" (RD, 391).

The intensity with which the poet recalls and scrutinises his past in *Vivir sin estar viviendo* is clearly illustrated in "El retraído" (RD, 399-400). Like the prose poems "Las campanas" (RD, 606-07) and "Pregón tácito" (RD, 612-13), this text examines the nature of memory itself. The poem reminds the reader that the act of recall is a creative activity which requires the poet to be alert and vigilant. Comparing himself to a child playing, Cernuda describes memories as tantalising fragments of coloured paper or a shard of glass. He also stresses that memory has no tangible physical form, but is a hidden mental process, evoked by an aroma or sound:

Sólo tienen la forma prestada por tu mente,
Existiendo invisibles para el mundo
Aun cuando el mundo para ti lo integran.
(399)

⁷⁹ See also Harris (1973: 137).

Active or passive, memories wait until the poet's senses are still and poised before calling him or being called. The process of recollection, which requires the "sosiego exterior de los sentidos" (400), is compared to an artistic one. The poet's "recuerdos" (400) lie dormant, awaiting rediscovery in the same way that the strings of a "vihuela" (400) await the deft stroke of a maestro to awaken their power and sculpt their "sonidos/Diáfanos" (400) into "temblor, canto" (400).⁸⁰

Cernuda enters into this concentrated and highly focused state of mind throughout the book as he meditates on the ageing process and his intricate relationship with his former self. Before examining the disconcerting series of poems mentioned above, it is useful to focus on "El árbol" (RD, 392-94) as it provides the reader with a succinct analysis of the poet's estrangement from youth. The examination of a secluded plane tree, sheltered in a "jardín murado y silencioso" (392), leads to the poet's contemplation of the various ages of man. The opening stanza artfully combines connotative and denotative descriptions of the tree. The first line of the poem situates the tree spatially and also hints at its mythical nature: "Al lado de las aguas está, como *leyenda*" (392). The poet then describes its powerful branches and its interlacing leaves. The last line of the stanza draws the reader's attention to the "sombra edénica" (392; my emphasis) which lies beneath the tree's thick canopy of leaves. As Jiménez-Fajardo observes (1978: 107), the reference to the edenic shadow ensures that the previous physical descriptions of the tree resonate with biblical echoes of Genesis. The third stanza concentrates on the spring flowers which encircle the tree, bringing with them the freshness and vigour of new life after "el invierno horrible" (393). The poet's attention quickly turns to the youths who visit

⁸⁰ The stanza also recalls Bécquer's *rima* VII. "El retraído" concludes with a celebration of the value of the contemplative inner life. It ends with the lines "Si morir fuera esto,/Un recordar tranquilo de la vida,/Un contemplar sereno de las cosas,/[...] Rescatando el pasado/Para soñarlo a solas cuando libre,/Para pensarlo tal presente eterno,/Como si un pensamiento valiese más que el mundo" (RD, 400). The final line of the stanza echoes San Juan de la Cruz's belief that "Un solo pensamiento del hombre vale más que todo el mundo", in 'Avisos y sentencias espirituales', no. 32 (1940: 746). As Cernuda notes, the same idea also occurs in Blake's poetry: "'Un solo pensamiento vale más que el mundo', escribe San Juan: 'Un pensamiento llena la eternidad', escribe Blake", PC I, 282. The value of a "pensamiento" is a recurring motif in Cernuda's mature poetry. In "Tarde oscura" (RD, 337-38), the protagonist searches for faith in thought as a means of counteracting man's futile existence: "Por estos suburbios/Sórdidos, sin norte/Vas, como el destino/Inútil del hombre.//Y en el pensamiento/Luz o fe ahora/Buscas" (338).

the water. He considers that highly sensitive individual who is able to commune with the tree, experience its power and mystery and feel its rising sap as if it were his own destiny:

Raro es aquel que siente, a solas algún día
En hora apasionada, la mano sobre el tronco,
La secreta premura de la savia, ascendiendo
Tal si fuera el latido de su propio destino.
(393)

The poet then analyses the effects of time on this gifted adolescent. He contrasts the carefree levity of youth, which is free from the burden of memory, with the mechanical existence of “los otros” (394) or the elderly. In the eighth stanza, he describes the undefined territory between youth and “los otros” (394). He declares that a pause occurs “en medio del camino” (394) and “La mirada que anhela, vuelta hacia lo futuro,/Es nostálgica ahora, vuelta hacia lo pasado” (394). The intuitive and responsive youth, once able to commune with nature, grows old and less alert. He is possessed by a “fatiga nueva” (394) and he struggles to recognise his own face and his own “conciencia” (394). Drawing on the image of the trapped bird, Cernuda inverts the secure properties of the nest, imprisoning the youth in a safe locus: “Tal pájaro extranjero en nido que otro hizo” (394). As he observes the fading afternoon light, the poet realises that the tree exists out-with the “engaño mortal” (394) of time. The poem closes with an intensification of the previous simile as the poet considers man’s fallen state: “Ser de un mundo perfecto donde el hombre es extraño” (394).

Cernuda returns to and reworks the themes explored in the above poem in “El intruso”, “La sombra” and “Viendo volver”, creating a network of connections between the texts in this book. Just as the youth in “El árbol” becomes a stranger to his former self, the speaker in “El intruso” meditates on his dislocated and fragmented identity. The glimpse of his middle aged face in a mirror disturbs his recollections of and his reflections on his youth. Although “El intruso” depicts a world of disorder, doubt and division, it is a polished and carefully structured text. The poem, structured on a strict system of oxymorons, opens with a hypothesis and a question as the speaker imagines that he is living the “life of another in another age” (Coleman, 1969: 177). The use of “acaso” (391) in the third line underscores the speaker’s uncertainty

regarding the authenticity of his own existence. The final line of the first stanza, “Extrañas ya la vida” (391), sums up the speaker’s temporal and existential sense of alienation. In the second stanza, the speaker searches for the center of his personal identity amidst the flux and the instability of the exterior world:

Como si equivocara el tiempo
Su trama de los días,
¿Vives acaso los de otro?,
Extrañas ya la vida.

Lejos de ti, de la conciencia
Desacordada, el centro
Buscas afuera, entre las cosas
Presentes un momento.
(391)

The disorientating sight of his face in the mirror occurs precisely mid-way through the poem, fracturing the “unidad del yo” and resulting in what Ricœur terms the “dissolution of sameness” (1991: 199). The face is described with three vague adjectives, (“vieja”, “Hosca”, “abstraída” [392]), conveying only its unsettling presence. The poem terminates with a series of inverted statements as the speaker’s old, sullen and preoccupied face separates him from the hopes and confidence of youth. The repetition of “no eres” (392) in the final stanza rings in the mind of the reader and as the speaker stares into the mirror he is led to a negative and continually receding destination:

Pero tu faz, en el alinde
De algún espejo, vieja,
Hosca, abstraída, te interrumpo
Tal la presencia ajena.

Hoy este intruso eres tú mismo,
Tú, como el otro antes,
Y con el cual sin gusto inicias
Costumbre a que se allane.

Para llegar al que no eres,
Quien no eres te guía,
Cuando el amigo es el extraño

Y la rosa es la espina.⁸¹
(391-92)

As indicated by the title of the text, in “La sombra” the memory of youth becomes increasingly distant and elusive. The poet equates the search for his youthful self to the search for a departed lover. Doubting the coherence and reality of his present identity, and unable to recall the “pena aguda” (415) of youth, he is left with a vague unease, a mute “inconsciencia” (416) which silences the past and exiles him to a limbo-like existence. As his impotence increases, the temporal locutions “ayer” and “ahora” (415) provide the poem with its only definite markers. By addressing the former youth in the third person (“El mozo ido” [415]) and his present self in the second person, the poet illuminates on a linguistic level the gulf separating the two. In keeping with his search for an intense, simple and concise verse, shorn of verbosity or artifice, Cernuda explores his relationship with his youth in clear and straightforward language:

Ausencia conocida, nueva siempre,
Con la cual no te hallas. Y aunque acaso
Hoy tú seas más de lo que era
El mozo ido, todavía

Sin voz le llamas, cuántas veces;
Olvidado que de su mocedad se alimentaba
Aquella pena aguda, la conciencia
De tu vivir de ayer. Ahora,

Ida también, es sólo
Un vago malestar, una inconsciencia
Acallando el pasado, dejando indiferente
Al otro que tú eres, sin pena, sin alivio.
(415)

It is, however, in “Viendo volver” that Cernuda offers his most skilled appraisal of the division between past and present identities. With the exception of the title, he deploys only the conditional tense, attesting as in “Primavera vieja” to the hypothetical nature of his return to his past. Nevertheless, unlike “Primavera vieja”, he does not recall or evoke any concrete topographical details. In the opening stanza, the speaker likens himself to a river, poised between ceaseless change and a fixed

⁸¹ Hughes notes the similarity between this stanza and T. S. Eliot’s “The Dry Savages” (1987: 195-96).

essence. By structuring the stanza on a series of antithetical terms, he conceals rather than reveals the scenes to which he returns. The parallel use of the conjunction in “Irías y verías” and “El mismo y otro” (430) creates a delicate and tense balance between fixity and flux:

Irías, y verías
Todo igual, cambiado todo,
Así como tú eres
El mismo y otro. ¿Un río
A cada instante
No es él y diferente?
(430)

The speaker then contrasts his nonchalant exterior with his secretive gaze, which is “La forma en que persiste/El antiguo deseo” (430). The gaze is light and capricious, alert and disdainful. It both draws him towards and away from objects. With cool detachment, he weighs up whether his former world is lost or gained, hovering in an unstable space between doubt and certainty, belonging and non-belonging:

Mirando, estimarías
(La mirada acaricia
Fijándose o desdeña
Apartándose) irreparable todo
Ya, y perdido, o ganado
Acaso, quién lo sabe.
(430-31)

In the fourth and fifth stanzas, the speaker describes himself being led “con pasmo indiferente” (431) to his past where he encounters the “tú de ayer, que es otro hoy” (431). He depicts his former self as “Impotente, extasiado” (431), alone as a tree and awaiting the arrival of a friend, unaware that “el amigo es él y en él le espera” (431). The poem closes with an impasse between past and present selves. Unable to communicate with his youthful self, the poet concludes the poem with the sardonic remark that

[...] la vida
Era una burla delicada,
Y que debe ignorarlo el mozo hoy. (431)

Cernuda's concern with the memory of his adolescence persists in the following collection, *Con las horas contadas*, begun in Mount Holyoke College and completed in Mexico. Although he initially believed that his residence in America would alleviate the difficulties of life in exile (see "La partida" [423-24] and "Otros aires" [416-17]), he quickly grew disenchanted with Massachusetts, particularly after his discovery of and frequent visits to Mexico during his summer vacations.⁸² Many of the compositions in this book meditate on the inaccessibility of the past, the poet's bleak existence in yet another hostile northern environment and the value and the worth of his poetic enterprise. In "Lo más frágil es lo que dura" (RD, 468-69), the past is sensual and tantalising, but remote and indistinct. The text opens and closes with a question as the speaker seeks to discover what remains of his youth. The experience of youth is reduced to the fragile scent of orange blossom. The soft assonantal rhyme in the fourth and fifth stanzas ("pasado", "extraño", "aroma", "memoria" [468]) deftly evokes the delicacy of the fragrance which envelops the speaker and leads him back to the time when youth looked expectantly and confidently to the future:

¿Tu mocedad? No es más
Que un olor de azahar

En plazuela a la tarde
Cuando la luz decae
[...]
Envolviéndote: aroma
Único y sin memoria

De todo, sea la sangre,
Amores o amistades

En tu existir primero,
Cuando cualquier deseo

El tiempo pronto iba
A realizarlo un día

⁸² In 'Historial de un libro', he writes that "La existencia en Mount Holyoke se me hizo imposible; los largos meses de invierno, la falta de sol (un poco de luz puede consolarme de tantas cosas), la nieve, que encuentro detestable, exacerbaban mi malestar. [...] Téngase en cuenta que llevaba algunos años de vivir *vicariously* (a eso alude el título de *Vivir sin estar viviendo*) [...]. Era un estado similar al de los personajes que Don Quijote pretendía haber visto en la cueva de Montesinos, y como ellos, sin pena ni gloria, me movía suspendido en un estado ilusorio que no era de vigilia ni tampoco de sueño. La consecuencia de ese vivir es que nada se interpone entre nosotros y la muerte: desnudo el horizonte vital, nada percibía delante sino la muerte", PC I, 656.

De aquel futuro; [...]
(468)

Despite its elusive nature, the speaker recognises that this scent contains the very essence of his existence: “Y ves que es lo más hondo/De tu vivir un poco” (469). The poem ends with a mocking question as the speaker is forced to accept the intangible and insubstantial nature of his past: “Un olor de azahar,/Aire. ¿Hubo algo más?” (469). In the ironically titled poem “Pasatiempo” (RD, 460), the writer offers a brief and curt summary of his solitary, time-bound existence in exile in which oblivion replaces memory and even the task of writing poetry appears futile:

Tu tierra está perdida
Para ti, y hasta olvidas,
Por cerrada, la herida.

Tu trabajo, en secreto,
Con moneda de viento
Pagado por los menos.

¿Qué hacer entonces, dices,
Cuando nada te asiste
Y el tiempo te desvive?
(460)

The dark brooding tone of “Pasatiempo” also dominates the somber texts “Limbo” (RD, 460-62) and “Soledades” (RD, 464) in which Cernuda castigates the materialism of American society and briefly doubts the value of his own craft. “Limbo”, which describes a bourgeois cocktail *soirée*, opens in an empty grey square and the poet remarks on the curious artificial nature of the scene: “Parecía, no realidad, mas copia/Triste sin realidad” (460). The interior of the house in which the social gathering takes place is as dark as its external surroundings. Even the colours of the paintings have become dull: “el color se escondía/En un retablo español” (461). As he listens to the superficial conversation of the imperious ladies and gentleman, the visitor overhears a collector boast about his acquisition of the first edition of a “poeta raro” (462). The poet’s work becomes another useless commodity in a commercially driven society, “Domesticado para el mundo de ellos” (462). Unable to protest, the meek and silent visitor becomes an accomplice in the debasement of art:

Y tú cobarde, mudo
Te despediste ahí, como el que asiente,
Más allá de la muerte, a la injusticia.
(462)

Acutely aware of society's exploitation and mistreatment of art, in the desolate "Soledades" the poet questions the purpose of leaving his poetic creations to an ill-deserving public. He doubts the worth of his poetry, his own self and he chastises himself for not having learned the value of silence. Words scatter in the air, replicating and resonating in a meaningless vacuum:

¿Para qué dejas tus versos,
Por muy poco que ellos valgan,
A gente que vale menos?

Tú mismo, que así lo dices,
Vales menos que ninguno,
Cuando a callar no aprendiste.

Palabras que van al aire,
Adonde si un eco encuentran
Repite lo que no sabe.
(464)

Nonetheless, in two poems in this collection, "La poesía" (RD, 462-63) and "Nocturno yanqui" (RD, 445-49), the poet's memory of his life-long commitment to poetry permits him to rediscover and reaffirm his faith in his vocation and in the poetic word. Both texts are deeply self-reflexive as Cernuda meditates on the demands of poetry and the ethical nature of his craft. "La poesía" infuses the book with fresh life, dynamism and energy as Cernuda celebrates his respect and reverence for poetry at various stages in his life. The opening two stanzas recall the child's obedient submission to poetry and the adolescent's delight in the creative task. Although the man briefly questions his "servidumbre" (463) to art, his rebellion is short-lived and he willingly answers poetry's call or the illusion of its call:

Pero después, pobre sin ti de todo,

A tu voz que llamaba, o al sueño de ella,
Vivo en su servidumbre respondió: “Señora”.⁸³
(463)

Cernuda also submits and responds to the discipline and rigours of poetry in “Nocturno yanqui” (RD, 445-49), which is, as Harris notes (1973: 164), a poem of existential analysis akin to “Noche del hombre y su demonio” (RD, 366-70). In this text, an interior monologue in the second person, the writer reveals his capacity for self-detachment and self-criticism as he meditates with searing clarity and lucidity, during a sleepless night in Mount Holyoke, on his intense solitude in exile, on his acute temporal consciousness, his sense of dissociation between past and present selves and his work as a teacher.⁸⁴ The poem, defined by the poet himself as a “soliloquio” (449), skilfully plays on the reader’s memory of Cernuda’s poetic corpus. As the poet seeks to resolve many of the pressing concerns and themes explored throughout *Vivir sin estar viviendo* and *Con las horas contadas*, he creates a series of inter-textual echoes with poems such as “Viendo volver”, “La sombra”, “El intruso” and “Pasatiempo”. In full maturity, the poet deals with his recollections in a highly sophisticated and subtle manner. He threads the memory of his former self, his struggle for self-affirmation and his previous creative activities into a text which critically appraises the nature and the function of his poetry. The metrical structure of the poem, like Manrique’s “Coplas”, is based on “pie quebrado” stanzas.⁸⁵ This refers the reader, as Pato notes (1989: 213), to the tradition of meditative poetry which deals with the problem of time and with the attempt to envision a transcendent purpose in the face of the ephemeral nature of existence. The writer, then, encourages the reader to draw on his memory of previous readings in order to gain a deeper understanding of the poem. In accordance with his search for a poetry which resembles the rhythm

⁸³ Gil de Biedma notes the similarity between the final stanza of “La poesía” and the closing stanza of Herbert’s “The Collar”: “But as I rav’d and grew more fierce and wilde/At every word,/My thoughts I heard one calling, Child:/And I reply’d My Lord” (1977: 33).

⁸⁴ Olivio Jiménez believes that this poem provides an outstanding example of the ethical basis of Cernuda’s poetry. He writes: “La dura historia de sus proyecciones éticas (el insobornable sentido de la dignidad, la búsqueda afanosa de su verdad, o de la verdad, la lealtad a su propio destino) se cuenta aquí con viril sobriedad, sin desbordamientos personales, con una decantación expresiva que evita la más leve sombra de languidez o desmayo” (1962: 59).

⁸⁵ In his essay “Tres poetas metafísicos” (1946), Cernuda praises Manrique’s ability to maintain a perfect equilibrium between the spoken and the written word. According to Cernuda, Manrique “representa una forma estilística para la cual la palabra es sobre todo revelación directa de un pensamiento, sin complacerse, como ya se complace Garcilaso, en las asociaciones que la imaginación puede efectuar con la palabra, prescindiendo de su significación inmediata”, PC I, 503.

of the spoken word, the language is succinct, spare, at times colloquial, the tone plain, conversational and unaffected. The text opens with a cursory description of the speaker's physical surroundings: "La lámpara y la cortina/Al pueblo en su sombra excluyen" (445).⁸⁶ The use of the verb "excluir" deliberately and decisively shuts out the encroaching darkness and encloses the reader in a narrow and circumscribed space, which sets the stage for the ensuing intense and highly concentrated meditation. As Sobejano acutely notes, the light from the lamp symbolises "la luz de la conciencia pensante" (1976: 100). The reference to the lamp also conveys the poem's central theme: the search for illumination through introspection and retrospection. The speaker's gaze swiftly moves from the observation of concrete reality to his own self. He commands himself to sleep, adopting a mocking, ironic and self-deprecating tone:

Sueña ahora,
Si puedes, si te contentas
Con sueños, cuando te faltan
Realidades.

Estás aquí, de regreso
Del mundo, ayer vivo, hoy
Cuerpo en pena,
Esperando locamente,
Alrededor tuyo, amigos
Y sus voces.
(445)

Paradoxically, the mention of "voces" (445) awakens in the speaker the need to be silent. As he listens to the tireless and fearful beat of his own blood, the contrast between the silence of the room and his heartbeat creates a moment of tension which is deflected and undercut by the mundane noises of the creaking wood and the whistling radiator. The speaker conveys his restlessness and disquiet through two simple nouns: "Un bostezo./Pausa" (446). The prosaic actions of yawning and glancing at his watch provide a concrete point of departure for his temporal meditations. He begins by recalling the time devoted to reading. He picks up a book, but realises that the most fruitful form of reading is now the recollection of once-read

⁸⁶ For an excellent, thorough and extremely detailed analysis of this poem, see Gonzalo Sobejano (1976). He likens the poem to Baudelaire's "L'examen de minuit" (1976: 106).

texts: “Mejor es recuerdo de unos/Libros viejos” (446). The reference to the watch, to the years spent reading and the speaker’s enumeration of the forthcoming seasons (“el invierno te espera,/Y la primavera entonces” [446]) ensure that the abstract concept of time assumes a vivid physical presence in the text. Stanzas six to nine are structured around a series of urgent questions and answers as the “tú” plays an inquisitorial role and forces the speaker to assess and face the isolation of his temporally constrained life in exile. In the ninth stanza, the speaker offers a dispassionate and clear-sighted appraisal of his situation as an exiled writer, deprived of a reading audience:

[...] tus lectores, si nacen,
Y tu tiempo, no coinciden.
Estás solo
Frente al tiempo, con tu vida
Sin vivir.
(447)

The poem shifts abruptly from the present to the past tense as the speaker recalls his lost youth, likening it to a bird which has flown from his hand. He then considers the time devoted to teaching. Crucially, it is the act of writing poetry rather than teaching which provides him with a measure of independence and dignity. He rejects the worth of teaching, aware that

Nadie enseña lo que importa,
Que eso ha de aprenderlo el hombre
Por sí solo.
(448)

The above statement contains a concise summation of Cernuda’s concept of poetry which, as seen in poems such as “La familia” and “Vereda del cuco”, involves the search for knowledge and self-understanding through the solitary, disciplined and concentrated analysis of past experiences. The speaker then recalls and reflects upon his commitment to art which is inextricably linked to his pursuit of personal values and his quest for self-affirmation through love:

Lo mejor que has sido, diste,
Lo mejor de tu existencia,
A una sombra:
Al afán de hacerte digno,

Al deseo de excederte,
Esperando
Siempre mañana otro día
Que, aunque tarde, justifique
Tu pretexto.

Cierto que tú te esforzaste
Por sino y amor de una
Criatura,
Mito moceril, buscando
Desde siempre, y al servirla,
Ser quien eres.
(448-49)

By recalling his unwavering faith in poetry, described as a “sombra” (448), the speaker realises that his present identity is intimately bound to his past history: “Quien eres, tu vida era;/Uno sin otro no sois” (449). Nonetheless, the discovery of his personal truth through the act of writing and through his intense self-examination brings little solace. He questions the purpose of keeping “la verdad del hombre” (449) for oneself as if it were an “inútil secreto” (449). Given that he defined himself as a writer without a reader in the ninth stanza, the series of interrogations in the eighteenth stanza subtly but incisively question the worth of the unread text and the unread self-analysis:

¿Mas es la verdad del hombre
Para él solo,
Como un inútil secreto?
¿Por qué no poner la vida
A otra cosa?
(449)

The speaker then instructs himself to continue his journey in the knowledge that his present identity rests on a lost “miraje” (449) or youthful myth. The poem concludes as it began with the speaker in complete solitude. He is accompanied only by his “tú”, his faithful interlocutor in exile, testimony to and product of his profound isolation:

Y piensas
Que así vuelves
Donde estabas al comienzo
Del soliloquio: contigo
Y sin nadie.

Mata la luz, y a la cama.

(449)

It is important to underline that the “contigo” (449) in the penultimate stanza is deliberately ambiguous. It could refer to the speaker’s “hombre interior” or to poetry itself, his sole companion throughout his soliloquy. The detached philosophical mood and tone of previous stanzas is suddenly replaced by a dry terse one as the speaker commands himself to switch off the light and go back to bed. The reference to the light refers the reader back to the opening of the poem in which the speaker’s sleep was disturbed by the need to think and reflect. The violence contained in the imperative “Mata” (449) underlines the speaker’s urgent need to rest and cease thinking. As Pato observes, the command is self-referential as it means to “get finished with the poem, or with all that started it (‘la lámpara’)” (1989: 214). Moreover, the circular structure of the text mirrors its central discovery: the truth of the speaker’s present self is inextricably bound to his past poetic trajectory, a truth which is at once heightened and underplayed by the curt, prosaic and matter-of-fact conclusion contained in the final throw-away line.

Thus, in the selection of texts studied in this chapter, Cernuda pursues a powerful mnemonic discourse which increases in depth, resonance and complexity. Throughout the bleak landscape of exile, explored in “Cementerio en la ciudad”, “Gaviotas en los parques” and “Impresión de destierro”, the memory of his homeland enables the poet to ground himself in a specific terrain and reassemble a sense of provenance and origin from the refractions and discontinuities of geographical exile. Although memory plays an evasive and nostalgic role in “Jardín antiguo” and “Resaca en Sansueña”, in the multi-faceted poem “El ruiseñor sobre la piedra”, the poet’s memory assumes an ethical function as he celebrates the Escorial, the epitome of the spirit of Spain and of man’s creative achievements. Through memory, the poet professes his faith in the fragility and futility of beauty and in the timeless world of art and poetry. Moreover, by praising the Escorial’s joyous hymn to beauty, the poet not only affirms his belief in his own creative task and artistic vision, but also in the power of poetry and language to redeem man from “el horrible mundo práctico” (RD, 316) of the north. As the poet comes to terms with and accepts the fact of physical exile in *Como quien espera el alba*, he invites the reader to accompany him on his

inner voyage of personal exploration. In “La familia” and “Vereda del cuco” he withdraws into his own mind, into his own “conciencia”, in order to search for the truth of his self in the quiet still centers of poetic thought. Faithful to his self-designated role as a truth-bearer, he seeks to uncover and illuminate hidden aspects of his identity and his craft through memory.

Whereas the rupture of physical exile stimulates the process of recollection examined in this chapter, in *Vivir sin estar viviendo* and *Con las horas contadas* memory in turn steadily re-frames and sharpens Cernuda’s response to, and understanding of, his exilic condition. As his temporal consciousness grows increasingly acute, he questions the security of his memory and personhood and undertakes a patient and steely process of self-examination. In “El intruso”, “La sombra” and “Viendo volver”, memory separates the poet from, rather than links him to, his former self. Consequently, Cernuda scrutinises the very nature of his personal identity, as the memory of the “mozo ido” (RD, 415) invites him to develop a heightened awareness of the stranger who dwells within. Nonetheless, it is vital to underline that the interplay between time and memory in his exilic texts does not simply result in a debilitating inner alienation and fragmentation. In the final poem examined in this chapter, “Nocturno yanqui”, the poet, alert and acutely self-conscious, provides the reader with a masterful overview and reflection on his divided identity, exilic existence and poetic enterprise. As he meditates on his craft, which reveals and contains his “verdad del hombre” (RD, 449), he entrusts both his past and his future to his poetry, to his poetic journey which transforms exile into a pilgrimage.

CHAPTER THREE

The Returning Exile: Memory and Meditation in *Ocnos*

¿Quién ignora la fuerza de un recuerdo y
de un olvido para formar un temperamento?
Somos hombres en tanto que podemos olvidar y recordar.
L. C., 'Divagación sobre la Andalucía romántica'

3.0 Introduction

The figure of the returning exile has been the subject of an international conference entitled *L'Émigration: le Retour* (1999) testifying to the richness and complexity inherent in the exile's "pulsión regresiva" (Sicot, 2003: 45). In the words of one participant, the multiple forms that the exilic return can take and the diverse interpretations involved in the concept of returning "home" after deracination can only be considered as "une aventure pluridimensionnelle et polysémique" (Clément Mbom, 1999: 167). Within this adventure Cernuda's two collections of prose poems, *Ocnos* and *Variaciones sobre tema mexicano*, offer a fertile ground for study. Throughout both books the poet undertakes a lengthy and varied process of recollection and restitution. The prose poems of *Ocnos*, written at different periods throughout the writer's exile in Great Britain, America and Mexico, were originally published in three separate editions: the first in Oxford in 1942, the second in Madrid in 1949 and the third in Xalapa, Mexico, in 1963. The first edition, based entirely on scenes of childhood and adolescence in Seville, was written during his exile in Glasgow (1941-1943). In *Variaciones*, published in 1952 as a result of his visits to and eventual residence in Mexico, Cernuda's memories are triggered not by his arrival in a hostile and unfamiliar environment, but by the recognition of his homeland in Mexico.⁸⁷

Despite the subtle and complex manner in which the poet recalls his past in *Ocnos* and *Variaciones*, as seen in the introduction to this thesis, prior critical

⁸⁷ Sicot also underlines the different ways in which memory operates in *Ocnos* and *Variaciones*. He perceptively observes that "C'est au moyen de la mémoire, travaillée par l'oubli, que le poète d'*Ocnos* retrouvait, en Angleterre ou en Ecosse, des moments de son passé. [...] Le processus est, dans *Variaciones*, sensiblement différent. C'est par la découverte de lieux familiers, bien qu'étrangers, que le poète se souvient" (1995: 319-20).

readings have tended to view the books as the celebration of an Edenic Andalusian paradise in which the poet's sense of alienation, whether internal or external, is assuaged.⁸⁸ Silver classifies them as “works of harmony; the former recalling the time before individuation and separateness, the latter apostrophizing a new conjunction of the several components of the lost Eden” (1965: 155).⁸⁹ Although he offers many insightful commentaries on *Ocnos*, he labels the texts as “essays in nostalgia” for Andalusia (1965: 65). This view of *Ocnos* as an evasive utopia and the strict equation of memory with the repossession of a lost paradise are substantiated by one of the early reviews of the book.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, in *Ocnos* and *Variaciones* the poet effectuates, in my view, a far more original return to the *lieux de mémoire* of his past than these interpretations suggest. In view of his ethical and metaphysical concepts of poetry, this chapter will argue that memory plays an ethical and contemplative rather than evasive or sentimental role throughout the first edition of *Ocnos*. It will propose that he undertakes, as in the selection of verse poems studied in the previous chapter, a journey of moral introspection. Rather than retreating to an evasive utopia based on the memory of Andalusia, it will argue that he uses memory in order to explore the sources of his poetic instincts. It will then consider why he decided to express himself in prose rather than in verse in *Ocnos* and will study the various stylistic techniques used in order to present his memories in as depersonalised a manner as possible. Given the amount of material contained in the prose poems, a separate chapter will analyse the increasingly philosophical and intellectual role played by memory in the later editions of *Ocnos*. The fifth chapter of the thesis will examine how the process of memory and meditation functions in *Variaciones*.

⁸⁸ Gil de Biedma considers that *Ocnos* and *Variaciones* merit a privileged place in Cernuda's poetic corpus due to the poet's attempts to recreate and possess through the written word “La visión edénica, el sueño de la vida como sensual embeleso inagotable, que en *La realidad y el deseo* es únicamente eso: visión y sueño que el poeta contempla intermitentemente espejear sobre los caducos escombros de la vida, es en ellas el objeto de una demorada tentativa de recreación y posesión mediante la palabra. Creo que eso les presta un especial interés dentro de la totalidad de su obra” (2001: 381).

⁸⁹ For a detailed study of the nature of Eden as elaborated in *Ocnos*, see chapters two, three and five of Silver's 1965 study.

⁹⁰ In a review published in the *BSS* in 1943, Aubrey Bell wrote that ““This charming evocation of the Seville of the writer's childhood is written in thin lines of delicate prose. The tiny book, [...] is filled with yearning suggestion, and to those who know the city well presents a substantial picture, doubly welcome in these years of isolation and turmoil””, in *Epistolario* (2003: 344, n140). In a letter to Nieves de Madariaga dated 8 July 1943, Cernuda's response was as follows: “es curioso ver la deformación de nuestros propósitos, literarios y de otras clases, cuando los juzgan los demás. Según él, *Ocnos* es un libro costumbrista, o poco menos, cosa que ciertamente no pensé que fuera. De todos modos, también se refiere a San Juan de la Cruz, y eso lo salva todo”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 344).

3.1 Memory and Ethics: *Ocnos* and the Poetry of Meditation

Inventer, au fond, c'est se ressouvenir
Gérard de Nerval

The explanatory note, which Cernuda composed for the third edition of *Ocnos*, elucidates the circumstances and conditions in which the book was written and the meaning of its title. It also reveals the preponderant role played by memory in the production of the poems. In keeping with his search for an impersonal mode of expression when referring to or drawing on personal experiences in his work, it is written in the third person:

Hacia 1940 y en Glasgow (Escocia), comenzó L. C. a componer “Ocnos”, obsesionado entonces con recuerdos de su niñez y primera juventud en Sevilla, que entonces, en comparación con la sordidez y fealdad de Escocia, le aparecían como merecedores de conmemoración escrita y, al mismo tiempo, quedarán así exorcizados. El librito creció (no mucho), y la búsqueda de un título ocupó al autor hasta hallar en Goethe mención de Ocnos, personaje mítico que trenza los juncos que han de servir de alimento a su asno.⁹¹ Halló en ello cierta ironía sarcástica agradable, se tome al asno como símbolo del tiempo que todo lo consume, o del público, igualmente inconsciente y destructor.⁹² Y en 1942 y en Oxford (donde L. C. se hallaba de vacaciones), durante la guerra pasada, se imprimió la edición primera del libro. (RD, 825-26)

Given Silver’s emphasis on the role played by nostalgia in the poems, it is important to underline that Cernuda’s intention was to exorcise and release his memories through the act of writing rather than to simply seek refuge in them.

⁹¹ Ortega y Gasset’s article, ‘Oknos el soguero’, elucidates the creative struggle implied in the meaning of the title given to the prose poems: “Lo que Oknos laborioso trenza, el asno [...] lo va anulando. Representa este animal el poder destructor necesario al ritmo de la gran madre. Una creación lograda y perfecta detendría el progreso: es menester que colabore la potencia enemiga, la energía destructiva” (quoted by Zubiar, 2002: 24-25, n12).

⁹² Cernuda was deeply preoccupied from an early stage in his career with the critical reception of his work. In 1927, following the mixed reviews which *Perfil del aire* received, he observed in an ‘Anotación’ that “La comprensión poética rara vez coincide con el pensamiento poético de la obra sobre que opera. [...] Toda obra implica, en su autor, un creador y un público. Como el público no existe ha tenido que ser inventado”, PC II, 752. In a letter to Nieves de Madariaga, dated 13 February 1942, he reiterated the importance of creating and cultivating a future reading audience. He wrote: “Si hay destino envidiable para un poeta es hallar camino hacia las gentes que vivan después de él, a través de la ceguera de los contemporáneos”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 313).

Moreover, by contrasting his memories with the “sordidez y fealdad” of Scotland, he invites the reader to detect the discreet moral value judgment which lies behind the examination and celebration of his past. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the ethical project which underpins *Ocnos*, it is useful to study the texts in conjunction with Cernuda’s essay ‘Tres poetas metafísicos’ (1946), which analyses the ‘Coplas’ by Jorge Manrique, the ‘Epístola a Arias Montano’ by Francisco de Aldana and the ‘Epístola Moral a Fabio’ by an anonymous Sevillian poet. It begins with a succinct description of the metaphysical nature of their writing:

La poesía pretende infundir relativa permanencia en lo efímero; pero hay cierta forma de lirismo, no bien reconocida ni apreciada entre nosotros, que atiende con preferencia a lo que en la vida humana, por dignidad y excelencia, parece imagen de una inmutable realidad superior. Dicho lirismo, al que en rigor puede llamársele metafísico, no requiere expresión abstracta, ni supone necesariamente en el poeta algún sistema filosófico previo, sino que basta con que deje presentir, dentro de una obra poética, esa correlación entre las dos realidades, visible e invisible, del mundo. (PC I, 502)

Cernuda not only highlights the metaphysical character of their work, but also underlines the importance of its ethical qualities. He praises Manrique for accepting and asserting “la responsabilidad del hombre para con su propia vida, según una finalidad terrena” (PC I, 507) and he offers a series of incisive definitions of Aldana’s concept of the “hombre interior”. He describes him as “ese yo profundo” (PC I, 508), “la proyección interior del compuesto espiritual que llamamos personalidad” (PC I, 508) and as “la verdad íntima” (PC I, 508). The essay then draws an important distinction between the work of Manrique, Aldana and that of the unnamed Sevillian writer. Whereas Manrique searches for a form of immortality after death and Aldana’s texts celebrate his mystical union with God, the disenchanted and sceptical seventeenth-century poet seeks salvation within himself. Mirroring his own situation in exile in Glasgow, Cernuda underlines that “para el poeta anónimo el hombre nada debe esperar fuera de sí, ni en éste ni en otro mundo posible” (PC I, 513).

It is precisely this ethic of integrity and self-reliance which Cernuda adopts and applies to the examination of his past in *Ocnos*. Deploying memory as an instrument of self-understanding and self-knowledge, he undertakes, in the solitude of

exile, a patient and steely labour of recovery.⁹³ As in much of the poetry of *Como quien espera el alba*, he retrieves from his past an ethical and aesthetic value system with which he is able to explore and create his poetic identity in exile.⁹⁴ In the first edition of *Ocnos*, he projects his former memories and experiences onto the mythical protagonist Albanio from the pastoral world of Garcilaso's 'Segunda Égloga'. Through Albanio, he celebrates the invisible transcendent reality which he intuited as a child and as an adult commemorates in poetry. Far from escaping from the world of exile into the recollection of an Andalusian paradise, throughout the prose poems he examines the awakening of his poetic vocation, seeking to discover and affirm the "verdad íntima" (PC I, 508) of his identity.

Alert to the moral and metaphysical dimensions of his concept of poetry, Valender (1984) has highlighted how the writer's mature poetry and prose poems in particular belong to the European tradition of meditative poetry.⁹⁵ This tradition was developed at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century. Louis Martz, the specialist in the field of English meditative poetry, illustrates how many of the English "metaphysical poets" (Donne, Herbert, Marvell, Crashaw and Traherne) were influenced by religious treatises, such as San Ignacio de Loyola's *Ejercicios espirituales*.⁹⁶ The critic explains that the aim of the religious meditation is to "seize

⁹³ In a letter to Nieves de Madariaga, written shortly after the publication of *Ocnos*, Cernuda claimed that "es casi un alivio ver esas páginas publicadas: son o pretenden ser, un rescate de mi vida, de la vida en general", in *Epistolario* (2003: 331). This concept, as Valender notes (1984: 28, n3), appears to derive from San Juan de la Cruz. On 20 July 1944, Cernuda explained to Nieves de Madariaga that "San Juan de la Cruz me acompaña y me consuela. Qué error magnífico, en medio de un mundo ocupado en destruirse ensañadamente, querer rescatar la vida individual por medio del amor", in *Epistolario* (2003: 376). This reference to rescuing or redeeming the world through love or the poetic vision occurs throughout Cernuda's critical and poetic corpus. See "El poeta" (RD, 569-70) from *Ocnos*, "El águila" (RD, 321-23) and "Las ruinas" (RD, 323-26) from *Como quien espera el alba*. In 'Tres poetas clásicos' (1941), written at the same time as *Ocnos*, the concept reappears in the course of Cernuda's commentary on the work of Garcilaso: "Su visión poética del mundo supone, [...], el rescate del mismo, que hubiera sido imposible sin una extraordinaria energía subyacente", PC I, 491.

⁹⁴ In his introduction to *Como quien espera el alba*, Jiménez-Fajardo acutely observes that Cernuda's poetry at this time "is a labour of retrieval" (1978: 70). In his textual commentaries, he analyses how the poet retrieves from "his own past, his present, and the nature of his art, a system of values" which will sustain him in exile (1978: 70). Although he provides extremely informative readings of the verse poems, he overlooks how this "labour of retrieval" functions in the prose poems.

⁹⁵ See also Valente (1962).

⁹⁶ Cernuda also noted the likelihood of a connection between the English metaphysical poets and Spanish mystics such as San Juan de la Cruz. In a footnote at the end of his essay 'Tres poetas clásicos' (1941), he wrote: "Sería curioso relacionar nuestra poesía mística, y nuestra poesía gongorina, con el grupo de poetas metafísicos ingleses del siglo XVII; Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Marvell, Vaughan y Traherne. ¿Existiría entre unos y otros algo más que afinidad fortuita?", PC I, 500. Having translated Marvell's 'Definition of Love' in 1955, he observed that "Es probable que algunos de los poetas metafísicos ingleses conocieran la poesía culterana y conceptista española; entre ellos Donne y Marvell, y acaso Crashaw, por lo menos, sabían español", PC I, 538. For a comparative study of Spanish influences on English seventeenth-century poetry, see Edward Wilson (1958: 38-53).

the reality and the meaning of the presence of God” (1963: xviii). In order to speak with God in colloquy and to hear God speak to man in turn, the formal meditation falls into three distinguishable portions, which correspond to the acts of memory or composition of place, understanding and will. Martz underlines that the state of mental and affective illumination created by the discipline of meditation need not necessarily be religious. He cites Coleridge’s account of the Imagination, which Cernuda translated in his essay on Coleridge, as a perfect definition of the soul in meditation (1962: 68).⁹⁷ The result is a state of mind which brings together the senses, the emotions and intellectual faculties of man “in a moment of dramatic creative experience” (Martz, 1962: 1). As Valender (1984: 30) observes, Cernuda offers a highly original interpretation of the art of meditation. Structuring the world of *Ocnos* around the universal myth of Paradise and the Fall, the poet substitutes the life of Christ for his own childhood and adolescence and the divine presence of God for the invisible world of nature. In contrast to Harris and Silvers’ readings, Valender underlines that “*Ocnos* no es una evocación sentimental de la niñez, sino más bien una meditación sobre esa experiencia; meditación que permite al poeta identificar lo que es permanente y trascendental en su existencia, aquello que ha determinado su forma de ser” (1984: 30).

“La poesía” (RD, 553), the first poem in the book, follows in clean and transparent prose, the tripartite structure of the meditative poem. The composition of place, skilfully crafted through recollection, is swift and concise. It locates the reader in time and space: “En ocasiones, raramente, solía encenderse el salón al atardecer, y el sonido del piano llenaba la casa”. The two adverbs of time, the second intensifying the first, invite the reader to share a privileged moment in the speaker’s past.⁹⁸ In the second paragraph, the speaker analyses whether it was the music or the unusual nature

⁹⁷ Cernuda’s translation is as follows: “El poder de la imaginación, movido por la voluntad y el entendimiento y bajo el control de ambos, ‘se revela en cierto equilibrio o reconciliación de cualidades contrarias: lo idéntico con lo diferente, la idea con la imagen, lo individual con lo representativo, lo nuevo con lo familiar, un estado emotivo usual con otro desusado, el juicio firme con el entusiasmo profundo, y al mismo tiempo que armoniza lo natural con lo artificial, aún subordina el arte a la naturaleza, la manera con la materia y nuestra admiración hacia el poeta con nuestra simpatía por la poesía’”, PC I, 315.

⁹⁸ The personal nature of the poet’s memories, as well as their density and detail, enclose the reader of *Ocnos* in a highly distinctive artistic world. Ricœur underlines the “caractère foncièrement privé de la mémoire. [...] La mémoire paraît bien être radicalement singulière: mes souvenirs ne sont pas les vôtres. On ne peut transférer les souvenirs de l’un dans la mémoire de l’autre. En tant que mienne, la mémoire est un modèle de mienneté, de possession privée, pour toutes les expériences vécues du sujet” (2000: 115). Mirroring Cernuda’s fidelity to his self and his past in *Ocnos*, Ricœur also highlights the ethical dimension contained in the act of recollection. He observes that “À la mémoire est attachée une ambition, une prétension, celle d’être fidèle au passé” (2000: 26).

of the moment which captivated the child and left in him “una huella que el tiempo no ha podido borrar”. Explaining what he saw in terms of “una realidad diferente de la percibida a diario”, he recalls the child’s intuitive understanding of the sacred nature of his vision. The structural balance between the two adjectives “alado” and “divino” and the two verbs “acompañar” and “aureolar” communicates the moment of equipoise contained in his heightened aural and visual perception of exterior reality. The accumulation of references to purity and light (*alado, divino, aureolar, nimbo, luminoso*) also emphasises the visionary nature of the experience which illuminates and transfigures the adult’s consciousness and the child’s subconscious:

Entreví entonces la existencia de una realidad diferente de la percibida a diario, y ya oscuramente sentía cómo no bastaba a esa otra realidad el ser diferente, sino que algo alado y divino debía acompañarla y aureolarla, tal el nimbo trémulo que rodea un punto luminoso. (553)

In the final section of the meditation, the speaker asserts his will. He declares the continuing validity of the memory of the conjunction between the light and the piano’s notes. The text concludes as it began with the ethereal unification of light and music filling the darkness. The poem’s circular structure and the subtle shifts in temporal perspective create a tight connection between past and present experiences and selves. Given the interplay between memory and reason, recollection and analysis in the concluding paragraphs, the reader realises that Cernuda’s use and concept of memory in the prose poems is far from naïve or reactionary.⁹⁹ The act of recollection assumes a deeply positive and ethical function as the speaker affirms his faith in the redemptive power of his early poetic vision:

Así, en el sueño inconsciente del alma infantil, apareció ya el poder mágico que consuela de la vida, y desde entonces así lo veo flotar ante mis ojos: tal aquel resplandor vago que yo veía dibujarse en la oscuridad, sacudiendo con su ala palpitante las notas cristalinas y puras de la melodía. (553)

In “El poeta” (RD, 569-70), the discovery of “unas cortas líneas de leve cadencia” in amongst Bécquer’s prose texts also unveils the presence of a transcendent reality.

⁹⁹ In his essay on Gide (1946), Cernuda offers an interesting analysis of Gide’s use of memory in *Si le Grain ne Meurt*. His comments reflect his own dynamic treatment of his past in *Ocnos*. He states that “se equivocaría quien pensase que la vuelta hacia el pasado daría un tinte melancólico a su visión, porque precisamente es éste uno de los pocos libros de memorias en que la significación de lo recordado apunta hacia lo futuro. [...] Quienes lean el libro han de sentir [...] la impulsión vigorosa hacia lo venidero y desconocido, que tan característica es en la vida y en la obra de Gide”, PC I, 574.

Albanio senses the mysterious power contained in the written word, which appeals to and awakens the memory of a former existence:

[...] al leer sin comprender, como el niño y como muchos hombres, se contagi6 de algo distinto y misterioso, algo que luego, al releer otras veces al poeta, despert6 en 6l tal el recuerdo de una vida anterior, vago e insistente, ahogado en abandono y nostalgia. (569)¹⁰⁰

By placing “La poesía” at the start of the book, Cernuda alerts the reader to his principal concerns in *Ocnos*: the formation of his poetic temperament, the nature of poetry and his craft. It is important to underline that as the poet moves from the recollection of the child’s experiences to a deeper understanding of their import, the title of the collection’s opening poem acquires greater significance. Not only does it equate poetry with the perception of a hidden latent realm, but it also refers to the process through which the writer gains knowledge and self-understanding in his northern exile.¹⁰¹ Using poetry as an instrument of self-expression and self-discovery, in “La naturaleza” and “El huerto” he engages in a series of disciplined spiritual exercises. Far from simply recreating the topography of Andalusia, the texts explore the semi-divine nature of the child-poet, referred to in “La eternidad” (RD, 556) as the “ser espiritual que en 6l había”.

“La naturaleza” (RD, 554), narrated in the third person, examines Albanio’s keen powers of observation. The focus of the opening paragraph is on his concentrated gaze. The reader observes the child watching the imperceptible growth of plants. The repetition of temporal locutions (“día tras día”, “durante largo rato”) emphasises not only the regularity, but also the intensity and duration of his examination of the foilage. Similarly, the use of the gerund with “ir”, used to express gradual actions, underlines the child’s patient scrutiny of nature. The measured

¹⁰⁰ Cernuda stressed, like Bergamín and Lorca, that the mystery of poetry should be intuited rather than explained rationally or intellectually, hence the importance accorded to the child’s responses to poetry. In his essay on Gérard de Nerval (1962), he underlines that “Intuir lo poético, y contagiarse de él, son operaciones que poco o nada tienen que ver con ‘entender’. Hay que acabar de una vez con la vulgaridad a lo Menéndez y Pelayo, que quiere ‘entender’ la poesía. [...] Si algún lector se escandalizara ante lo dicho, bastará recordarle que la religión, cuya función en el hombre tiene una raíz no muy distinta de aquella de la poesía [...], habla y apela [...] a lo que no es racional en el hombre”, PC I, 747-48.

¹⁰¹ In his chapter “The Truth of One’s Self”, Harris underlines that “In the vicarious existence of exile poetry offers Cernuda a way of life, but a way of life he must create entirely by his own efforts, [...], in solitude and with only his conscience to guide him” (1973: 155). Nevertheless, his commentaries on *Ocnos* overlook how the writing of each prose poem constitutes a lively act of self-definition and self-redemption in exile.

rhythm of the prose, interspersed with internal assonantal rhymes and discreet alliterations, mirrors that of the plants' slow development. As sound and sense complement one another, the reader detects Cernuda's sensitivity to and awareness of the poetic possibilities inherent in the "ritmo de la frase" (PC I, 650):¹⁰²

Le gustaba al niño ir siguiendo paciente, día tras día, el brotar oscuro de las plantas y de sus flores. La aparición de una hoja, plegada aún y apenas visible su verde traslúcido junto al tallo donde ayer no estaba, le llenaba de asombro, y con ojos atentos, durante largo rato, quería sorprender su movimiento, su crecimiento invisible, tal¹⁰³ otros quieren sorprender, en el vuelo, cómo mueve las alas el pájaro. (554)

The child then takes a shoot and replants it. The narrator enumerates, through a series of infinitives, the tasks which the young botanist diligently undertakes: "Tomar un renuevo tierno de la planta adulta y sembrarlo aparte [...], mantenerlo a la sombra los primeros días, regar su sed inexperta a la mañana". As Albanio watches the new leaves unfold, he experiences a quiet elation and assumes a God-like status: "Sentía como si él mismo hubiese obrado el milagro de dar vida, de despertar sobre la tierra fundamental, tal un dios, la forma antes dormida en el sueño de lo inexistente." The child's actions also offer an implicit commentary on the creative process which takes place in each prose poem. Just as Albanio selects and cares for a shoot, giving life to a previously dormant substance, so the poet awakens and tends to forgotten or dormant memories, sculpting them into self-standing artistic artefacts.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Through his study of Hölderlin, Cernuda began to use *enjambements* in his verse. In 'Historial de un libro', he notes that this led to the creation of "un ritmo doble, a manera de contrapunto: el del verso y el de la frase", PC I, 650. In some of his favourite poems, he claims that "el verso queda como ensordecido bajo el dominio del ritmo de la frase", PC I, 650. This preference for the "ritmo de la frase" may help to explain his assiduous cultivation of the prose poem. He also stresses his distaste for a marked rhythm in verse: "Desde temprano me agradó poco el verso de ritmo demasiado acusado, con su monotonía inevitable, y nunca quise usar, por ejemplo, el ritmo trocaico ni tampoco [...] el verso dodecasílabo. Si en el verso hay música, mi preferencia se orientó hacia la 'música callada' del mismo", PC I, 650-51.

¹⁰³ José Luis Cano claims that the use of the adverb "tal" instead of "como" in Cernuda's prose and verse poems is due to the influence of French literature in which the comparative "tel" is relatively common (1973: 250). In a letter to Nieves de Madariaga on 29 January 1943, Cernuda wrote that "Tu observación sobre mi uso de 'tal' ya yo me la he hecho en varias ocasiones, así como el uso de 'cuán'; son chocantes en quien, como yo, pretende adquirir un estilo *hablado* y no *escrito*", in *Epistolario* (2003: 333).

¹⁰⁴ In his commentary on *Primeras poesías*, Ulacia perceptively notes that "Para Cernuda, lo mismo que para Bécquer, la escritura se materializa a través de la memoria; la experiencia se revive en otra cifra: en la del lenguaje" (1984: 21). The critic claims that "Esta escritura de la memoria cristalizará en *Donde habite el olvido*" (1984: 21). This "escritura de la memoria", however, also characterises the prose poems in *Ocnos* and, as seen in the previous chapter, a great deal of the verse poems produced in exile.

“El huerto” (RD, 556-57), structured around a *mise en scène*, developing action, climax and an epilogue, also explores Albanio’s profound bond with nature. The narrator imitates the simplicity of a child’s voice as he recounts a visit to an orchard: “Alguna vez íbamos a comprar una latania o un rosal para el patio de casa. Como el huerto estaba lejos había que ir en coche” (556). The use of personifications such as “planta enfermiza” (557) and “túnel de cristales ciegos” (557) demonstrate that the child’s senses, which confer upon the natural world human qualities, are alert to the presence and promise of a hidden reality inside the orchard. As the heat mounts uncomfortably, he believes that in a solitary corner of the greenhouse a “graciosa criatura” (557) may appear. The voice of the adult speaker then recapitulates and expands upon the experience in the greenhouse, intertwining personal and literary memories:

Hoy creo comprender lo que entonces no comprendía: cómo aquel reducido espacio del invernadero, atmósfera lacustre y dudosa donde acaso habitaban criaturas invisibles, era para mí imagen perfecta de un edén, sugerido en aroma, en penumbra y en agua, como en el verso del poeta gongorino: “Verde calle, luz tierna, cristal frío”. (557)

Although *Ocnos* is a work of memory, oblivion plays an important role in the book. The landscape of Andalusia is unnamed: the streets and bazaars are anonymous and the poet’s memories are populated by generic figures such as street criers, street lighters and “los seises” (RD, 567).¹⁰⁵ Similarly, the child protagonist moves swiftly from childhood to adolescence, creating unexplained ellipses in the book’s narrative framework. Several poems in the first edition of *Ocnos* depict the child on the borders of adolescence. In “El vicio” (RD, 564-65), the journey to school takes the child beyond the safe confines of the patio, the garden or the house and provides a glimpse into the adult world. The “cara pálida y deslucida” (565) of a prostitute fills Albanio with a “temor infantil” (565). In “El placer” (RD, 570-71), he watches a couple dance

¹⁰⁵ Ramos Ortega notes that “*Ocnos* es, tal como nos lo presenta el autor, una gran elipsis de Sevilla, a quien Cernuda describe amorosamente sin nombrarla” (1982: 277). Sicot also underlines that the poems are composed of “mémoire mais aussi d’oubli. D’oubli autant, sinon plus, que de mémoire car *Ocnos* est fait de lacunes autant que de souvenirs. [...] Des pans entiers de la vie du poète enfant sont oubliés, gommés ou simplement tus” (1995: 301-02). As early as 1929, Cernuda demonstrated an interest in the role which oblivion plays in the creative representation of the past. At the end of ‘El indolente’ (1929), Don Míster writes: “¿El recuerdo? No quiero ser hipócrita. Casi no tengo recuerdos ya. Al referirle esta historia me parecía que la iba inventando y olvidando”, PC II, 302. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty “‘True memory’ is found at the *intersection* of remembrance and oblivion, ‘at the instant where the memory returns which was both forgotten and preserved by our forgetting’” (quoted by David Krell, 1990: 100).

and notes that they are bound together by “el ritmo del espasmo más que el del baile” (570). Although he experiences an “anhelo loco y triste” (570), his desire is vague and formless, unable to express itself except through stifled longing and envy. The mature speaker recalls that

Niño aún, mi deseo no tenía forma, y el afán que lo despertaba en nada podía concretarse; y yo pensaba envidioso en aquellos hombres anónimos que a esa hora se divertían, groseramente quizá, mas que eran superiores a mí por el conocimiento del placer, del que yo sólo tenía el deseo. (570)

The penultimate paragraph of “La riada” (RD, 573-74), which recalls “Niño tras un cristal” (RD, 492) from *Desolación de la quimera*, describes Albanio behind a window, examining a walled garden. In the verse poem, the child, mesmerised by the falling rain, retreats to the world of the imagination and reads under lamplight. Deploying a series of brief nominal phrases, Cernuda evokes the child’s enclosed timeless existence: “Bajo la lámpara, la noche,/El sueño, las horas sin medida”. In the prose poem, he presents a similar scene, but in greater detail. He elaborates on the sense of privacy created by the contrast between the light of the candles, the surrounding darkness and the heavy soporific rain:

Al llegar la noche, derribados con el temporal los postes y alambres eléctricos, no había luz. A la claridad de las velas, un libro ante sus ojos soñolientos, escuchaba el viento afuera, en el campo inundado, y la lluvia caudalosa caer hora tras hora. Se sentía como en una isla, separado del mundo y de sus aburridas tareas en ilimitada vacación; una isla mecida por las aguas, acunando sus últimos sueños de niño. (574)

The fall from childhood, examined in “El tiempo” (RD, 559-60) and in greater detail in “Escrito en el agua” (RD, 614-15), excludes the youth from his previous a-temporal world. “La eternidad” (RD, 556) recounts the fear and panic which Albanio feels when the concept of eternity becomes intertwined with that of God. Faced with the prospect of limitless time, he longs to return to the child’s existence which is free from time or memory: “Esto, de haber sido posible, es lo que hubiera preferido: volver atrás, regresar a aquella región vaga y sin memoria de donde había venido al mundo.” A cluster of poems, set in the late afternoon or in total darkness, recount the youth’s attempts to escape from the imposition of self-consciousness which adolescence imposes. In “La música” (RD, 585), Albanio finds respite from his own

self and from others in music. As he listens to the notes of Bach or Mozart, he enters into a trance of “embeleso contemplativo”. Transfixed, he compares the musical experience to a wave which elevates man from life to death and envelops him in oblivion:

Su armonioso ir y venir, su centelleo multiforme, eran tal ola que desalojase las almas de los hombres. Y tal ola que nos alzara desde la vida a la muerte, era dulce perderse en ella, acunándonos hacia la región última del olvido. (585)

As the above quotation reveals, the sea, with its network of associations relating to death and drowning, exerts a powerful attraction over the adolescent. Upon arriving at an unnamed coastal town, in “El mar” (RD, 585-86) Albanio is drawn to the sea, enticed by its sleepless voice which calls out in the “vastedad sin nombre” (586) of the night. In “El amante” (RD, 588-89), the night blackens both the sky and the sea and submerges them in “una misma vastedad” (588). As the adolescent wanders on the beach, separated from his friends, he experiences an elation which eludes language. He refuses to explain the reasons for his intoxication:

Entre la sombra de la playa anduve largo rato, lleno de dicha, de embriaguez, de vida. Pero nunca diré por qué. Es locura querer expresar lo inexpresable. ¿Puede decirse con palabras lo que es la llama y su divino ardor a quien no la ve ni la siente?¹⁰⁶ (588)

Despite Albanio’s reluctance to confide and express his emotions in the written word, his intense emotional receptivity leads to the awakening of his poetic gift. Rather than describing his attempts to write poetry, mentioned briefly in “El maestro” (RD, 572-73), Cernuda’s memories focus on the acuity of Albanio’s senses and his contemplative mind. “La música y la noche” (RD, 579) and “Belleza oculta” (RD, 565-66) both offer the reader a vital insight into the adolescent’s acute sensitivity to external reality. Like “La poesía”, “La música y la noche” adheres closely to the tertiary structure of the meditative poem. It opens with a meticulously composed composition of place. In two concise sentences, the writer recreates a

¹⁰⁶ Cernuda expresses similar concerns regarding the limitations and the insufficiency of language in ‘Palabras antes de una lectura’ (1935). He writes: “¿cómo expresar con palabras cosas que son inexpresables? Las palabras están vivas, y por lo tanto traicionan; lo que expresan hoy como verdadero y puro, mañana es falso y está muerto. Hay que usarlas contando con su limitación, y procurar que no falseen demasiado, al traducirla, esa verdad intuitiva que a través de ella intentamos expresar”, PC I, 605-06.

specific time, a concrete location and a series of events. Through a careful selection of adjectives (“rasgear quejoso”, “inquietud bulliciosa”), he conveys to the reader the restless urges of adolescence and introduces the general theme of the meditation:

Alguna vez, a la madrugada, me despertaba el rasgear quejoso de una guitarra. Eran unos mozos que cruzaban la calleja, caminando impulsados quizá por el afán noctámbulo, lo templado de la noche o la inquietud bulliciosa de su juventud. (579)

The speaker then deploys his critical and analytical skills. He addresses the reader with a question: “¿Quién ha visto alguna vez un niño que intenta apresar en su mano un rayo de sol?”. The direct address ensures that the reader is engaged in both the descriptive and analytical sections of the meditation. As Cernuda recreates and examines Albanio’s emotional responses to the music, he provides a clear example of what T. S. Eliot called in his essay on the English metaphysical poets “a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling” (1951: 286). By exploring Albanio’s excitement and frustration, he delicately unravels the significance of the original memory and meditates on the tantalising possibility that “la vida no ofreciera otra cosa que su forma entrevista”:

¿Quién ha visto alguna vez un niño que intenta apresar en su mano un rayo de sol? Tan inútil y loco como ese afán era el que me asaltaba tendido en mi cama, en la soledad y la calma de la madrugada, al oír aquella música. Era la vida misma lo que yo quería apresar contra mi pecho: la ambición, los sueños, el amor de mi juventud.

Y lo que hacía más agudo mi deseo era el contraste entre la fiebre encerrada en mis venas y la calma y el silencio nocturnos: como si la vida no ofreciera otra cosa que su forma entrevista, la fuga tentadora del placer y de la dicha. (579)

The actual structure of the poem, framed by sound and silence, by the notes of the guitar and their eventual disappearance, also underlines the adolescent’s fleeting experience of “placer”. The poet threads startling imagery into his analysis of the emotion which swept over Albanio in the silence of the dawn: “Tal la ola henchida se alza del mar para romperse luego en gotas irisadas, así rompía en llanto mi fervor; pero no eran lágrimas de tristeza, sino de adoración y plenitud.” The carefully placed semi-colon separates the simile of the breaking wave from the following explanation and creates an equilibrium between the recollection and the rational explanation of emotion. The speaker then announces his commitment to the fervour and desire which

he experienced in the solitude of the early morning, creating a retrospective and projective sense of identity:

Ninguna decepción ha podido luego amortiguar aquel fervor de donde brotaban. Sólo los labios de la muerte tienen poder para extinguirlo con su beso, y quién sabe si no es en ese beso donde un día encuentra el deseo humano la única saciedad posible de la vida. (579)

“Belleza oculta” (RD, 565-66), which enters into an internal inter-textual dialogue with the first poem of *Primeras poesías* and several key passages in ‘Palabras antes de una lectura’ and ‘Historial de un libro’, examines the adolescent’s heightened perception of the world’s beauty and his concomitant sense of separation from it.¹⁰⁷ The description of the spring afternoon appeals to the reader’s sense of sight and smell and conveys the sharpness of the youth’s senses: “Era una tarde de marzo tibia y luminosa, *visible* ya la primavera en *aroma*, en halo, en inspiración, por el aire de aquel campo entonces casi solitario” (565; my emphasis). The two abstract nouns (“halo”, “inspiración”), with their religious resonances, emphasise the sacredness of the day. Upon seeing, as if for the first time, the surrounding beauty of the landscape, Albanio experiences a profound sense of solitude: “Y con la visión de esa hermosura oculta se deslizaba agudamente en su alma, clavándose en ella, un sentimiento de soledad hasta entonces para él desconocido” (566). Conscious of the burden of responsibility which the vision brings, he is divided between the need to communicate his insight with others and remain silent. The juxtaposition between the verbs “gozar” and “sufrir” and the adjectives “amarga” and “divina” conveys the network of contradictory emotions created by his new found poetic sensibilities:

El peso del tesoro que la naturaleza le confiaba era demasiado para su solo espíritu aún infantil, porque aquella riqueza parecía infundir en él una responsabilidad y un deber, y le asaltó el deseo de aliviarla con la comunicación de los otros. Mas luego un pudor extraño le retuvo, sellando sus labios, como si el precio de aquel don fuera la melancolía y aislamiento que lo acompañaban, condenándole a gozar y a

¹⁰⁷ “Belleza oculta” mirrors Cernuda’s description in ‘Palabras antes de una lectura’ (1935) of the discovery of his poetic gift. In ‘Historial de un libro’, he also recalls that the need to write, which coincided with his sexual awakening, stemmed from his intense visual perception of reality: “Hacia entonces el servicio militar y todas las tardes salía a caballo con los otros reclutas, como parte de la instrucción, por los alrededores de Sevilla; una de aquellas tardes, sin transición previa, las cosas se me aparecieron como si las viera por vez primera, como si por primera vez entrara yo en comunicación con ellas, y esa visión inusitada, al mismo tiempo, provocaba en mí la urgencia expresiva, la urgencia de decir dicha experiencia”, PC I, 626.

sufrir en silencio la amarga y divina embriaguez, incomunicable e inefable, que ahogaba su pecho y nublabá sus ojos de lágrimas. (566)

The isolation which accompanies Albano's artistic vision creates a vital affinity between himself and the magnolia tree in "El magnolio" (RD, 571). The text opens with a description of the snaking narrow alleys of a "barrio antiguo". The tight constriction in space is heightened by the fact that the street leads to a closed door. The speaker's recollection of an immense magnolia tree, with its expanse of white leaves, suffuses the poem with a sense of energy and release: "Entre las hojas brillantes y agudas se posaban en primavera, con ese sutil misterio de lo virgen, los copos nevados de sus flores." In the closing section of the poem, the speaker deciphers the meaning of the memory. He examines the attraction of the tree's hidden flowers. He states that "Aquel magnolio fue siempre para mí algo más que una hermosa realidad: en él se cifraba la imagen de la vida." By viewing the tree as a symbol of life itself, he implicitly accepts that his task as a poet also involves creating moments of beauty free from human vanity or appraisal.¹⁰⁸ Just as Albano's silence preserves the integrity of the "belleza oculta" of nature, the tree's isolation endows its beauty with a higher value. The poem concludes with an image of self-contained perfection: "Su propio ardor lo consumía, y brotaba en la soledad unas puras flores, como sacrificio inaceptado ante el altar de un dios."

Throughout the first edition of *Ocnos*, then, Cernuda engages in a rigorous exercise in self-analysis. Deeply aware of the link between our memories, sense of provenance and identity, his "recuerdos" are an invitation to explore the sources of his poetry and self. In the closing lines of 'Historial de un libro', he observes that the present man is shaped and formed by his past: "ya lo dijo hace muchos siglos alguien infinitamente sabio: 'carácter es destino'" (PC I, 661). Through his intense contemplation of his childhood and adolescence, he seeks to understand how his past, which contains his decision for poetry, the sources of his poetic vision and inspiration, has determined his poetic trajectory and identity. Instead of indulging in a "delectación morosa" (Gil de Biedma, 2001: 381) of the landscape of Andalusia, in

¹⁰⁸ Vicente Quirarte draws an illuminating comparison between "El magnolio" and the following lines from Keats in "Sleep and Poetry": "'What is more tranquil than a musk-rose blowing/In a green island, far from all men's knowing?'" (1985: 112). The seclusion of the magnolia tree also recalls ideas contained in "Río vespertino" (RD, 371-74 [373]): "Si la voz del poeta no es oída,/¿Sino mejor no es para el poeta?/Del hombre aprende el hombre la palabra,/Mas el silencio sólo en Dios lo aprende".

“La poesía” and “El poeta” he affirms his faith in the sacred reality which is revealed by and transmitted through the written word. In “La naturaleza” and “El huerto”, his recollections also mediate between the visible and the invisible, the concrete and the abstract. By examining the child’s connection with nature, he seeks illumination rather than refuge and re-creates through his mnemonic gaze the “ser divino” (RD, 385) who dwells within. The writing of each poem, then, is a deeply creative act as he searches in his memories for a form of “Luz o fe” (RD, 338) with which to sustain and construct the truth of his poetic persona in exile.

Cernuda’s memories of adolescence, which deftly evoke the imprecise sexual desires of youth and the awakening of his creative impulse, permit him to assert, albeit implicitly, his commitment to his vocation as a poet and his “verdad diferente” (Paz, 1977: 155) as both a homosexual and a writer. As the close textual readings reveal, the act of recollection is inextricably linked to his concern with personal integrity and his struggle for self-affirmation in exile. Moreover, as the texts move from a concrete recollection to an analysis of its meaning and import, “Belleza oculta” and “El magnolio” offer subtle reflections on the ineffable nature of the poetic vision and the vital role that silence and solitude play in preserving and creating beauty. Thus, far from simply recreating and retreating to an Edenic paradise in the initial years of exile in Glasgow, Cernuda draws on his memories in order to meditate on the metaphysical nature of poetry, the power and the limitations of language and the role that solitude plays in the creative process, constantly transforming lived experience into “saber espiritual” (Paz, 1977: 157).

3.2 The Prose Poem and the Treatment of the Past

Cernuda cultivated both the prose poem and short prose fiction from an early stage in his career. During the 1920s he published thirteen aphoristic prose poems and in the 1930s he composed ten prose poems which he included in his fourth collection *Los placeres prohibidos*.¹⁰⁹ Between 1929 and 1942 he produced five short stories: ‘El indolente’ (1929), ‘Sombras en el salón’ (1937), ‘En la costa de Santiniebla’ (1937), ‘El viento en la colina’ (1938) and ‘El sarao’ (1942). In them it is possible to detect the seeds of *Ocnos*. The pensive and sensitive figure of Albanio appears in ‘El viento en la colina’ and in ‘El indolente’, set in the pastoral world of Sansueña, the poet

¹⁰⁹ For a detailed study of the prose poems which date from the beginning of Cernuda’s career (1924-1928), see Harris (1971: 87-91).

projects his identity onto the elegant Don Míster or Míster Inglés who enjoys a harmonious rapport with the land. There are also several stylistic and thematic connections between many of the prose poems in *Los placeres prohibidos* and *Ocnos*. The poet makes use of the “tú” form of self-address, used throughout *Ocnos*, in “Sentado sobre un golfo de sombra” (RD, 186), “Tienes la mano abierta” (RD, 190) and in the final section of “Para unos vivir” (RD, 182). He also introduces to his poetry the pivotal concept of a fall from a mythical and timeless childhood paradise in “Había en el fondo del mar” (RD, 192-93) and “Era un poco de arena” (RD, 708).¹¹⁰ As in “Estaba tendido” (RD, 179), “Pasión por pasión” (RD, 185) and “En medio de la multitud” (RD, 176-77) from *Los placeres prohibidos*, in “Escrito en el agua” (RD, 614-15) Cernuda contemplates the fleeting nature of desire and the senselessness of his existence in a godless world.

The subtle and intricate texts of *Ocnos*, then, are the result of many years of experimentation with the prose poem.¹¹¹ In the explanatory note written for the third edition of *Ocnos*, Cernuda insisted that “el género literario a que se llama poema en prosa [...] se impuso fatalmente a L. C. como adecuada y necesaria para sus recuerdos anteriores, ya consignados, y para sus nuevas experiencias” (RD, 826). He did not, however, elucidate why he considered the prose poem to be the most suitable form of poetic expression for his past and present experiences in *Ocnos*. In ‘Bécquer y el poema en prosa español’ (1959) he reveals a detailed knowledge of the history of the genre and he outlines the development of the prose poem in France and Spain.¹¹² He briefly contrasts verse and prose poems and he states that a prose poem must be

¹¹⁰ One of the earliest references to a “fall” from a divine and idyllic childhood is contained in Cernuda’s essay on Jacques Vaché in 1929. Cernuda describes Vaché and his predecessors Rimbaud and Lautréamont as “caídos”: “Ahí están, pues, reunidos estos tres nombres con su mágica juventud en total rebelión contra el mundo, contra la carne, contra el espíritu. Nunca la palabra ‘caído’ podría aplicarse tan justamente. [...] Caídos, sí, mas no de cielo extranjero alguno, sino de su misma divina juventud”, PC II, 22. See also poem IV (RD, 203-04), studied in chapter one, from *Donde habite el olvido*.

¹¹¹ For an examination of Cernuda’s evolution as a prose writer, see Valender (1984: 125-29). For a detailed but concise examination of the development of the prose poem in Spain, see also Valender (1984: 15-19). The critic claims that “La contribución de Cernuda en este campo es única: demostrando que el género no ha de identificarse sólo con el modernismo y con el estilo impresionista favorecido por J. R. Jiménez, sus textos han sentado las bases para la incorporación del poema en prosa como una tradición literaria en España” (1984: 19-20).

¹¹² He writes: “Al mismo tiempo que algunos escritores, entre los cuales bastará con citar a Rousseau y a Chateaubriand, escriben una prosa que en momentos determinados tiene virtudes poéticas, otros trabajan específicamente en la creación de una nueva forma literaria: la del poema en prosa. *Gaspard de la Nuit* (1842), de Bertrand, representa la fase primera de la evolución del género; los *Petits Poèmes en Prose* (1869), de Baudelaire, la fase segunda; las *Illuminations* (1886), de Rimbaud, la tercera, de riqueza inagotable aun en nuestro tiempo”, PC I, 703.

concise: “si la longitud mayor o menor del poema en verso es cuestión controvertible, no parece serlo la de la brevedad del poema en prosa” (PC I, 704). He then observes that “El poema en prosa, como la poesía en verso, no se propone nada ajeno a su propia finalidad de expresar una emoción o experiencia poética” (PC I, 705). As Valender notes (1984: 129), neither of the above remarks help to explain why Cernuda felt compelled to express himself in prose rather than in verse in *Ocnos*. In his essay on Juan Ramón Jiménez (1942), published the same year as the first edition of *Ocnos*, Cernuda also claims that a writer is able to express himself in a more personal manner in prose than in verse. He states that

Dentro de la obra de Juan Ramón Jiménez la poesía en prosa adquiere una resonancia particular, porque esa forma poética permite a su avasalladora personalidad más libre curso literario. Ahí recuerdos, retratos, paisajes, pueden aliarse mejor con el yo que los ofrece, y no exigen en tanta medida, como sí lo exige el verso, cierta despersonalización [...]. En la prosa, por poética que sea, hay algo menos severo, y permite a lo accidental del personaje humano afirmarse directamente tras las palabras, causando menos enojo. (PC II, 169)

Given that the prose poems in *Ocnos* are characterised by the same measured, meditative tone and subtle balance between thought and feeling as found in his mature reflective verse, Valender seeks to clarify and nuance Cernuda’s remarks on the nature of the prose poem. He offers the following intelligent and insightful explanation:

Lo que Cernuda quizá haya querido decir no era que se pudiera permitir una disciplina meditativa más floja, sino más bien que el volumen de experiencia personal que el poema podía transponer en arte era mucho mayor si el poema se escribía en prosa y no en verso. [...] Si la niñez es una experiencia universal cuyas características son compartidas por todos, la calidad poética particular que Cernuda atribuía a su propia niñez era inseparable del paisaje andaluz en que había crecido. Y ya que este paisaje era obviamente único, su expresión tenía que ser muy concreta; Cernuda tenía que presentar el lugar en toda su inmediatez para que el lector pensara y sintiera como pensaba y sentía él; y sólo en prosa podía lograrse una descripción de este tipo. (1984: 129)

If we compare the prose and verse poems that carry the same title “Jardín antiguo”, it is evident that Cernuda recalls the landscape of Andalusia in far greater detail in his prose poems than in his verse poems. Both texts celebrate the peace and beauty of the gardens of the Alcázar in Seville. The verse poem, structured around four infinitives (“Ir”, “Oír”, “Ver”, “Sentir” [297]), provides the reader with a series of

brief concentrated descriptions of the stillness and silence of the gardens. As seen in the previous commentary on the poem, in the final stanza the speaker recognises the illusory nature of his desire to recapture the innocent and timeless world of his childhood: “*Sueño de un dios sin tiempo*” (my emphasis; 297). In the prose poem the composition of place is extended, which allows the poet to describe the gardens in prolonged and meticulous detail. Adverbs of place, such as “al fondo” (568) and “al pie de” (568), lead the reader from a dark corridor to the sunlit garden. Adverbs of time, such as “primero” (568) and “Luego” (568), convey the deliberate manner in which the speaker recreates and savours his imaginative return to the gardens. The poet also heightens the garden’s privacy by repeating images of enclosure. Two magnolia trees shield an old statue and myrtles and rosebay encircle a mossy fountain. Having devoted five paragraphs to his descriptions of the gardens, in the analytical section of the meditation the speaker announces the bond between his sense of place and personal identity: “Hay destinos humanos ligados con un lugar o con un paisaje” (568). In the final paragraph he realises that he will never be able to relive with the same exquisite perfection “ni la acción ni el goce” (569) experienced at the fountain. Yet the force of the realisation, buried in the long and involved description of the garden, fails to crystallise. The concluding image is one of impotence, as the speaker, trapped in the present, laments a lost and superior past: “Y el día que comprendiste esa triste verdad, aunque estabas lejos y en tierra extraña, deseaste volver a aquel jardín y sentarte de nuevo al borde de la fuente, para soñar otra vez la juventud pasada” (569).

Poems such as “La ciudad a distancia” (RD, 571-72) or “La catedral y el río” (RD, 566-68) contain equally elaborate descriptions of the countryside and architecture of Seville. Nonetheless, unlike “Jardín antiguo” Cernuda neither expresses his sentimental attachment to a particular place nor his desire to recapture a lost youth. As in the verse poems studied in the previous chapter, he strives to present his recollections in as depersonalised a manner as possible. Before analysing the texts, it is useful to highlight some of Cernuda’s thoughts on “style” in poetry which he outlines in his essay ‘Tres poetas clásicos’ (1941). Commenting on the poetry of Garcilaso, he distinguishes style from “manera”. He claims that “Con frecuencia llamamos estilo a lo que sólo es manera, aun cuando sea la peor de todas; aquella gracias a la cual el autor se parodia a sí mismo en sus mejores momentos” (PC I,

489).¹¹³ Cernuda cites the poetry of Villon, the portraits of Velázquez or Mozart's *Don Juan* as examples of works of art which have succeeded, through their "cualidad del estilo" (489), in capturing and conveying the very essence of their *époque* (PC I, 489). He then argues that

Si el estilo consiste en dar lógica coherencia y unidad a la composición, y por tanto en él detalle y conjunto reposan sobre la justa percepción mental del tema representado por el artista, el estilo no sólo debe informar la expresión, sino dar también tono espiritual a la obra, quedando en ella todo propósito subordinado a una disciplina armoniosa. Gracias al estilo las palabras del poeta son al mismo tiempo idea y emoción; es decir, no meros sonidos elocuentes o melodiosos, sino expresión que contiene en sí una realidad, ofreciéndola clara y pura como la luz tras el cristal. (PC I, 490)

Like his classical predecessor, in *Ocnos* Cernuda cultivates a clear, concise and harmonious poetic style which reflects, communicates and conserves the reality of his youthful experiences and the landscape of Andalusia. "La catedral y el río" (RD, 566-68) and "La ciudad a distancia" (RD, 571-72) provide the reader with excellent examples of Cernuda's ability to describe with both precision and sensitivity the detail and the overall composition, the physical contours and the atmosphere of a given landscape. In both texts the poet's carefully ordered recollections, free from the subjectivity of nostalgia, present the reader with vivid and clear-sighted portraits of Andalusia.¹¹⁴ "La catedral y el río" is divided into two sections. The first section concentrates on the speaker's memories of the interior of a cathedral and the second focuses on his memories of a still and quiet river. Each section opens with the phrase

¹¹³ In his essay on Juan Ramón Jiménez (1942), Cernuda expresses similar ideas. He states that "Si estilo es expresión y expresión es pasión asistida por técnica, artista será quien a través de un estilo se exprese apasionada y reflexivamente. Cuando el artista fracasa en su tentativa para expresarse decimos que es amanerado; manera será pues el fracaso de un estilo. [...] Aquí conviene aclarar que forma no es algo exclusivamente exterior, como idea tampoco es algo exclusivamente interior; forma es coincidencia de materia e idea, y en ella no es posible distinguir a éstas, como al alma no es posible distinguirla del cuerpo en el ser humano. [...] La tarea del arte consiste tanto en corporeizar la entelequia como en espiritualizar la materia. Ésa es la contradicción íntima del arte, y artista quien la resuelve en armonía", PC II, 161.

¹¹⁴ In his essay on Juan Ramón Jiménez (1942) Cernuda criticises Jiménez for failing to impose a clear structure on his verse and prose poems. He observes that "al rechazar cualquier auxilio previo a nuestra experiencia puede uno perderse en un laberinto, sin distinguir las líneas esenciales de aquello que se contempla, o que por reforzar la visión inédita se añade algo innecesario. Éste es el lado débil, tanto del verso como de la prosa, en la obra de Juan Ramón Jiménez. Hay ocasiones en que cierta exuberancia oculta o anula en su obra los contornos; exuberancia efectista recargando innecesariamente la idea o la emoción que intenta trasladar al lector. Dan a veces sus poemas en prosa o en verso la impresión de una hermosa jaula de palabras donde debía contenerse la realidad, mas que por un defecto de construcción, o por descuido del constructor, la realidad, el pájaro que iba a alojarse en ella, ha huido", PC II, 171.

“Ir al atardecer”. The use of the infinitive acts as an invitation or a command to the reader to accompany the poet on his journeys to the cathedral and the river. The poet creates a delicate balance between light and dark, sound and silence, interior and exterior worlds as he describes the powerful notes of the organ which play in the half-lit cathedral and then the silence of the river at dusk. The reader follows the speaker’s trained and concentrated gaze as he walks by the river and examines the smooth emerald surface of the water. The reader’s senses become still and alert, taut and focused as the speaker listens to the whistle of a passing train and the cheep of swallows. The intensely visual, almost painterly quality of his poetry ensures that he transmits to the reader, through the precision of his written word, “una realidad, ofreciéndola clara y pura como la luz tras el cristal” (PC I, 572):

Ir al atardecer junto al río de agua luminosa y tranquila, cuando el sol se iba poniendo entre leves cirros morados que orlaban la línea pura del horizonte. Siguiendo con rumbo contrario al agua, pasada ya la blanca fachada hermosamente clásica de la Caridad, unos murallones ocultaban la estación, el humo, el ruido, la fiebre de los hombres. Luego, en soledad de nuevo, el río era tan verde y misterioso como un espejo, copiando el cielo vasto, las acacias en flor, el declive arcilloso de las márgenes.

[...]

Se oía el silbido de un tren, el piar de un bando de golondrinas; luego otra vez renacía el silencio. La luz iba dejando vacío el cielo, sin perder éste apenas su color, claro como el de una turquesa. Y el croar irónico de las ranas llegaba a punto, para cortar la exaltación que en el alma levantaban la calma del lugar, la gracia de la juventud y la hermosura de la hora. (567-68)

“La ciudad a distancia”, meticulously structured around five paragraphs of more or less equal length, also draws the reader into a deep contemplation of the landscape of Southern Spain which is imbued with a translucent quality. In the opening paragraph the speaker and his companions drift lazily down a river in the midday heat. As the speaker listens to the cicadas singing on the branches of elms and chesnuts and observes the rosy clay colour of the water, the reader detects a subtle tension between repose and concentration, restfulness and alertness, indolence and creativity. The second and third paragraphs direct the reader’s vision upwards to a white-washed town on the slope of a hill and to a church situated above the town. The poet also focuses the reader’s gaze and mind on vivid minute details, such as the dust which glints under olive trees and the gleaming light on the green vines. The series of

adverbs and prepositions contained in the third paragraph (“Arriba”, “dentro de”, “al fondo”, “a través de” [572]) enables the reader to locate and visualise the church and the orchard: “Arriba estaba la iglesia, y dentro de ella, al fondo, a través de la penumbra, se vislumbraba el huerto: una galería cubierta por verde emparrado que la luz teñía con un viso de oro traslúcido” (572). Moving outside to the terrace, the speaker gazes at the plains and the river below, creating a constant interaction between spatial expansion and constriction. The penultimate paragraph focuses on the shimmering silvery city on the opposite side of the river. The speaker’s recollections of the effects of the light on the city’s stone walls reveal an artistic sensibility and an acute sensitivity to the subtleties of shadow and tone: “Más allá, de la otra margen, estaba la ciudad, la aérea silueta de sus edificios claros, que la luz, velándolos en la distancia, fundía en un tono gris de plata” (572). The speaker also recalls the exact spatial organisation of the scene: “Sobre las casas todas se erguía la catedral, y sobre ella aún la torre, esbelta como una palma morena” (572). The reader’s gaze is then swiftly directed to the river below, to the fishing tackle and the sails of anchored boats. Through intense meditative contemplation, the poet combines molecular detail and panoramic views, the tangible and the intangible, the visible and the invisible dimensions of reality in a single concentrated vision. From a bench, the speaker contemplates the view and recapitulates the essential elements of the scene. By personifying the landscape as a sleeping body, the poet conveys the peace and stillness of the land:

Junto al muro encalado donde se abría aquel balcón, en la terraza, estaba adosado un banco que ofrecía asiento a la sombra. Todo aparecía allá abajo: vega, río, ciudad, agitándose dulcemente como un cuerpo dormido. Y el son de las campanas de la catedral, que llegaba puro y ligero a través del aire, era como la respiración misma de su sueño. (572)

It is important to note that Cernuda’s recollections of the topography and architecture of Seville do not simply focus on external reality. As seen in the first section of this chapter, they also concentrate on the adolescent’s contemplative mind and his ability to perceive the “hermosura oculta del mundo” (PC I, 606). “El otoño” (RD, 554-55) and “El amor” (RD, 593-94) provide the reader with a vital insight into the intensity with which Albanio studies nature. The opening paragraph of “El otoño” at once recalls and explains the appeal of autumn for the speaker: “Encanto de tus otoños infantiles, seducción de una época del año que es la tuya, porque en ella has

nacido” (554). Far from providing the reader with an impressionistic or sentimental description of former autumns, Cernuda’s recollections of the piercingly sharp air and mid-September rainfalls meditate on the child’s sensitivity to the scents and sounds of nature. The text also awakens the reader’s aural, visual and tactile senses, allowing him to share the child’s pre-poetic experiences. The first sentence of the second paragraph contains two examples of synaesthesia which emphasise the child’s heightened sensory responses to external reality: “La *atmósfera* del verano, densa hasta entonces, se aligeraba y adquiriría una *acuidad* a través de la cual los *sonidos* eran casi *dolorosos*, punzando la carne como la espina de una flor” (554; my emphasis). The onomatopoeic repetition of the plosive phoneme [k] reproduces for the reader the drumming sound of rainwater on the windows: “Caían las primeras lluvias a mediados de septiembre, anunciándolas el trueno y el súbito nublarse del cielo, con un chocar acerado de aguas libres contra prisiones de cristal” (554; my emphasis). Even the maternal voice is shrill and sharp and is likened to the cries of swallows which fly overhead: “La voz de la madre decía: ‘Que descorran la vela’, y tras aquel quejido agudo (semejante al de las golondrinas cuando revolaban por el cielo azul sobre el patio)” (554). The alliteration of the plosive [p] and the voiced [r] in “*pies de plata*” and “*rumor rítmico*” (555; my emphasis) conveys the rhythmic beat of the rain which acquires human attributes: “la lluvia entraba dentro de la casa, moviendo ligera sus pies de plata con rumor rítmico sobre las losas de mármol” (554-55). At night the child curls in bed, feeling young, light and pure. Having smelt the delicious autumn air and tasted the rainwater, he experiences a profound moment of harmony between inner and outer realities, body and spirit: “Y por la noche, ya en la cama, encogías tu cuerpo, sintiéndolo joven, ligero y puro, en torno de tu alma, fundido con ella, hecho alma también él mismo” (555). Given that “El otoño” appeals to the reader’s senses and intellect, imagination and reason, Cernuda’s comments on Manrique in the course of the essay ‘Tres poetas metafísicos’ could also apply to his own intentions in this poem: “Lo que pretende es despertar las almas, no adormecerlas; depurarlas, no hechizarlas” (PC I, 504).

“El amor” is divided into three paragraphs and focuses on the adolescent’s examination of three young poplar trees, which creates a balance between the text’s structure and content. The composition of place opens with a simple factual statement: “Estaban al borde de un ribazo” (593). The poet then describes the formal relationship between the three slender trunks of the poplar trees, their branches and

the sky. As in “La ciudad a distancia”, the poet scrutinises the pale colours of the landscape. He also manipulates the reader’s gaze as he describes both the foreground and the background of the scene, the detail of the trees’ trunks and the overall effect of the beauty of the air and light on the trees:

[...] Eran tres chopos jóvenes, el tronco fino, de un gris claro, erguido sobre el fondo pálido del cielo, y sus hojas blancas y verdes revolando en las ramas delgadas. El aire y la luz del paisaje realzaban aún más con su serena belleza la de aquellos tres árboles. (593)

The second paragraph opens in the same manner as the first. It begins with a brief matter-of-fact sentence as the speaker recalls the frequency of former visits to the trees: “Yo iba con frecuencia a verlos” (594). Albanio’s contemplation of the trees produces a fusion between emotion, perception and thought and he is suffused with a sense of the divine: “Me sentaba frente a ellos, cara al sol del mediodía, y mientras los contemplaba, poco a poco sentía cómo iba invadiéndome una especie de beatitud” (594). The poet then creates a pictorial effect by repeating the order and the composition of the scene. He draws our attention to the nearby hill, to the more distant plain and to the grass, air and light. His poetic expression also gains the same clarity, classical harmony and balance as the scene described. The division of the final sentence into two finely balanced sections, separated by a colon, mirrors the poise and equanimity of the observer and the serenity of the landscape:

Todo en derredor de ellos quedaba teñido, como si aquel paisaje fuera un pensamiento, de una tranquila hermosura clásica: la colina donde se erguían, la llanura que desde allí se divisaba, la hierba, el aire, la luz. (594)

There are numerous poems in the first edition of *Ocnos* in which the poet’s memory appears to play an anecdotal or descriptive rather than meditative role. Poems such as “Las tiendas” (RD, 583-84), “El Bazar” (RD, 559), “El escándalo” (RD, 562-63) and “Pregones” (RD, 561-62) record simple commonplace events in the child’s life. In “Las tiendas” the child protagonist is absent from the poem and the adult poet describes the merchandise from the sleepy “covachas”. In “El escándalo” the poet provides a wryly observed portrait of two elegant and effeminate “seres misteriosos” (563) dressed in white jackets and black trousers. They swagger with a “gracia felina” (563) and scorn the jeers and insults of onlookers. Nevertheless, such

poems should not be dismissed nor overlooked. While not adhering to the tripartite meditative structure, they contain implicit reflections on the child's ability to live exclusively in the present moment. As in "El amor", in "El escándalo", Cernuda deploys a meticulously constructed syntax. By placing two temporal locutions before the main verb of the first sentence, he forces the reader to pause, accept the suspension of the narrative action and contemplate the events of the long summer Andalusian afternoons: "En las largas tardes del verano, ya *regadas las puertas*, ya *pasado el vendedor de jazmines*, aparecían ellos, solos a veces, emparejados casi siempre" (562; my emphasis). In this poem, as in many others, Cernuda's iterative narrative is characterised by the use of either definite or indefinite delimitation. By beginning the poem with temporal references, such as "En las noches de primavera, alta ya la madrugada" (570), "En los largos atardeceres del verano" (577), followed by a verb in the imperfect tense, the poet emphasises the ritualistic repetition of an event. Cernuda also reduces verbs and verbal constructions to a minimum. In the opening sentence of "José María Izquierdo" (RD, 578-79) the reader is confronted with a series of adjectival phrases and in the first paragraph of "Un compás" (RD, 580) with a series of nouns. Cernuda adopts a technique which he admired in San Juan de la Cruz and Hölderlin and simply enumerates what he sees before him: "El portón. Los arcos. [...] Los muros blancos del convento. Los ventanillos ciegos bajo espesas rejas" (580).¹¹⁵ Through the elimination of the verb, the convent is situated outside chronological time and its secrecy heightened. As Cernuda invites the reader through the convent's creaking gate, he describes the swallows and swifts swooping over the belfry. The combination of verbal suppression and the creation of a descriptive stasis permit the reader to become complicit in the children's "paladar profano" (580), relishing with them a slice of shortbread and a furtive moment of childhood: "En la vaga luz crepuscular, en el silencio de aquel recatado rincón, el exquisito alimento nada tenía de terreno, y al morderlo parecía como si mordiéramos los labios de un ángel" (580).

¹¹⁵ Commenting on the poetry of San Juan de la Cruz, in 'Tres poetas clásicos' Cernuda observes that "Hay momentos en que ni siquiera construye frases completas, sino que se limita a señalar, como si el arte del poeta fuese ya inútil, el nombre mismo de las cosas, cuya hermosura es para él cristal transparente a través del cual admira la faz de su creador", PC I, 498. It is interesting to note that Cernuda also greatly admired San Juan de la Cruz's prose writings: "Mas aún desde un punto de vista literario mundano, pocas cosas tan bellas existen en nuestro idioma como la obra de San Juan de la Cruz. No hablo únicamente de sus versos, sino de su prosa también", PC I, 500.

In “Pregones” and “El tiempo” (RD, 559-60) the poet’s depiction of the child’s intuition of an eternal hidden realm of reality is particularly skilled. Both poems describe the patio in “fresca penumbra” and the soporific sound of the fountain, drawing the reader further into the child’s universe. “Pregones” begins in a fable-like manner: “Eran tres pregones” (561). The poem, structured around a spring afternoon, midday in summer and dusk in the autumn, maintains a subtle equilibrium between the narration of a series of events and a meditation on the timeless world of childhood. Each section of the text, set in a street, a patio and inside the child’s house, concentrates on the various cries of the “pregones”. The poet endows the afternoon breeze with a tactile quality: “la brisa traía un aroma áspero, duro y agudo, que casi cosquilleaba la nariz” (561). The speaker then recalls the drowsy murmur of water in the fountain and the pleasure with which he swung on the wicker rocking chair. In order not to detract the reader’s attention from the stillness of the scene, the poet places a series of adjectives and adverbs after verbs which indicate movement:¹¹⁶

Todo era ligero, flotante; el mundo, como una pompa de jabón, giraba frágil, irisado, irreal. (562).

Y de pronto, tras de las puertas, desde la calle llena de sol, venía dejoso, tal la queja que arranca el goce, el grito de “¡Los pejerreyes!”. (562)

El mundo, tras de detenerse un momento, seguía luego girando suavemente, girando. (562)

Cernuda manipulates the order of the meditative poem in “El tiempo” (RD, 559-60) and begins the text with the analytical section. The poem opens with a general statement: “Llega un momento en la vida cuando el tiempo nos alcanza” (559). Ever attentive to the need to express his thoughts with the utmost clarity, the poet states “Quiero decir que a partir de tal edad nos vemos sujetos al tiempo y obligados a contar con él” (559). Valender (1984: 46) has highlighted how in the final paragraph of “El tiempo” the poet’s perception of the visible and invisible worlds is suggested through the ordered symmetrical construction of sentences:

Allí, en el absoluto silencio estival, subrayado por el rumor del agua, los ojos abiertos a una clara penumbra que realzaba la vida misteriosa de las cosas, he visto

¹¹⁶ Valender (1984: 44) has also noted the above examples.

cómo las horas quedaban inmóviles, suspensas en el aire, tal la nube que oculta un dios, puras y aéreas, sin pasar. (560)

The subordinate clauses and phrases in the first half of the sentence, which delay the introduction of the principal verb “he visto”, are of a different order of perception from those introduced by the main clause. The critic perceptively points out that “el absoluto silencio estival”, “el rumor del agua” and “una clara penumbra” belong to the visible world perceived by the poet, while “las horas [...] inmóviles, suspensas en el aire” and “la nube que oculta un dios” signal the poet’s intuition of an invisible world (1984: 46). By including two orders of perception in a single sentence Cernuda suggests the inter-relation and balance between the temporal and a-temporal worlds.

In conclusion, Cernuda’s elegant, subtle and supple prose communicates to the reader the harmony of the landscape of Andalusia as well as the acute sensitivity of the observer. Although the poet re-creates his past in far greater detail in prose than in verse, his faithful observation of the meditative discipline ensures that the note of nostalgia detected in “Jardín antiguo” does not intrude into the majority of poems which recall his childhood experiences in Southern Spain. Throughout the meticulously structured texts Cernuda accords autonomy and independence to the reader. The acuity of his meditative gaze and the precision of his poetic word enable the reader to visualise the landscape of Andalusia. The skilled use of synaesthesia and personification also invite the reader to sense the presence of a hidden realm within nature. The poet’s ability to devise a lyric, which accentuates states of permanence and which favours stasis over action, the controlled syntax, verbal suppression and iterative narrative, permits the reader to experience the timeless world of childhood. For Cernuda, then, as for San Juan de la Cruz, “la belleza y pureza literaria son resultado de la belleza y pureza de su espíritu; es decir, resultado de una actitud ética y de una disciplina moral” (PC I, 500).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Role of Memory in the Second and Third Editions of *Ocnos*

Todo el pasado de nuestra vida
se parece al cielo cuando se pone el sol:
tanto más claro cuanto más lejano.
Dante Gabriel Rossetti

4.0 Introduction

Following the publication of the first edition of *Ocnos*, set in Andalusia and devoted entirely to scenes of youth, Cernuda continued to write prose poems. The six poems composed in 1944 (“La luz”, “Ciudad de la meseta” [previously “Segovia”], “Santa” [previously “Santa Teresa”], “El mirlo”, “Pantera” and “La tormenta” [previously “La tormenta y el cuco”]) refer to adult rather than to childhood or adolescent experiences. They also possess a more intellectual tone and content than many of the poems in the first edition.¹¹⁷ In 1948 Cernuda sent a new index to José Luis Cano, the editor of the second edition of *Ocnos*, along with a collection of “piezas inéditas” (*Epistolario*, 2003: 442). The index abandoned the miscellaneous order of the first edition. The poet decided to structure the second edition chronologically and he inserted the new poems concerning childhood and adolescence among the original poems of the first edition. The eighteen poems in the second edition concentrate on memories of youth, memories of the poet’s life in Spain after his departure from Seville and reflections on his exile in Great Britain. The edition also contains three texts, “Pantera”, “La soledad” and “Las campanas”, which meditate on the poet’s conflictive relationship with society and the creative process itself. Irritated by claims that the first edition was motivated by nostalgia for Andalusia and determined to maintain a strict separation between “el hombre que sufre y el artista que crea” (PC I, 660), Cernuda

¹¹⁷ In his essay on Gide (1946), Cernuda comments on Gide’s decision not to include adult experiences in his autobiography *Si le Grain ne Meurt*. He notes that adult experiences do not have the same intense emotional value as childhood experiences: “La parte de su vida que Gide refiere es la correspondiente a la niñez y a la primera juventud, los años formativos, aquellos en que la repercusión del mundo en el espíritu es más intensa que extensa, tiñéndose de un matiz poético gracias a la facultad lírica latente en el niño y en el mozo. Y una de las razones que pudo tener para no prolongar el relato más allá de la juventud no sé si sería que nuestras experiencias, pasada la juventud, antes tienen valor intelectual que emotivo, y pierden por tanto el contagioso valor evocativo de las otras juveniles. Acaso también le guiara ahí el ejemplo de Goethe, que detiene su *Dichtung und Wahrheit* en el umbral de la madurez”, PC I, 573-74.

replaced the “yo” present in fifteen poems in the 1942 edition with “tú” and “él”.¹¹⁸ The poet observed that many of the poems in the second edition “tenían resonancia más bien intelectual, pero con regusto poético, que acaso dieran menos unidad al libro primitivo, que estuvo centrado en torno a la ciudad nativa de L. C. y a su vida allí” (RD, 826).¹¹⁹ In the third edition of *Ocnos*, published in November 1963 by the University of Veracruzana, he added fifteen new poems to the forty-eight already published. He continued to recall his experiences of youth in Spain and his exile in Great Britain. He also added material relating to his residence in America as well as two texts, “El acorde” and “Helena”, which meditate on his craft. The first section of this chapter will examine how the poet reconfigures his childhood memories into more philosophical meditations on his *acorde* with the world. It will then consider how the meditative discipline permits the poet to question and overcome his subjective reactions to exile in Great Britain. Finally, it will argue that analytical and theoretical texts, such as “El acorde”, “La soledad”, “Pregón tácito” and “Las campanas”, provide a fitting conclusion to the poet’s inquiry into the nature of poetry and memory which he pursues throughout the three editions of *Ocnos*.

4.1 Memories of Childhood, Youth and Adulthood

In his essay on Gide (1946), Cernuda comments on the controlled and clear-sighted manner in which the mature Gide is able to contemplate his past and present experiences following the publication of *Si le Grain ne Meurt*. His remarks provide

¹¹⁸ In a letter to José Luis Cano, dated 18 February 1948, Cernuda comments on the development of *Ocnos*. He states that “Es cierto que queda rota la unidad temática andaluza de la primera edición; pero nunca pensé centrar el libro en el ambiente andaluz infantil y juvenil, y además me enoja un poco que lo consideren como dictado por ‘nostalgias andaluzas’. Bien sabe Dios que no tengo el menor deseo de volver por aquella bendita tierra, donde viví, contra mi voluntad, tan largo tiempo”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 442).

¹¹⁹ In order to preserve the stylistic and thematic unity of the first edition, Cernuda originally intended to collate and publish the new poems in a second edition, entirely separate from the first, entitled *Marsias*. In 1960 he explained that “‘Marsias’ tal vez fuese título proyectado para la serie nueva de poemas en prosa luego añadidos a la edición segunda de *Ocnos*” (quoted by Valender, 1984: 57). In ‘Marsias’, published in 1964, but written in 1941, Cernuda re-interprets the Greek myth of Marsyas. As in his interpretation of the myth of Ocnos, he emphasises the public’s hostility towards the poet, who attempts to express “un afán sobrehumano” (PC I, 799). At the end of the text, he concludes: “Así, pues, y en las menos palabras, ¿qué se cifra simbólicamente en ese mito de Marsias? Que el poeta debe saber cómo tiene frente de sí a toda la creación, tanto en su aspecto divino como en el humano, enemistad bien desigual en la que el poeta, si lo es verdaderamente, ha de quedar vencido y muerto”, PC I, 800. As Valender notes, the passage recalls the final section of Baudelaire’s prose poem “Le confiteur de l’artiste”: “‘Nature, enchanteresse sans pitié, rivale toujours victorieuse, laisse moi! Cesse de tenter mes désirs et mon orgueil! L’étude du beau est un duel où l’artiste crie de frayeur avant d’être vaincu’” (1984: 58, n3).

the reader with a valuable introduction to the lucid and often cerebral way in which Cernuda studies his own past in the second and third editions of *Ocnos*:

Lo que ahora hallamos en ella, una vez publicado *Si le Grain ne Meurt*, es ese relativo dominio sobre la vida que el hombre semeja adquirir precisamente cuando gran parte de la suya propia es ya pasado; una clarificación y objetividad de sus experiencias, que van dibujándose entonces en la memoria, a la manera de esas escrituras invisibles que sólo un reactivo revela, y en tal sentido, ¿no se diría que el reactivo de nuestra vida es el tiempo? A medida que el futuro se reduce y estrecha ante nuestro paso, el pasado adquiere importancia, y vuelve entonces, descubriendo su significado antes desapercibido, como algo que no ha muerto, como una especie de futuro visto de espaldas. (PC I, 573)

Four poems in the second edition of *Ocnos*, “El poeta y los mitos” (RD, 560-61), “El piano” (RD, 555-56), “El enamorado” (RD, 576-77) and “Sortilegio nocturno” (RD, 580-81), return to the thematic nucleus of the first edition. The texts explore the poet’s access to the transcendent invisible world through music, desire and the written word. Far from simply replicating material contained in the first edition, Cernuda carefully reworks many of the themes explored in poems such as “El poeta”, “La música”, “La música y la noche” and “El amante”. “El poeta y los mitos” offers the reader an analytical rather than lyrical meditation on the awakening of his poetic vocation and in “El piano” and “El enamorado” he adopts a more complex and ambitious narrative point of view. In both poems the young and the mature “yo” of the poet are present in the texts, represented by the pronoun “tú”. As seen in the second chapter, the “tú” form of self-address permits the poet to study his past with a critical gaze and discover, with the equanimity of a detached observer, the “significado antes desapercibido” (PC I, 573) of his former experiences.

“El poeta y los mitos”, with its careful balance between emotion and intellect, complements texts such as “La poesía” and “El poeta” from the first edition. Just as Albanio intuits the mystery of poetry upon reading Bécquer for the first time (“se contagió de algo distinto y misterioso” [569]), the discovery of a book of Greek myths reveals to the child “un mundo donde la poesía, vivificándolo como la llama al leño, trasmataba lo real” (560). The beauty and vibrancy of Greek mythology appears in stark contrast to the cult of suffering taught by Catholic dogma: “¿Por qué se te enseñaba a doblegar la cabeza ante el sufrimiento divinizado, cuando en otro tiempo los hombres fueron tan felices como para adorar, en su plenitud trágica, la hermosura?” (560-61). The speaker then affirms his faith in his early encounter with

Greek mythology, conscious that “cualquier aspiración que haya en ti hacia la poesía, aquellos mitos helénicos fueron quienes la provocaron y la orientaron” (561). As in “El poeta”, Cernuda swiftly transforms a single recollection into a tightly structured meditation on the magnetic power of the written word, which reveals to the receptive and intuitive child-reader “una realidad invisible” (561). However, unlike “El poeta”, in “El poeta y los mitos” the child protagonist is absent from the poem and the point of view is that of the mature poet throughout the text. Rather than developing the composition of place, the poet extends the analytical section of the meditation as he seeks to order, structure and understand his former experiences from a predominantly intellectual point of view.

Whereas “El poeta y los mitos” meditates on the power of the written word, “El piano”, “Sortilegio nocturno” and “El enamorado” recall experiences that transcend language. All three texts skilfully return to, develop and deepen thoughts and meditations contained in “La naturaleza”, “El huerto” and “El amante” regarding the child’s or the youth’s silent spiritual communion with the world. “El piano” examines the profound attraction which music exerted over the child-poet. The composition of place begins abruptly, almost “in media res”: “Pared frontera de tu casa vivía la familia de aquel pianista, quien siempre ausente por tierras lejanas, [...], alguna vez regresaba por unas semanas a su país y a los suyos” (555). The poet’s descriptions of the elusive foreign pianist are deliberately ambiguous, concealing more than they reveal. Rather than recalling the pianist’s physique, the speaker simply remembers his “aire vagamente extranjero y demasiado artista” (555). He also deploys the demonstrative adjective “aquel” without having previously designated or mentioned the subject. The effect is the calculated creation of a sense of mystery and intimacy, as if he tacitly assumes that the reader is already acquainted with the pianist. Entranced, the child listens to the melancholic and languid notes which evoke unknown temporal realms: “escuchabas aquellas frases lánguidas, de tan penetrante melancolía, que llamaban y hablaban a tu alma infantil, evocándole un pasado y un futuro igualmente desconocidos” (555). As an adult, the music continues to enchant him. He senses that its mysterious elemental force “aguarda un gesto divino, el cual, dándole forma, ha de hacerla brotar bajo la luz” (555). In the final section of the meditation the mature “tú” recapitulates and examines the original scene and elucidates the meaning of the memory. He realises that the child is attentive to actions rather than to words.

Consequently, he is acutely sensitive to the quasi-divine power of music which resists rational explanation:

El niño no atiende a los nombres sino a los actos, y en éstos al poder que los determina. Lo que en la sombra solitaria de una habitación te llamaba desde el muro, y te dejaba anhelante y nostálgico cuando el piano callaba, era la música fundamental, anterior y superior a quienes la descubren e interpretan, como la fuente de quien el río y aun el mar sólo son formas tangibles y limitadas.¹²⁰ (555-56)

In “Sortilegio nocturno” the speaker observes a couple making love under the cover of night in a car. Linked by “el goce puro del animal” (581), language ceases to be of any importance for the couple whose embrace assumes a universal meaning: “Al balanceo del coche iban anónimos él y ella, levantados por el deseo a un rango donde el nombre no importa, porque el acto lo excluye, haciendo del particular oscuro cifra total y simbólica de la vida” (580). “El enamorado” recounts the first time that the adolescent experienced sexual attraction. As in “El mar”, discussed in the first section of this chapter, the intensity of his emotion eludes definition or verbal expression. Throughout the composition of place the speaker deftly alternates between the perspective of the young and the mature “tú”. Upon seeing an elegant and graceful “criatura” at an open-air summer concert, the youth experiences an attraction which is at once “gozosa y dolorosa” (576). He both withdraws from and is drawn towards a dark-eyed “criatura”. The adult “tú” then explores the significance of the adolescent’s powerful and contradictory emotions. He states that “No fue ésa la primera vez que te enamoraste, aunque sí fue acaso la primera en que el sentimiento, todavía *sin nombre*, urgió sobre tu conciencia” (576; my emphasis).¹²¹ The poem concludes with a meditation on the fleeting nature of human beauty. The adult “tú” speaks to and for the reader as he declares that the contemplation of the human form permits us to briefly escape from the passage of time:

Otros podrán hablar de cómo se marchita y decae la hermosura corporal, pero tú sólo deseas recordar su esplendor primero, y no obstante la melancolía con que

¹²⁰ Cernuda expresses similar ideas in “A un poeta futuro” (RD, 339-43): “No comprendo a los ríos. Con prisa errante pasan/Desde la fuente al mar, en ocio atareado,/Llenos de su importancia, bien fabril o agrícola;/La fuente, que es promesa, el mar sólo la cumple,/El multiforme mar, incierto y sempiterno” (340).

¹²¹ As seen in the first chapter of this thesis, the concept of “la vida sin nombre” also appears in the essay ‘Carta a Lafcadio Wluiki’ (1931). See also “Como leve sonido” (RD, 190-91) from *Los placeres prohibidos* and poems I and VIII from *Donde habite el olvido*.

acaba, nunca quedará por ella oscurecido su momento. Algunos creyeron que la hermosura, por serlo, es eterna (*Como dal fuoco il caldo, esser diviso – Non può’l bel dall’eterno*), y aun cuando no lo sea, tal en una corriente el remanso nutrido por idéntica agua fugitiva, ella y su contemplación son lo único que parece arrancarnos al tiempo durante un instante desmesurado. (577)

Two texts in the second edition of *Ocnos*, “Ciudad de la meseta” (RD, 589) and “La luz” (RD, 603), recall the adult poet’s moments of harmony and plenitude, openness to and union with external reality. Both poems contain a “resonancia más bien intelectual” (RD, 826) and meditate on the meaning and the power of light. Before examining the texts, it is vital to underline that the poet-philosopher does not sacrifice imagery for a dry terse prose. As in the poems examined above, he maintains a delicate balance between concrete experience and abstract ideas. Although “Ciudad de la meseta” and “La luz” do not forsake poetic imagery for elaborate intellectual analysis, Cernuda’s sophisticated use of vocabulary ensures that his prose resembles “el lenguaje escrito” rather than “el lenguaje hablado”.¹²² “Ciudad de la meseta” depicts Segovia in the winter and opens with a panoramic view of the city which rises “tajante, tal proa de navío”. The city is surrounded by an “halo amarillo” which illuminates the colourless countryside. As in his portraits of Seville from the first edition, the poem reveals Cernuda’s ability to discern minute variations in tone, shade and colour in a given landscape. The reader is struck by the overwhelming glare of light, communicated by the repetition of the adjective “nevado” to describe both the sky and the outstretched plain. The speaker scans the black, grey and white shades of the landscape as well as the “resplandor autónomo” of the markets, streets and squares. He is able to observe the subtle alterations in the light in the cresting of a wall or the belfry of a roof. He realises that the light emanates from the stone itself rather than from a remote “astro”. Consequently, the stone, described as “la piedra planetaria humana”, becomes imbued with metaphysical values and acts as the point of contact between the visible and invisible worlds. The poet conveys the city’s dual status through the juxtaposition of the adjectives “militante y ociosa”. Even the city’s eaves welcome “el tiempo eterno” and “la realidad profunda”. The poem concludes with an assertion of light’s strength and grace, which is both “corona y fundamento de la piedra”.

¹²² In a letter to José Luis Cano dated 4 May 1956, Cernuda declared that “mi vocabulario parte siempre de lo corriente, del lenguaje hablado”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 591). According to Paz, “[por] las palabras que emplea, casi todas cultas, y por la sintaxis artificiosa, más que ‘escribir como se habla’, a veces Cernuda ‘habla como un libro’” (1977 :147).

In “La luz” the memory of mornings spent naked under the sky leads to an analysis of the “violencia irresistible” of light, which is both “etérea” and “animal”. The speaker examines the sense of physical, mental and cosmic harmony created by the rays of light on his body. Reflecting his interest in pre-Socratic philosophy, wherein “water, fire, earth, and air are seen as the immutable, constituent elements of the universe” (Silver, 1965: 142), he recalls that the light silenced “los poderes elementales de que el cuerpo es cifra, el agua, el aire, la tierra, el fuego”.¹²³ Light dissolves the limits of the human form, links thought and matter, inner and outer realities like the embrace of two lovers:

Toda forma parecía recogerse bajo el nombre y todo nombre suscitar la forma, con aquella exactitud prístina de una creación: lo exterior y lo interior se correspondían y ajustaban como entre los amantes el deseo del uno a la entrega del otro. (603)

The colon provides the sentence with a deep pause, which enables the reader to reflect on the poet’s discourse. It also divides the sentence into two sections: one section contains the speaker’s rational appraisal of light and the other the simile of the two interdependent lovers. Although the speaker declares that light testifies to a divine presence, it also brings with it the fear of death. Death appears as the “privación de la luz”. He then concludes that his naked body has absorbed enough light, enough “partículas suficientes de aquella divinidad ilusoria”, to illuminate death. Despite the cerebral content of the poem, the tone is neither strained nor forced, merely demonstrating the “dominio del pensamiento sobre la palabra” (PC I, 504). The circular structure of the opening paragraph, which opens and closes with an image of the speaker’s body stretched out under the sun, provides the text with its imaginative frame. The paragraph concludes with an example of synaesthesia, which emphasises that the poet responds on a sensory as well as on an intellectual level to the effects of the light: “Y tu cuerpo escuchaba la luz.” In his essay ‘The Metaphysical Poets’, T. S. Eliot separates the reflective poet from the intellectual poet. He claims that “Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose” (1951: 287).¹²⁴ The poet’s image of his body

¹²³ This idea re-appears in “*Apología pro vita sua*” (RD, 344-49) from *Como quien espera el alba*: “Este cuerpo que ya sus elementos restituye/Al agua, al aire, al fuego y a la tierra” (348).

¹²⁴ In ‘Tres poetas metafísicos’, Cernuda praises the fusion of thought and emotion in Francisco de Aldana’s poetry. He declares that “La belleza de sus versos, [...], no es conceptual ni formal, sino que

listening to the light demonstrates the extent to which he is a reflective, rather than a purely intellectual poet, a poet who “Piensa el sentimiento, siente el pensamiento” (PC I, 121).

4.2 Memories of Exile in Great Britain

Después de todo, el tiempo que te queda es poco,
y quién sabe si no vale más vivir así,
desnudo de toda posesión,
dispuesto siempre para la partida.
L.C., “La casa”

Six poems in the second edition of *Ocnos* (“Río”, “El mirlo”, “El brezal”, “Las viejas”, “La primavera” and “La nieve”) and four poems in the third edition (“Ciudad caledonia”, “Biblioteca”, “Maneras de vivir” and “El parque”) refer to the poet’s memories of exile in Great Britain. Whereas the majority of poems in the first edition are written in the imperfect tense, many of the texts relating to recollections of adulthood are written in the present tense, indicating the proximity of the experience. “Guerra y paz” (RD, 592), written in January 1958 and published in the third edition, recounts the beginning of the poet’s geographical exile and his arrival in France during the Civil War. Throughout the poem, which describes an exit, a border crossing and an arrival, the poet exerts considerable discipline over a potentially emotive subject matter. The first paragraph recounts his arrival in a deserted railway station “aquel anochecer de febrero”. The temporal reference and the series of verbs in the preterite (“llegaste”, “te encaminaste”, “te separaste”, “animaste”, “pediste”) underline the finality of his departure from Spain. The light of a café leads the speaker to a “rincón del andén vacío”. By contrasting the dark station with the warm light of the café, the poet succeeds in narrating the moment of transition from war to peace with controlled efficiency. In the second paragraph the brevity of the two opening sentences followed by an exclamation express his relief and wonder at the stillness and the silence of the café: “Era el café. Qué paz había dentro. Qué silencio.” The serene image of a mother cradling a child also emphasises the speaker’s transition

pensamiento y expresión forman en ellos un todo inseparable, como el fuego y la rosa de que él nos habla”, PC I, 511.

from a hostile exterior to a secure interior. Having requested milk, toast and cigarettes, he considers his miraculous and profound sense of well-being. Through the satisfaction of simple requests, he slowly regains confidence in the gentle and peaceful nature of life: “Era la vida de nuevo; la vida, con la confianza en que ha de ser siempre así de pacífica y de profunda, con la posibilidad de su repetición cotidiana”. In the penultimate paragraph he recalls his “tierra sangrante”. Rather than detailing scenes of destruction, he describes the twisted relics of the last station in Spain, which acts as a concise and potent symbol of the brutality of war: “un esqueleto de metal retorcido, sin cristales, sin muros — un esqueleto desenterrado al que la luz postrera del día abandonaba”. The speaker then affirms his “voluntad”. While being helpless in the face of “la locura de todos”, he stoically accepts his exile as he physically and metaphorically leaves his homeland: “¿Qué puede el hombre contra la locura de todos? Y sin volver los ojos ni presentir el futuro, saliste al mundo extraño desde tu tierra en secreto ya extraña.”

Despite the restrained and sober manner in which Cernuda recounts the beginning of his physical exile, many of the poems which recall his residence in Great Britain fail to maintain the same even, meditative tone in which thought and emotion unite. In “Ciudad Caledonia” (RD, 594-95), “Las viejas” (RD, 598-99) and “La nieve” (RD, 602-03) the poet adopts a caustic and sardonic tone as he expresses his profound dislike for the industrial city of Glasgow, the climate and the material values of the “sociedad tradicionalista y empírica” (RD, 599) of Great Britain. The poems also reveal his increasing preoccupation with the passage of time and his own mortality. Images of spatial and temporal imprisonment dominate the texts. “Las viejas”, a malicious diatribe against two “viejas espectrales” (599), opens with an abrupt imperative: “Míralas” (598). Uncertain as to whether the speaker is addressing himself or the reader, the reader obeys the command, studies the elderly women and becomes complicit in the speaker’s highly critical gaze and acerbic commentary.¹²⁵ The anonymous solitary women, with their corpse-like bodies, macabre out-dated clothes and stale perfume, provide the speaker with the “imagen del destierro más completo, aquel que no aleja en el espacio sino en el tiempo” (599). In “La nieve” the speaker finds snow as repulsive as the fragile stiff bodies of the two “viejas

¹²⁵ See also Sicot (1995: 228-29). Commenting on “El brezal” and “Las viejas” the critic observes that “Le lecteur s’y sent pris à partie [...]. ‘Mira’ et ‘Míralas’ ne le contraignent-ils pas en effet à une plongée, dès le premier mot, dans le temps et l’espace du poème, mais aussi et surtout dans le regard même du poète qui se saisit alors de celui du lecteur” (1995: 229).

espectrales” (599). As he awakens to a curiously dark light, he watches the falling snow and asks: “La nieve te repele por sí, y además por ser símbolo de algo insidiosamente repelente. Pero ese algo, ¿qué es?” (602). He scorns the senselessness of British Christmas festivities during which families gather around a “pino muerto” (602) and are entranced by “esta [...] nieve cruel, estéril, inapelable” (602).¹²⁶ He then contrasts the fluidity of the fountain, the river, the sea, the clouds and rain with ice, which freezes, fixes and imprisons. Verbs of movement (“yendo y viniendo”, “subiendo y bajando” [602]) are supplanted by verbs of immobility, such as “fija” (602) and “queda” (602), which convey the cessation of water’s protean and life-giving qualities as it becomes snow.

“Ciudad Caledonia” recalls the futile and solitary years spent in the prison-like city of Glasgow. As the poet describes the puritanical and utilitarian inhabitants of Glasgow, he momentarily loses control over the vitality and agility of his poetic language. He resorts to a surprisingly facile simile: “La imaginación les es tan ajena como el agua al desierto” (594). Having sought solace from the world of exile in literature, in “Biblioteca” (RD, 597-98) the speaker expresses his frustration with the sterility and aridity of his existence. Upon contemplating rows of books, he questions the value and purpose of literature.¹²⁷ The insistent repetition of the noun “libros” in the second sentence of the first paragraph underlines his weariness with the written word and the act of reading: “Cuántos libros. Hileras de libros, galerías de libros, perspectivas de libros en este vasto cementerio del pensamiento, donde ya todo es igual” (597). Conscious that books ought to be alive and vibrant, blessed with the ability to illuminate and edify the reader, he refuses to be one of the “frecuentadores

¹²⁶ He scathingly remarks that “Ahí tienes una, y no la menor, de las inconsecuencias habituales en la mente común: hallar como mito de la vida aquel donde la vida precisamente no existe, a menos que con él así se exprese un deseo inconsciente de aniquilamiento en la cima pascual de la trivialidad humana” (RD, 602).

¹²⁷ In ‘Historial de un libro’ Cernuda explains that in Mount Holyoke “La lectura, que siempre tuvo para mí atractivo singular, llegó a aburrirme; a veces me ocurría entrar en la biblioteca de la universidad para tomar un libro y volvía a salir de ella sin ninguno. [...] A veces leía para sustituir la vida que no vivía”, PC I, 656. In a letter written to Rica Brown dated 9 August 1944, Cernuda discusses his life in Great Britain and the climate. He then expresses more serious concerns regarding his acute temporal consciousness, the conflict between living and writing and the possible illusory nature of his poetic activities: “Estoy pasando, y debo pasar, días bastante amargos. [...] Si yo fuera más joven, todo esto me dolería igual [...], pero no tendría como ahora esa obsesión del tiempo que pasa, del tiempo que se acaba para mí. Escribir sería, si no un remedio, acaso un narcótico. Pero cada día siento menos interés por la literatura, me parece un engaño y una trampa de la vida, y a la cual debo haberme olvidado de vivir cuando más debía acordarme de estar vivo”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 380). See also “Noche del hombre y su demonio” (RD, 366-70) from *Como quien espera el alba*. The devil declares that “Ha sido la palabra tu enemigo:/Por ella de estar vivo te olvidaste” (367).

de libros” (598) who read only to “morir” (598). Unsure if he is one of the aforementioned “frecuentadores”, the reader experiences the force of the speaker’s exasperation when he commands: “Sacude de tus manos ese polvo bárbaramente intelectual, y deja esta biblioteca, donde acaso tu pensamiento podrá momificado alojarse un día” (598). The imperative echoes one of the most urgent messages from Gide’s *Les Nourritures terrestres*: “‘Et quand tu m’auras lu, jette ce livre et sors’” (quoted by Sicot, 1995: 230). The speaker assures himself that he still has time to go outside, walk by the river and discover a more vital and instructive source of literary inspiration: “Aún estás a tiempo y la tarde es buena para marchar al río, por aguas nadan cuerpos juveniles más instructivos que muchos libros, incluido entre ellos algún libro tuyo posible” (598).

“El brezal” (RD, 596-97), like “Maneras de vivir” (RD, 599-601), meditates on the power of the creative imagination or the poet’s “mirada interior”, a term borrowed from Wordsworth.¹²⁸ Like “Las viejas”, the poem opens with the stark command “Mira”. Far from urging the reader to share his cynical gaze, the speaker instructs himself and the reader to perceive the heath as clearly and as objectively as possible. The command also acts as the point of departure for a complex intellectual meditation on the role played by memory in the speaker’s perception of external reality. In the first paragraph the speaker recalls his original childhood vision of a heath. He meditates briefly on the child’s unwavering faith in his imagination: “Allá en la niñez lo prefiguró tu imaginación, no dudando, ¿cómo dudaría de su imaginación el niño?, que el brezal fuese sino como tú lo creaste, con aquella mirada interior que puebla a la soledad” (596). Upon discovering the word “el brezal” in a book, the child associated it with mysterious windswept moors in an unknown northern land. The speaker then considers the dream-like nature of his childhood conception of a moor: “La visión era real, cierto, toda campo denso, profuso, misterioso; pero en ella, como en un sueño, no había color alguno” (596). In the second paragraph the adult speaker contemplates an actual moor “bajo cielos ajenos” (597). The speaker quickly surveys the bleak countryside and sky, disappointed that the reality of the moor did not correspond to his idealised childhood vision or his “realidad íntima” (597). He then considers the effect of his sombre mood on his view of the heath: “Tantas cosas como el brezal pudo decirte antes, y ahora que lo tenías

¹²⁸ Leopoldo Panero (1949: 186) first pointed out this borrowing.

allí estaba inexpresivo y mudo, ¿o eras tú quien lo estaba?, porque el brezo es planta de parajes desolados y solitarios” (597). In the concluding section of the meditation the speaker realises that his imaginary childhood vision of the heath denied the actual heath any real beauty:

Y te decías que cuando la realidad visible parece más bella que la imaginada es porque la miran ojos enamorados, y los tuyos no lo eran ya, o al menos no en aquel momento. La creación imaginaria vencía a la real, aunque ello nada significara respecto a la hermosura del brezal mismo, sino sólo que en la visión infantil hubo más amor que en la contemplación razonable del hombre, y el goce de aquélla, por entero y bello, había agotado las posibilidades futuras de ésta, por muy reales que fuesen o pareciesen. (597)

Conscious of the subjective nature of his perception of external reality, in poems such as “La primavera” (RD, 601) and “El mirlo” (RD, 595-96) the poet strives to recall and study the landscape of Great Britain in a far more disciplined and detached manner than in “Ciudad caledonia” or “Las viejas”. Both poems return to the calmer and more meditative vein of the first edition as the poet observes, with an attentive and alert gaze, moments of rare beauty witnessed during his years of exile in Great Britain.¹²⁹ In the first paragraph of “La primavera” the speaker contrasts his memories of spring in Spain with spring in Great Britain. He compares the fertility of the Spanish countryside with the urban cold and dirt of Great Britain:

En lugar de praderas sembradas por las corolas del azafrán, tienes el asfalto sucio de estas calles; y no es el aire marceño de tibieza prematura, sino el frío retrasado quien te asalta en tu deambular, helándote a cada esquina. (601)

Lost in a nostalgic reverie, he absent-mindedly observes a dark dry leaf from the previous autumn and a solitary motionless old man. Upon approaching the “viejo”, he realises that he is selling spring flowers. Struck by their brilliant colours, he lists the flowers’ names, savouring their bold and unexpected beauty: “asfodelos, jacintos,

¹²⁹ In ‘Historial de un libro’ the poet notes that during his exile in Great Britain “La luz, los árboles, las flores del paisaje inglés comenzaron a aparecer en mis versos, para matizarlos con un colorido y claroscuro nuevos. Así fue el norte completando en mí, meridional, la gama de emociones sensoriales”, PC I, 647. It is important to underline that Cernuda did not always find his residence in Great Britain disagreeable or depressing. In a letter to Juan Gil-Albert, dated 25 October 1938, he writes from Cranleigh School in Surrey that “Yo me encuentro bien aquí: he pasado semanas muy difíciles y muy duras, sin esperanzas ningunas. Casi no puedo creer en esta calma actual y me da miedo por la tormenta que tras de ella pueda venir. Inglaterra me está gustando ahora y creo que quedaré buen amigo de esta tierra. Ya el idioma comienza a serme familiar. Leer a Shakespeare, a Blake, a Keats en su propio idioma es gran cosa para mí”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 261).

tulipanes, de vívidos colores increíbles en esta atmósfera aterida”. The poem concludes with a moment of existential illumination. The speaker declares that “la primavera está ahí, loca y generosa”. As spring calls and awakens his senses, heart and mind, he realises that its promise and joy have defied not only the external cold and darkness, but also his own fear, despair and apathy:

Llama a tus sentidos, y a través de ellos a tu corazón, adonde entra templando tu sangre e iluminando tu mente; quienes a la invocación mágica, a pesar del frío, lo sórdido, la carencia de luz, no pueden contener el júbilo vernal que estas flores, como promesa suya, te han traído e infundido en tu miedo, tu desesperanza y tu apatía. (601)

In “El mirlo” the poet celebrates the clear and joyful song of a blackbird which is free from “toda razón humana” (596).¹³⁰ The composition of place is swift and economic. Having specified the time of year and day, the poet directs the reader’s attention to the naked elm trees and the bright gleam of saffron in the crepuscular gloom. He then listens to the song of a lone blackbird. He delays the introduction of the subject of the sentence, allowing the noun “mirlo” to resonate at the end of the first paragraph: “Cerca, desde tal clima sin hoja o cual alero, echándose penas a la espalda, silba sentido e irónico algún mirlo” (596). The skilled composition of place is followed by an equally artful analysis of the lightness of the blackbird’s song. The bird’s day, composed of song and silence, flight and repose, is framed by his indefatigable song: “Tiene su cantar ahora la misma ligereza sin cansancio ni sombra que tuvo a la mañana, y al recogerse tras de la jornada volandera calla en su garganta la misma voz alegre de su despertar” (596). Having described the circular nature of the blackbird’s day, the poet examines in greater depth the bird’s profound sense of equilibrium: “Para él la luz del poniente es idéntica a la del oriente, en sosiego de plumas tibias ovilladas en el nido, idéntico a su vuelo de cruz loca por el aire, donde halla materia de tantas coplas silbadas” (596). The internal rhythm between “poniente” and “oriente” and the subtle alliteration of the “s” in “plumas tibias ovilladas” and “tantas coplas silbadas” (my emphasis) reflect, on a stylistic level, the

¹³⁰ In “Río vespertino” (RD, 371-74) the poet envies the blackbird’s freedom. Like the self-sufficient nightingale in “El ruiseñor sobre la piedra” (RD, 313-18), studied in the second chapter, the blackbird sings only for himself, unaware of the passage of time and unburdened by the need to express and interpret the human condition: “Tan sólo un mirlo/Estremece con el canto la tarde./Su destino es más puro que el del hombre/Que para el hombre canta, pretendiendo/Ser voz significativa de la grey./La conciencia insistente en esa huida/De las almas” (371).

bird's harmony. In the second section of the analysis, the poet elevates the blackbird to a quasi-divine status. The blackbird's flight brings to the earth "alguna semilla divina, un poco de luz mojada de rocío" (596), which nourish his existence, "no de pájaro sino de flor" (596). The transformation of bird into flower, the link between light and water, earth and sky grace the *mirlo* with a cosmic power. The poet then adopts a more intellectual tone as he listens to both the passion and the mockery contained in the bird's song: "Y equivalente oposición dialéctica, primaveral e invernal, a la que expresa el tiempo en esos días, es la pasión y burla que expresa el pájaro en esas notas" (596). In the concluding section of the meditation, the blackbird's song, which defies death, suffuses the listener with its irrepressible joy: "Y su alegría contagiosa prende en el espíritu de quien oscuramente le escucha, formando con este espíritu y aquel cantar, tal la luz con el agua, un solo volumen etéreo" (596).

Like the majority of poems in the first edition, both "El mirlo" and "La primavera" appeal to the reader's aural and visual senses. However, unlike the dense appeal to the senses in poems such as "Jardín antiguo" or "El huerto" the sight of a slim bunch of flowers, the glimpse of saffron and the solitary song of a blackbird, sharpen the reader's senses rather than fill them. Consequently, the reader becomes as alert and disciplined as Cernuda himself, fully equipped to accept and participate in the poet's fleeting moments of peace and plenitude in Great Britain. There is also a strong connection between the poet's faith in the delicate life-affirming world of nature in "La primavera" and "El mirlo" and his celebration of nature's fleeting beauty in "Violetas" (RD, 311-12) from *Las nubes*. "Violetas", composed of three five-line stanzas, describes in plain and unaffected language the fragile yet resilient beauty of spring flowers in England. The first stanza describes the flowers, the second compares them to a human smile and the third points to the moral lessons implicit in the poet's observation of nature. The poem's opening three adjectives ("Leves, mojadas, melodiosas" [311]), composed of two, three and four syllables, establish the slow rhythm of the poem as the poet meditates on and savours the flowers' beauty. As Hughes notes (1987: 55), the selection of words containing consonant clusters ("oscura", "insinuándose", "perla", "tras", "verdes", "valvas") also contributes to the poem's slow tempo. As the flowers march victoriously towards death, the poet realises that their ephemeral beauty lives on in the onlooker's memory:

[...] Así su instante alcanza,
Norma para lo efímero que es bello,
A ser vivo embeleso en la memoria.
(312)

4.3 Memories of Exile and Memories of Poetry

Just as “Guerra y paz” recounts Cernuda’s departure from Spain, “La llegada” (RD, 607-08), published in the third edition, recalls his arrival in America in the autumn of 1947.¹³¹ Impatient and excited, the poet awakens before dawn and contemplates the dark sea and sky from an empty “salón”. He scrutinises the skyline of New York and studies the “sutileza extraordinaria” (607) of the skyscrapers’ colours. Despite the panoramic view, he compares the pink, lilac and violet hues of the buildings to “la entraña en el caracol marino” (607). He then doubts the reality of the scene, fearing that the coast and the city are an illusion, a projection of his desire. He asks himself a series of abrupt questions and momentarily wonders whether the ship will arrive at its destination: “¿Eras tú quien estaba allí? ¿Estaba ante ti la ciudad que esperabas? [...] Temías fuera a desvanecerse como espejismo, que el buque estaba aún en camino, que no ibas a llegar nunca” (607). Having endured the “molestias innumerables” (607) of customs and travelled through the bleak suburbs, he is drawn to enticing and brightly coloured shop windows which gleam like toys “en día de reyes o día del santo” (608). He is also entranced by the vibrancy of the city which is “alegre con la alegría envidiable de la juventud sin conciencia” (608). Whereas Cernuda eagerly discovers and explores an unknown land and city in “La llegada”, in “La casa” (RD, 610-11) he laments his itinerant existence. He yearns for the silence and the security of a house, “un refugio con la amistad de las cosas” (610). He insists that a house would shield him from the “presencia y el ruido ofensivos de esos extraños” (610). Although “La casa” concludes with the assertion that it is better to live stripped of possessions and constantly ready for departure, the affirmation is lost among the speaker’s bitter recollections of his exilic wanderings.¹³²

The second and third editions of *Ocnos* also contain four meditations on the role played by solitude in the creative process, the poet’s experience of “acorde” with the world and the mechanisms of memory itself. These powerful and subtle poems

¹³¹ See also the somewhat disconsolate poem “La partida” (RD, 423-44) from *Con las horas contadas*.

¹³² In a letter to Nieves de Madariaga dated 13 August 1943, Cernuda states that “Así que, con la perspectiva de no volver allá y de no poder continuar aquí, me veo como el alma de Garibay: flotando en los espacios infinitos”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 353).

counteract the emotive, self-pitying and sarcastic tones contained in “La casa”, “Ciudad Caledonia”, “Biblioteca” and “Las viejas”. Through memory the poet affirms his faith in the meditative discipline and in his poetic vocation. All four poems rigorously analyse the ethical and metaphysical nature of his art. “La soledad” (RD, 604) incorporates ideas and imagery previously used in “El magnolio” and “La riada” into a concentrated analytical poem which examines the importance of solitude for the poet and his work.¹³³ The poem begins with a simple circular proposition: “La soledad está en todo para ti, y todo para ti está en la soledad.” Just as the magnolia’s pure flowers blossom in the privacy of a walled garden, solitude calms the poet’s “turbulencia” and allows the creative thought process to take place. The description of solitude as an “Isla feliz” also recalls the final section of “La riada” in which the child listens to the wind and the rain and feels as if he is on an island adrift from the world and its “aburridas tareas” (574):

Isla feliz adonde tantas veces te acogiste, compenetrado mejor con la vida y con sus designios, trayendo allá, como quien trae del mercado unas flores cuyos pétalos luego abrirán en plenitud recatada, la turbulencia que poco a poco ha de sedimentar las imágenes, las ideas.¹³⁴ (604)

The speaker then classifies himself as one of life’s “contempladores”, dependent on distance for clarity of thought and vision. By distancing himself from life, he is able to consider its ironic incongruities and gain a deeper understanding of its “sorpresa y [...] reiteración”. Although solitude separates him from “los otros”, “el amor” and “la vida”, it permits him to attain the serene and concentrated state of mind required by the poetic act. Given that solitude permits the speaker to observe life with a keen and critical gaze, he declares that “Mas esa soledad, que de todo te separa, no te apena. ¿Por qué habría de apenarte? Cuenta hecha con todo, con la tierra, con la tradición,

¹³³ “La soledad” enters into an inter-textual dialogue with poems such as “Soliloquio del farero” from *Invocaciones*, “La familia” and “Góngora” from *Como quien espera el alba*. As seen in the second chapter of this thesis, in “La familia” the speaker reflects on the crucial role which solitude plays in his search for his individual truth and personal value system: “Fuerza de soledad, en ti pensarte vivo,/Ganando tu verdad con tus errores” (336). The poet also praises Góngora for renouncing the material comfort of the Court and for seeking solace in his poetry, in his inner conscience and the life of the mind: “Ya restituye el alma a soledad sin esperar de nadie/Si no es de su conciencia, [...]//Pero en la poesía encontró siempre, no tan sólo hermosura, sino ánimo,/La fuerza del vivir más libre y más soberbio” (331).

¹³⁴ In his essay on Juan Ramón Jiménez (1942) Cernuda declares that “El trato con la poesía es más feliz cuando en soledad, y la luz de aquella brilla más pura lejos de la muchedumbre y del vaho espeso que exhala”, PC II, 157.

con los hombres, a ninguno debes tanto como a la soledad.” He also recognises the pivotal role which solitude has played in shaping his identity. He quietly states that “Poco o mucho, lo que tú seas, a ella se lo debes”. In the final paragraph he recalls the dark star-studded skies of his childhood.¹³⁵ By concluding rather than beginning the poem with a recollection, the poet demonstrates the skill with which he manipulates the structure of the meditative poem. The poem’s final sentence provides the reader with a striking example of the meditative discipline. The poet integrates memory, analysis and commitment to solitude into one sentence. Self-scrutiny is balanced with compelling imagery as he modestly claims allegiance to a privileged community:

Allá entre las constelaciones brillaba la tuya, clara como el agua, luciente como el carbón que es el diamante: la constelación de la soledad, invisible para tantos, evidente y benéfica para algunos, entre los cuales has tenido la suerte de contarte. (604)

Just as Cernuda examines how the meditative process functions in “La soledad”, in “El acorde” (RD, 613-14) he studies the various ways in which the elusive “acorde”, that rare moment of harmony between self and world, occurs. In ‘El historial de un libro’ he claims that the poem failed to express the complexity of his ideas. He states that “Hay experiencias cuyo alcance se nos escapa, unas veces por pereza al explorarlas [...]; otras por incapacidad para explorarlas, y ésa fue mi situación al escribir el poema en prosa ‘El Acorde’” (PC I, 653). Despite his reservations, the poem succeeds in illuminating the acute receptivity and sensitivity of the poet. Grave and concentrated or cheerful and carefree, he is equally responsive to the arrival of the “acorde”: “Pero en una y otra figuración espiritual, siempre hondamente susceptible de temblar al acorde, cuando el acorde llega” (613). In the third paragraph he urges himself to recall and study the still and silent child and adult, who are attentive only to the sound of music: “Mírale: de niño, sentado a solas y quieto, escuchando absorto; de grande, sentado a solas y quieto, escuchando absorto” (613). He examines whether the “acorde”, which began in adolescence and which requires the stimulus of music, is accompanied by a heightened perception of time and space. He enquires “Es primero, ¿un cambio de velocidad?” (613) or “¿Como si se abriese una puerta?” (613). Unwilling to use the term “mystical” to describe the

¹³⁵ In the poem’s final paragraph the phrase “la vastedad de los espacios no te arredra” (604) brings to mind Blaise Pascal’s famous *pensée*: “Le silence éternel de ces espaces infinis m’effraie” (1951: 142).

experience, he declares that the “acorde” defies spatial boundaries.¹³⁶ He claims that the “acorde”, which opens like an arch to unlimited space, invites him to enter into a strange and unusual world in which time ceases to exist: “El instante queda sustraído al tiempo, y en ese instante intemporal se divisa la sombra de un gozo intemporal, cifra de todos los gozos terrestres, que estuvieran al alcance” (613). The poet then enters into a dialogue with himself as he considers the pivotal role played by sexual desire in his “acorde místico” (614): “En otra ocasión lo has dicho: nada puedes percibir, querer ni entender si no entra en ti primero por el sexo, de ahí al corazón y luego a la mente. Por eso [...] tu acorde místico, comienza como una prefiguración sexual” (614). In the penultimate paragraph he ceases to discover the source of the “acorde”. Instead, he describes clearly and simply the effects of the experience which, like the meditative poem, unites both “sentimiento y consciencia”:

Borrando lo que llaman otredad, eres, gracias a él, uno con el mundo, eres el mundo. Palabra que pudiera designarle no la hay en nuestra lengua: *Gemüt*: unidad de sentimiento y consciencia; ser, existir, puramente y sin confusión. (614)

It is interesting to observe that in the second and third editions of *Ocnos* Cernuda does not simply offer the reader abstract and philosophical meditations on his privileged sense of communion with exterior reality. “El estío” (RD, 587-88) and “Mañanas de verano” (RD, 563-64) both return to the more lyrical style of the first edition in order to celebrate the child’s and the adolescent’s ecstatic “acorde” with the world. The poems illustrate the varied and highly skilled manner in which the poet recalls his past in the later editions of *Ocnos*. They also reveal his faith in the sacredness of his youthful experiences and in the power of language to “renew the past” and “fixate the fleeting images of memory” (Jiménez-Fajardo, 1978: 71). “El estío” recalls a day spent luxuriating in the water and heat of a beach in Spain. The opening paragraph focuses on the lightness of the speaker’s body as he basks in the “calor generoso” (587) of the early morning sun. He likens himself to a winged and god-like figure as he greets the day: “Alado, casi, como un dios, ibas al encuentro del día” (587). The use of apposition, the absence of verbs or conjunctions help to

¹³⁶ In a letter to Silver, Cernuda underlines that “Yo trato de atenerme sólo a este mundo. La palabra ‘místico’ me pone siempre en guardia y la empleo lo menos posible. No tengo la pretensión de equiparar mi experiencia poética con la de San Juan de la Cruz, que además de ser gran poeta, es también un *santo*; cualquiera que sea mi antipatía a la iglesia católica, aún guardo respeto a la santidad cuando recae sobre alguien como San Juan de la Cruz”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 899).

communicate the sense of timelessness experienced by the speaker during his wondrous “día de ocio” (587): “el mar en las primeras horas, de azul transparente aún frío tras la madrugada; la alameda a mediodía, pasada de luz su penumbra amiga; las callejas al atardecer, deambulando hasta sentarte en algún cafetín del puerto” (587-88). The poem closes at nightfall, which is as inviting and enticing as the light of day: “Y en la sombra caías, delicia igual a aquella con que te entregabas a la luz, toda la jornada airosa reposando contra ti igual a un ala que se pliega” (588). “Mañanas de verano”, published in the third edition, describes a visit to a market place and explores the child’s consonance with nature. The speaker recalls the unusual nature of the excursion and marvels at the bright array of fruit, pots and sweet-smelling “dulces” (564) in the market. He then describes the clean air of the market. The freshness of the market air imbues the child with a sense of “lo inusitado” (564) and awakens in him a deep feeling of joy and rapture which only the poet is capable of experiencing:

Parecía como si sus sentidos, y a través de ellos su cuerpo, fueran instrumento tenso y propicio para que el mundo pulsara su melodía rara vez percibida. Pero al niño no se le antojaba extraño, aunque sí desusado, aquel don precioso de sentirse en acorde con la vida y que por eso mismo ésta le desbordara, transportándole y transmutándole. Estaba borracho de vida, y no lo sabía; estaba vivo como pocos, como sólo el poeta puede y sabe estarlo. (564)

“Pregón tácito” (RD, 612-13) and “Las campanas” (RD, 606-07) also demonstrate the extent to which, in Cernuda’s hands, memory and meditation become subtle and supple tools of self-analysis. Having read Proust, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Locke and Hartley, he was fully aware of theories relating to involuntary recollection. In his essay on Wordsworth he studies in considerable detail the influence of Hartley’s theory of the law of association of ideas on Wordsworth’s poetry.¹³⁷ In the course of his essay on Coleridge, he analyses Coleridge’s attempts to distinguish

¹³⁷ In a footnote he briefly but incisively explains Hartley’s theory: “Según la psicología de Hartley nuestras pasiones o afectos no son sino agregados de ideas simples unidas por asociación. Ideas simples son sensaciones que sobreviven después que han desaparecido los objetos que las causaron. O sea, que el proceso se desarrolla así: primero sensaciones, que proceden de impresiones producidas por objetos externos en partes diversas de nuestro cuerpo; después simples ideas y sensaciones; por último, bajo el poder de la asociación, todas las facultades diversas de la mente, como memoria, imaginación, entendimiento y voluntad. En términos de la psicología hartleyana el propósito de la poesía, según Wordsworth, consiste en proceder desde simples ideas, inherentes en los incidentes y situaciones de la vida común, hasta mostrar aquella facultad afectiva de la mente humana; en una palabra: desarrollar los sentimientos e ideas que sobreviven a las sensaciones de la vida diaria. Lo importante son los sentimientos, no la serie de sensaciones o emociones, ya que a los sentimientos acompaña cierto gusto o disgusto, y de la mezcla de los mismos procede la jerarquía de valores humanos”, PC I, 290-91.

between fantasy and imagination through the examination of “la ley de asociación de impresiones” (PC I, 312). He also advises the reader to read Proust in order to comprehend the role that memory plays in a literary work: “Del sabor de la magdalena mojada en té, de la oscilación de una losa en la *cour* del palacio de Guermantes, brotan respectivamente, redivivas en el recuerdo, la niñez y la juventud de Marcelo” (PC I, 312). In “Pregón tácito”, published in the third edition, and “Las campanas” Cernuda applies the same finely honed critical faculties to his own experiences of involuntary recollection. “Pregón tácito”, written in Mexico, recalls the time that the poet spent in Los Angeles in 1960. In the opening paragraph the speaker considers “Con afecto sonriente” (612) the memory of the tune from ice cream vans in Los Angeles. By describing the music as “infantil, delicioso, trivial” (612), he implies that it evokes scenes of childhood. In the following two paragraphs, he recalls the occasions when he heard the sound: from the ground floor of a friend’s house and from the window of his own room. While attempting to remember the tune, he vividly recalls the avenue’s palm and gum trees, the kaleidoscopic sunsets and in the second instance, the city’s lights seen from his bedroom. He then analyses the actual mechanisms of memory.¹³⁸ He elucidates how “unos días placenteros” (612) can crystallise around a trivial object, which in turn assumes a magical status. Despite his lucid dissection of the process of recall, he does not dispense with the mystery of memory. He admits that although he can visualise the white ice cream vans, he can neither hum, nor recall their enticing tune:

Y sin embargo, oh paradoja, bien que puedas evocar y ver dentro de ti la imagen de aquellos carritos del helado, no puedes en cambio recordar ni tararear dentro de ti el airecillo que sonaban, la musiquilla aquella, ahora inasequible, aunque idealmente siga sonando silenciosa y enigmática en tu recuerdo. (613)

Cernuda also carefully and patiently investigates the mechanisms of memory in “Las campanas”, a hermetic poem which testifies to the poet’s interest in the complexities and subtleties of the human mind. The speaker seeks to discover and

¹³⁸ The prose poem “El destino” (RD, 581-82) from the first edition also reveals the poet’s interest in the workings of memory. As he listens to the sound of water in a quiet secluded courtyard of the University of Seville, he recalls the end of his time at university: “Aquella tarde, el surtidor que se alzaba como una garzota blanca para caer luego deshecho en lágrimas sobre la taza de la fuente, su brotar y anegarse sempiterno, trajo a tu memoria, por *una vaga asociación de ideas*, el fin de tu estancia en la universidad” (581; my emphasis).

understand the attraction of memory. He scrutinises the word “recuerdo” and wonders whether it captures all the “emoción intemporal” (606) of a recollection. He claims that the mystery of memory resides in the fact that it confers a profound significance on seemingly insignificant events and awakens dormant emotions. He compares the emotion stirred by memory to the light of a star:

Porque ahí está lo misterioso: que nazca una emoción al adumbrarse en la memoria el recuerdo de algo que ninguna emoción parecía suscitar cuando actualmente ocurriera, como la luz que recibimos de una estrella no es la luz contemporánea de ese momento, sino la que de ella partió en otro ya distante. Hay emociones, entonces, cuyo efecto no es simultáneo con la causa, y deben atravesar en nosotros regiones más densas o más vastas, hasta que sean perceptibles un día. (606)

The speaker then considers the unexpected force and power of his own emotions as he hears bells ringing from a cathedral in England. He takes care to underline the objective nature of involuntary recall. The bells ring within his “mirada interior” (606), recreating the exact temporal and spatial circumstances of the original occurrence of bells ringing in Spain. The speaker realises that the magical peals of the bells evoke the memory of “un júbilo de festividad solemne y familiar” (606), a memory which is significant only for him. He vigorously stresses that the process of recollection illuminates rather than idealises the past. He states that “No, no es idealización de algo distante lo que así anima un momento pasado, porque no se te oculta como sórdido aquél y su ambiente” (606). The experience of involuntary recollection, like the meditative poem, trains, clears and focuses his mind. Through one concentrated “percepción auditiva” (606), the vitality not only of the speaker’s past, but of life itself returns, crystallising around the sound of the bells:

La nitidez de su impresión, cuando tú absorto, cerradas las compuertas de los restantes sentidos, contenías la vida enteramente en una percepción auditiva, inútil entonces e inútil ahora, opera el encanto tardío de la evocación, haciendo la imagen más bella y significativa que la realidad. (606)

“Las campanas” concludes with a clear example of how memory and the speaker’s ethic of fidelity are intertwined. His belief in the value and beauty of his intimate recollections leads to a bold statement of faith and a realisation that

[...] la importancia o fortuna de una existencia individual no resulta de las circunstancias trascendentales o felices que en ella concurren, sino, aun cuando anónima o desdichada, de la fidelidad con que haya sido vivida. (606-607)¹³⁹

Thus, in the second and third editions of *Ocnos*, Cernuda's memories of childhood and adolescence assume the form of a quest, a quest to imbue personal experience with universal truth and value. As the reader follows the poet on his journey from childhood to adolescence and his exilic journey from Spain to Great Britain and from Great Britain to America, he observes the increasing command which the poet exerts over his personal recollections, steadily re-shaping the poetic representation of the past. Distance and time permit the poet to view his past with both clarity and objectivity. By inserting poems which contain more sophisticated and complex forms of narrative address, such as "El piano" and "El enamorado", alongside the childhood poems of the first edition, Cernuda creates a myriad of perspectives on a single theme. The dialogue between mature and young voices in "El piano" and "El enamorado" obliges the reader, even more than in the first edition, to consider the texts from the perspective of the past and present simultaneously. In predominantly analytical poems such as "Ciudad de la meseta" and "La luz", the poet unites the senses and the intellect and transforms memories of light into concentrated statements of cosmic belonging.

It is vital that the reader perceives the three editions of *Ocnos* as an organic whole: the discreet lyricism of the first edition and the more cerebral tones of the second and third, the life-affirming memories of childhood and the acerbic memories of adulthood, illuminate and complement one another and enter into their own silent meditation. Throughout Cernuda's adult memories of physical exile in Great Britain, the pressure of painful and acrimonious recollections creates prose poems of a highly uneven quality. Nevertheless, the poet's plaintive or emotive tones in "Las viejas", "Ciudad caledonia" or "La casa" imbue poems such as "El brezal", "El mirlo", "La

¹³⁹ In his essay 'Proust and Human Time' Poulet offers a perceptive and illuminating study of the redemptive and spiritual role played by involuntary memory in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. He notes that the "Proustian memory has often been identified with the affective memory of the psychologists. And — psychologically speaking — it is that without doubt: that is to say, a revival in us of a forgotten state of mind. [...] But for Proust profound remembrance is not only that, something involuntarily undergone, but at its point of arrival in us something which is or which ought to be the point of departure for our spiritual action. It is an invitation, an appeal, which is addressed to all our being, and to which all our being ought to respond" (1962: 156-57). The above remarks could also apply to Cernuda's experience of involuntary memory in "Las campanas", an experience which actively engages his mind, sensory perceptions and profound sense of personal integrity.

primavera”, “Guerra y paz”, “Las campanas,” “Pregón tácito” and “El acorde” with greater potency. In “El brezal” the poet offers a subtle and intricate meditation on the subjective nature of his perception of external reality. This dense and difficult poem reveals not only the depth of his self-knowledge, but also his fully developed capacity for self-criticism in his mature poetry. In “Guerra y paz” Cernuda demonstrates his command over the meditative poem as he describes the solitary crossing from one nation to another with controlled composure and accepts physical exile with equanimity.

“La soledad”, “El acorde”, “Pregón tácito” and “Las campanas” reveal the self-reflexive nature of *Ocnos* as the poet studies the creative process itself, the mechanisms of the “acorde” and involuntary memory. It is important to underline that these more theoretical poems do not simply conclude *Ocnos* with an intellectual flourish. Cernuda’s realisation in “Las campanas” that the importance of an individual existence derives from “la fidelidad con que haya sido vivida” (RD, 607) reveals the extent to which he is an ethical poet, remaining faithful to his own “hombre interior” or “yo profundo” (PC I, 508). By having explored and remained loyal to his past, present and future throughout the three editions of *Ocnos*, committing himself to a life of displacement and belief in a transcendent reality, Cernuda, like Gide, “Por haber sido fiel [...] a sí mismo ha sido a la larga fiel al hombre” (PC I, 579).

CHAPTER FIVE

Between Exile and Return: Memory and Border Crossing in *Variaciones sobre tema mexicano*

Est-ce un souvenir que j'habite?
André Gide

5.0 Introduction

George Steiner has identified the border as one of the most powerful inventions shaping the modern mind.¹⁴⁰ Similarly in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, Marc Robinson writes: “Its variants are everywhere we look: thresholds, fences, bridges, and tollbooths; doormen and ticket-takers; air-rights and ‘glass ceilings’; the layers of the psyche and the class system” (1994: xxii). Throughout the thirty-one poems of *Variaciones sobre tema mexicano*, written between February and November 1950, the concept of the border, whether spatial or temporal, plays a pivotal role in conditioning Cernuda’s subtle responses to his adopted country. Framed by two explicatory texts entitled “El tema” (RD, 621-22) and “Recapitulando” (RD, 657-58) and inspired by his re-encounter with a Hispanic environment after his periods of exile in Great Britain and America, the book documents both his sense of homecoming and *dépaysement* in Mexico.¹⁴¹ Assuming the role of an observer of the Mexican culture and landscape, throughout *Variaciones* he discovers places which both recall his childhood in Seville and invite him to explore remnants of a non-Hispanic culture.

Despite the play between identity and alterity in the texts, as previously seen in the introduction to this thesis, Harris (1973) and Silver (1965) claim that the climate and landscape of Mexico offer the poet a mirror image of his native Andalusia and the opportunity to recapture the idyllic world of his childhood. Rather than viewing *Variaciones* as the celebration of an Edenic landscape in which reality and

¹⁴⁰ Quoted by Robinson (1994: xxii).

¹⁴¹ On 13 March 1950 Cernuda writes enthusiastically to Salvador Moreno in Mexico about *Variaciones*. “¿Sabe qué hago? Escribo algo sobre México, y no estoy descontento de lo que resulta. En prosa, animada por la poesía a veces, según espero, con imágenes de la tierra y la gente. Pocas veces he escrito con tanto cariño y gusto”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 482). Luis Felipe Vivanco declares that in *Variaciones* “el poema en prosa y el ensayo se complementan y unifican en una nueva forma de arte”, quoted by Valender (1984: 120, n18).

desire coincide, this chapter will consider how the poet's acute awareness of boundaries or thresholds conditions his sense of place and displacement in Mexico.¹⁴² It will examine how border crossing acts as the stimulus for the process of restitution and recollection undertaken in Mexico, enabling the poet to recuperate his native language and the topography of his youth. It will then study how both personal and collective memory separate him from Mexico and his own past. This section of the chapter will draw on de Certeau's theories on the "alterity" of memory and the complex relations between memory and place. As the writer is forced to assume a border position between exile and return, it will consider how the border becomes a self-elected place of belonging, allowing him to meditate on his place within Mexico and on the process of poetic creation itself.

5.1 The Returning Exile in Mexico

Structured loosely around his arrival and departure from Mexico, several texts begin with the border crossings of the "viajero-poeta".¹⁴³ "Lo nuestro" (RD, 629) opens with the phrase "Apenas pasada la frontera" and "Un jardín" (RD, 644-45) begins with the act of crossing a threshold within a garden in Mexico: "Al cruzar el cancel, aun antes de cruzarlo, desde la entrada al patio, ya sientes ese brinco, ese trémulo de la sangre, que te advierte de una simpatía que nace" (644). Crucially, in "La lengua" (RD, 625-26), the first prose poem of the book, it is the act of border crossing which signals the writer's entrance into a familiar linguistic environment.¹⁴⁴ The text, split

¹⁴² In his 1984 study Valender alerts the reader to the complexity and contradictions contained in *Variaciones*. He examines how Mexico at once conforms to and challenges Cernuda's mythical concept of Spain, baptised in previous texts as "Sansueña". In the concluding section of his study he argues that: "Por demasiado tiempo *Variaciones* se ha ido interpretando como celebración del supuesto regreso de Cernuda al Edén de sus sueños. [...] Si no consigue otra cosa, espero que el presente estudio habrá demostrado que lo que está diciendo Cernuda aquí es todo lo contrario: que la realidad y el deseo no coinciden y que no podrían coincidir nunca" (1984: 120). Although he offers perceptive and subtle readings of the poems, he does not examine in any depth the salient role played by the border or by memory in the book. Oscar Sánchez Aguilera (1996) has also developed and nuanced Valender's arguments. The critic traces the map of the various "otredades" encountered by the poet in Mexico. He observes that "el movimiento doble entre la (aparente) constatación de [...] armonía [...] durante sus residencias en tierras mexicanas y la creciente conciencia de su dificultad/ precariedad para sostenerse en los propios textos, constituye uno de los rasgos medulares de este conjunto" (1996: 124).

¹⁴³ I borrow this phrase from Sánchez Aguilera (1996: 144). Sicot also notes that "Le livre se présente bien comme un itinéraire, avec une arrivée par la frontière nord, dans le premier poème ('La Langue') et un départ en avion ('Centre de l'homme')" (1998: 170).

¹⁴⁴ Throughout *Variaciones*, the liminal space of the border is the site of meetings and encounters with the poet's language, culture and personal past. Indeed, in his analysis of the role played by the border in 'Récits d'espace', de Certeau writes: "Problème théorique et pratique de la frontière: à qui appartient-elle? Le fleuve, le mur ou l'arbre *fait* frontière. Il n'a pas le caractère de non-lieu que le tracé cartographique suppose à la limite. Il a rôle médiateur. [...] Il articule. Il est *aussi* un passage. Dans le

into three sections and composed of a tapestry of voices, also initiates the reader into the theme of the returning exile. In the opening section the writer doubles as an interlocutor with himself. He scrutinises the emotions experienced upon hearing his language for the first time after his exile in English-speaking countries. Through the recovery of language, he gains a rare sense of continuity between interior and exterior existences:

— Tras de cruzada la frontera, al oír tu lengua, que tantos años no oías hablada en torno, ¿qué sentiste?

— Sentí cómo sin interrupción continuaba mi vida en ella por el mundo exterior, ya que por el interior no había dejado de sonar en mí todos aquellos años.¹⁴⁵ (625)

Switching between the second person singular, first person plural and an impersonal discourse, he then underlines the existential importance of language for a poet. Far from being a mere tool or device, language represents the very condition and foundation of his existence, binding him inextricably to his nation and to his native tongue:¹⁴⁶

La lengua que hablaron nuestras gentes antes de nacer nosotros de ellos, esa de que nos servimos para conocer el mundo y tomar posesión de las cosas por medio de sus nombres, importante como es en la vida de todo ser humano, aún lo es más en la del poeta. Porque la lengua del poeta no sólo es materia de su trabajo sino condición misma de su existencia.

Y si la primera palabra que pronunciaron tus labios era española, y española será la última que de ellos salga, determinadas precisa y fatalmente por esas dos palabras, primera y postrera, están todas las de tu poesía. (625)

récit, la frontière fonctionne comme tiers. Elle est un [...] 'espace entre deux' [...] Lieu tiers, jeu d'interactions et d'entre-vues, la frontière est comme un vide, sym-bole narratif d'échanges et de rencontres" (1990: 186-87). Martin Heidegger also observes that, "A boundary is not that at which something stops but, [...] is that from which something *begins its presencing*" (1975: 154).

¹⁴⁵ Mirroring the sense of temporal and existential continuity experienced by Cernuda upon recovering his language, in 'La lengua, lugar de identidad', Francisca Perujo underlines that language provides both spatial and temporal permanence for an exile: "lengua-refugio, lengua-propiedad-verdadera, lengua, lugar de identidad, por carencia de otro lugar común o social propio. Y como la lengua es expresión, al sentirla como un lugar propio absoluto, es posibilidad única de síntesis de expresión de ese ser histórico que es la vida, [...], por haber sido ella el único fundamento estable, cierto, el hilo no fragmentado, no roto, en el camino de la vida" (1995: 399).

¹⁴⁶ Cernuda expresses similar ideas in "Es lástima que fuera mi tierra" (RD, 501-04), the first poem of "Díptico español" from *Desolación de la quimera* (1956-1962). The poem examines his relation to the then contemporary Fascist Spain. As a poet, the speaker claims that he can exchange neither his country nor his language: "No he cambiado de tierra,/Porque no es posible a quien su lengua une,/Hasta la muerte, al menester de poesía" (503). His task is to faithfully serve his land and his language: "Poeta alguno/Su tradición escoge, ni su tierra,/Ni tampoco su lengua; él las sirve,/Fielmente si es posible" (503).

Having elucidated the vital link between a poet, his language and his craft, he simply states “Que la poesía, en definitiva, es la palabra” (625). As he listens to the “eco fiel” (626) of Spanish in Mexico, he recognises that the “destino” (626) of his country is preserved through and in the form of words, which are “esos mismos signos de su alma” (626). Able to possess his language after his years of exile, he is unable to repress a feeling of national pride and debt. Consequently, the “artesano oscuro” (626) within him feels a sense of gratitude for the “conquistadores” who attained a “destino universal” for the Spanish language. “Y qué gratitud no puede sentir el artesano oscuro, vivo en ti, de esta lengua hoy tuya, a quienes cuatro siglos atrás, con la pluma y la espada, ganaron para ella destino universal” (626).¹⁴⁷ As Sánchez Aguilera observes, it is Cernuda’s re-encounter with his native language, the very source of his poetic and national identity, which facilitates his “simpatía profunda” (RD, 632) with Mexico. He underlines that “gracias a la ‘universalidad’ alcanzada siglos antes por ella y el espíritu que la informa, puede el viajero-poeta sentirse como en tierra propia lejos de su tierra” (1996: 140). Reflecting the bond experienced by the writer between his vocation, language and sense of national belonging, the critic notes that, “Lengua, identidad y poesía, si no como sinónimos, guardan entre sí una relación a modo de vasos comunicantes” (1996: 140).

Cernuda’s return to his linguistic environment also heralds the discovery of an ethical value system which corresponds to his idealised conception of Spain, celebrated in poems such as “Resaca en Sansueña” (RD, 277-81), “El indolente” (RD, 365) and “Elegía anticipada” (RD, 358-60). As in “Resaca en Sansueña” from *Las nubes*, in which he praises the innocence and indolence of the inhabitants of Sansueña, in “Mercaderes de la flor” (RD, 631-32) he extols the patience and humility of flower sellers. Whereas Anglo-Saxons “cubren el mundo de fábricas” (631), Mexicans cultivate flowers in their plot of land and assume poverty as a “vocación orgullosa e intransigente” (631). The speaker studies and is fascinated by the intensity of the flower sellers’ gaze, which reflects and expresses their inner integrity: “Bajo el ala del sombrero, en una de esas caras frescas que apenas han dejado de ser infantiles, qué intensidad tiene la mirada” (631). In “Los ojos y la voz” (RD, 640-41) the speaker

¹⁴⁷ Given that this chapter concentrates on Cernuda’s sense of place and displacement in Mexico, it will not dwell in any great depth on his, at times, polemical vision of the Conquest as presented in “El tema” and “Recapitulando”. For poems relating to Cernuda’s “Sansueña histórica”, see “Quetzalcóatl” (RD, 441-45), dedicated to Hernán Cortés, and the trilogy dedicated to Felipe II: “Aguila y rosa” (RD, 441-45), “Silla del rey” (RD, 419-23) and “El ruiseñor sobre la piedra” (RD, 313-18).

contrasts the disdainful voices and the listless gaze of the Anglo-Saxon with the musical tone of voice and the alert expressive gaze of the Mexican: “Estos ojos morenos, de mirar prolongado, que toca y que penetra; ojos a los que asoma el alma, que son ellos mismos el alma” (641). With clear echoes of the short story ‘El indolente’ (1929), which affirms the importance of the freedom from possessions and from the desire of possessions, in “El indio” (RD, 651) the poet celebrates the Mexican Indian’s spiritual integrity and self-sufficiency.¹⁴⁸ The serene Indian, indifferent to misfortune and acquiescing in the face of death, quietly accepts his poverty and is sustained by “algo más hondo”. Stripped of wealth and impervious to the flux of history, he remains faithful to himself and encapsulates for the poet a vital existential attitude. In the fourth paragraph the speaker urges himself to look at, pay heed to and learn from the Indian with whom he feels an instinctive bond:

Cayeron los amos antiguos. Vencidos a su vez fueron los conquistadores. Se abatieron y se olvidaron las revoluciones. Él sigue siendo el que era; idéntico a sí mismo, deja cerrarse, sobre la agitación superficial del mundo, la haz igual del tiempo.

Es el hombre a quien los otros pueblos llaman no civilizado. Cuánto pueden aprender de él. Ahí está. Es más que un hombre: es una decisión frente al mundo. [...] Allá en tus entrañas le comprendes.

Mírale, tú que te creíste poeta, y tocas ahora en lo que paran tareas, ambiciones y creencias. A él, que nada posee, nada desea, algo más hondo le sostiene; algo que hace siglos postula tácitamente. (651)

Despite Cernuda’s identification with the simplicity and dignity of the Mexican (see “Dignidad y reposo” (RD, 627-28]), his residence in the wealthier industrial countries of Britain and America frequently determines his initial reactions to the economic and cultural realities of Mexico. Having traversed a geographical border, in “Lo nuestro” (RD, 629) the speaker arrives in a “pueblo desastrado y polvoriento”. This poverty stricken town awakens painful memories of his homeland:

¹⁴⁸ The narrator of the short story ‘El indolente’ states that in Sansueña “Ningún deseo duele al corazón, porque el deseo ha muerto en la beatitud de vivir; de vivir como viven las cosas: con silencio apasionado”, PC II, 270. Later he declares: “— Le envidia — dije yo a Don Míster una de esas tardes —. Carece usted de lo que la gente considera como necesario para vivir, ya sea aparato de radio, teléfono o periódicos. Tiene en cambio todo lo que hoy se considera superfluo, desde las flores y el aire hasta la soledad. ¡Quién fuera usted! — añadí con un suspiro”, PC 11, 273. Cernuda expresses similar sentiments in “Propiedades” (RD, 646-48) in which his alter ego, Albanio, rejects the need for property. He upholds his friend Choco as an example of the freedom gained from a lack of possessions: “¿Dónde come? ¿Dónde duerme? ¿Es que come o duerme, en verdad? Lo único que posee, y eso no le posee a él, sino que es él, es su gracia [...] ¡Ah, no poseer nada, como si se poseyera todo! Ésa es su libertad.”

“Recuerdos de tu tierra, también pobre y también grave”.¹⁴⁹ Unaccustomed to overt scenes of destitution after his exile in more affluent territories, he is tempted to cross back over the border and return to America: “Y te sentiste tentado de volver a cruzar, sin más, al otro lado de la frontera”. He then overcomes his “primer movimiento de rencor atávico”. He reflects upon the intense vitality of the Mexican and the sacrifices required for such vitality:

Aquella tierra estaba viva. Y entonces comprendiste todo el valor de esa palabra y su entero significado, porque casi te habías olvidado de que estabas vivo. Acaso el precio de estar vivo sea esa pobreza y duelo que veías en torno; acaso la vida exija, para estar viva, ese abono ruin de miseria y tristeza, entre las cuales ella, como una flor, crece acrisolada. ¿Sofismas? Nada quedaba allá de la trivialidad y el vacío de la vida en las tierras de donde venías. (629)

In “La imagen” (RD, 633) the reader detects a similar tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Overwhelmed by the smell of flowers and incense in a church, the speaker studies and marvels at the devout congregation. After having spent many years in “tierras puritanas”, he is surprised by and is unable to believe or partake in their unconditional faith. Nonetheless, he urges himself to recognise the vestiges of his cultural heritage: “Más ahí está, viva por esos cuerpos, la obra más duradera de tu raza, entre éstos que tan de la tuya te parecen.” Disregarding the process by which Catholicism was enforced in Mexico (“dioses remotos idos, culto cruel extinto”), he allows himself to be revived by the religious fervour of the Mexican. Their “creencia en lo sobrenatural” and “actitud contemplativa” not only recall those of his own people, but also resuscitate him after the vicarious existence of exile: “Y en ellas te refrescas la sed y el cuerpo, como en una corriente que brotase súbita de la tierra donde se ocultaba”.

Linked to Mexico through “las palabras” and a mode of existence which embraces stillness and a detachment from material possessions, the poet also

¹⁴⁹ Throughout *Variaciones* it is important to note that the poet’s memories are triggered by the *recognition* of his homeland or, in the case of “El patio”, of his younger self in Mexico. This process of recall exemplifies Ricœur’s claim that “la reconnaissance est l’acte mnémonique par excellence” (2000: 557). Ricœur upholds *la reconnaissance* as “le petit miracle de la mémoire” (2000: 644). He writes: “Comme miracle, il peut lui aussi faire défaut. Mais quand il se produit, sous les doigts qui feuilletent un album de photos, ou lors de la rencontre inattendue d’une personne connue, ou lors de l’évocation silencieuse d’un être absent ou disparu à jamais, le cri s’échappe: ‘C’est elle! C’est lui!’ Et la même salutation accompagne de proche en proche, sous des couleurs moins vives, un événement remémoré, un savoir-faire reconquis, un état de choses à nouveau promu à la ‘récognition’. Tout le faire-mémoire se résume ainsi dans la reconnaissance” (2000: 644).

experiences a profound connection with the surrounding physical landscape. In “El mirador” (RD, 632) the speaker notes that an image, which is prior to imagination and memory itself, has prepared him for his bond with the Mexican topography. The poet’s poised and balanced prose, split into a series of sub-clauses of more or less equal length, draws the reader towards the pre-rational “imagen”:

Acodado luego en el muro, miras el paisaje, te dejas invadir por él, de tus ojos a tu imaginación y su memoria, adonde algo anterior, no sabes qué, imagen venida cómo o por dónde, parecía haberte preparado para esta simpatía profunda, este conocimiento entrañable que a su vista en ti despierta.¹⁵⁰ (632)

In “El patio” (RD, 648-49) the poet explores in greater depth the connection between his personal identity and the architecture and landscape of Mexico. In the opening paragraph he describes the composition and atmosphere of the patio: “Medio cortesano y medio rústico, está lleno de sol y de calma; de calma filtrada por los siglos, de vida apaciguada” (648). The stillness, harmony and order contained in the patio, with its “fuente al centro y naranjos en torno”, is similar to de Certeau’s definition of a place as:

l’ordre (quel qu’il soit) selon lequel des éléments sont distribués dans des rapports de coexistence. [...] La loi du “propre” y règne: les éléments considérés sont les uns à côté des autres, chacun situé en un endroit “propre” et distinct qu’il définit. Un lieu est donc une configuration instantanée de positions. Il implique une indication de stabilité. (1990: 172-73)

As the patio imbues the speaker both with a sense of the “propre” and of “stabilité”, he attempts to possess it through the gaze: “Sentado en un poyo, miras y miras embebido, con el gozo de quien largo tiempo privado de un bien, lo encuentra al fin, e incrédulo aún, lo posee” (648). Having regained a concrete sense of belonging in what appears to be a “rinconcillo andaluz”, inner and outer realities unite, fused in the “imagen fundamental” which has sustained him since childhood:

¹⁵⁰ For Walter Benjamin the “real treasure” contained within memory also consists of non-verbal images. He states that, “He who seeks to approach his own buried past must conduct himself like a man digging. [...] He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter; to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is only a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth: the images, [...], that stand — like precious fragments or torsos in a collector’s gallery — in the prosaic rooms of our later understanding” (1979: 314).

Viendo este rincón, respirando este aire, hallas que lo que afuera ves y respiras también está dentro de ti; que allá en el fondo de tu alma, en su círculo oscuro, como luna reflejada en agua profunda, está la imagen misma de lo que entorno tienes y que desde tu infancia se alza, intacta y límpida, esa imagen fundamental, sosteniendo, ella tan leve, el peso de tu vida y de su afán secreto. (648)

He then experiences a dissolution of temporal and spatial boundaries as he recognises that the existence of both the adult poet and the child belong in a secret and silent “rinconcillo [...] del mundo”:

El hombre que tú eres se conoce así, al abrazar ahora al niño que fue, y el existir único de los dos halla su raíz en un rinconcillo secreto y callado del mundo. Comprendes entonces que al vivir esta otra mitad de la vida acaso no haces otra cosa que recobrar al fin, en lo presente, la infancia perdida, cuando el niño, por gracia, era ya dueño de lo que el hombre luego, tras no pocas vacilaciones, errores y extravíos, tiene que recobrar con esfuerzo. (648-49)

Given that Cernuda connects disparate geographical locations and temporal existences through the contemplation of his surroundings, in several poems the act of looking assumes a vital importance. In “Miravalle” and “El regreso” he deploys the gaze as a means of recreating the Mexican landscape and rooting himself in a stable, self-contained “lieu” after the errance of exile. In the opening paragraph of “Miravalle” (RD, 626-27) he describes the physical organisation of the scene. By directing both his and the reader’s gaze from the terraces of the palace to the leaves of a nearby park, from the distant mountains to the overarching sky, he captures the depth and expanse, scope and detail contained within the view. Structuring the paragraph around a series of spatial markers (*desde, allá, primero, luego, al fondo, encima*) he ensures, as in his portraits of Andalusia in *Ocnos*, that the written word conforms to and expresses the plasticity of his vision:

Tiene este ala del palacio que fue virreinal un piso único, y sobre él todo son terrazas. Desde su risco levantado, a cualquier parte que mires, aparecen frondas allá abajo: primero las del parque, luego las de las avenidas. Al fondo, de un azul acerado y nevado, están las montes. Encima el cielo, el cielo profundo y luminoso. (626)

Having described the scene and experienced the charge and pull of the familiar, he urges himself to study and savour the countryside: “Siendo todo esto tan nuevo para ti, nada sin embargo te resulta extraño. [...] Míralo, míralo bien; acoge entera dentro

de ti tanta hermosura, que su contemplación es un regalo del destino, cuando de él ya ninguno esperabas” (626).¹⁵¹ Aware of the power of the landscape to penetrate “el alma de quien lo mira” (626), he notes the intimate complicit bond between the land and the onlooker: “Tendido bajo la mirada del hombre, le sonrío compasivo, casi tiernamente. Porque en él la grandeza no excluye la sonrisa, ni lo dramático lo delicado, siendo como es paisaje de conciliaciones, no de extremosidades” (626).

In “El regreso” (RD, 654) he not only recreates but also unites with the landscape through the act of looking. As in “Miravalle”, the speaker observes the similarities between past and present territories: “Frente a ti, y al fondo, los montes que precisa ascender. Otra vez estás en una tierra cuyo ritmo y acento se acuerdan con aquellos de la tuya ausente”. However, he suddenly doubts the reality of the scene and he sharply interrogates himself: “¿Estás realmente aquí? ¿No es en tu imaginación donde ves a esta tierra?”. After having considered his unexpected affinity with Mexico, he orders himself to accept and submit to his vision. Thanks to his close scrutiny of nature, he is suffused with a “sentimiento de lo divino” and connects, through the gaze, visible and invisible, tangible and intangible planes of existence. Through his intense contemplation of the landscape he achieves a fleeting *acorde* between interior and exterior, subjective and objective dimensions of reality:

Esta llanura, este cielo, este aire te envuelven y te absorben, anonadándote en ellos. El amor ya no está sólo dentro, ahogándote con su vastedad, sino fuera de ti, visible y tangible; y tú eres al fin parte de él, respirándolo libremente. Piensas que es bueno estar vivo, que es bueno haber vivido. Toda tu alegría, todo tu fervor recrean en tu alma el sentimiento de lo divino. Y das gracias a Dios, que ha preservado tu vida hasta este único instante deseado.¹⁵² (654)

¹⁵¹ Tatiana Aguilar-Álvarez Bay, who analyses the notion of place in *Variaciones* in terms of the intersection between “lo invisible eterno y lo visible temporal” (2002: 121), also highlights the importance of the gaze in the book. She claims that, “la transfiguración poética del lugar deriva de la contemplación, es decir, de la metamorfosis que opera la mirada amante. [...] Entonces, erigir un lugar implica restablecer los ejes en que el hombre puede insertarse; entre este gesto y la actividad contemplativa hay estrechas relaciones. De ahí la importancia que la mirada adquiere en *Variaciones sobre tema mexicano*: el diseño del lugar es inseparable de la mirada que lo dibuja y que, a la vez, se pasea por el ámbito recreado con verdadera fruición” (2002: 125-27).

¹⁵² I have taken this quote from Luis Cernuda, *Variaciones sobre tema mexicano: Édition bilingue* (1998: 140). The section “El amor ya no está sólo dentro, ahogándote con su vastedad” does not appear in the same poem in the *Poesía completa* (Ediciones Siruela). In “La posesión” (RD, 649-50), Cernuda fuses with the landscape through an erotic union rather than through the gaze: “En un abrazo sentiste tu ser fundirse con aquella tierra; a través de un terso cuerpo oscuro, oscuro como penumbra, terso como fruto, alcanzaste la unión con aquella tierra que lo había creado” (650).

5.2 Memory and Displacement

In the above poems, then, the act of border crossing permits the poet to enter into a coherent linguistic, moral and geographical space, enabling him to undertake diverse and multiple returns to his homeland. Through his encounter with places which recall those of his past, the poet, as critics have frequently underlined, experiences an abolition of the experience of alterity on a cultural, personal and even ontological level. Indeed in “Centro del hombre” (RD, 651-52) Cernuda recognises that in Mexico “el sentimiento de ser un extraño” finally lies dormant, “al fin dormido” (652).¹⁵³ Similarly, in the final lines of “Miravalle” he claims that Mexico offers him the possibility of permanence. Providing the reader with a brief series of visual portraits of himself, he writes: “Acodado en las balaustradas, deambulando bajo los arcos, parece imposible, si te fuera dado quedarte aquí, que llegaras un día a sentir saciedad, y con ella la maldición antigua del hombre: el deseo de cambiar de sitio” (627).

Nevertheless, given that *Variaciones* was written in Mount Holyoke College rather than in Mexico itself, throughout the book Cernuda highlights the fragile and provisional nature of his bond with his adopted country. In “Centro del hombre”, the use of the preterite tense and the temporal reference underline the brevity of the harmony experienced between “el hombre” and “la tierra”, “cuerpo” and “alma”: “*Por unos días hallaste en aquella tierra tu centro, que las almas tienen también, a su manera, centro en la tierra*” (652; my emphasis). In “Dignidad y reposo” (RD, 627-28) the reader also detects the poet’s urgent need to combat the threat of oblivion and to preserve his recollections of Mexico through the act of writing: “Pronto, pronto. Antes que te olvides, recuerda, entre otras, algunas” (627).¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ On 8 June 1950, he writes from Mount Holyoke College to Salvador Moreno in Mexico, stating that: “Mi único deseo es estar ahí, abrazar un cuerpo oscuro y olvidar esta completa ‘extrañeza’ en que vengo viviendo”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 492).

¹⁵⁴ In “La concha vacía” (RD, 652-54) Cernuda relies on fragments of music to recall his stay in Mexico. Although the poem terminates with an uncharacteristically subjective note as he contemplates his own mortality, like “Las campanas” and “Pregón tácito” from *Ocnos* it underscores his lively interest in the workings of involuntary memory. He muses on the particular power of music to evoke the past: “El verso, el lienzo, la escultura, otras formas corpóreas del arte, al ser recordadas, no podrían devolvete en ellas unos momentos de tu vida, porque su materia está ocupada por su propia existencia, [...], y no ofrecen resquicio por donde la tuya pudiera infiltrarse. La música, en cambio, hecha de sonido, [...], es incorpórea, fluida todo. Así podemos entrar en ella, [...], apropiarla como expresión de nuestra existencia. Por alta y noble que sea, aun es posible domarla, esclavizarla a nuestra persona, imponerle nuestro peso humano de criatura cuyo existir flota a merced del olvido” (653). For an analysis of the importance of music in *Variaciones*, see Carlos Ruiz Silva (1979: 148-51).

Moreover, the multiple modes of self-address and moments of self-doubt glimpsed in the above texts point to a subject who is split rather than unified, decentred rather than centred. Whereas in sections of “La lengua” Cernuda adopts the “yo” or the “nosotros” and considers Mexico from the point of view of a Spaniard/poet conscious of and grateful to his nation’s cultural heritage, in the majority of the texts he deploys the “tú” form of self-address.¹⁵⁵ As seen in “La imagen” and “Lo nuestro”, structured around the interplay between the familiar and the strange, the “tú” considers Mexico from the point of view of an exile deprived of a fixed territory. Indeed, as the act of border crossing into Mexico stimulates the process of recollection for the speaker, the comparisons between Mexico and Spain/Andalusia, Mexico and Anglo-Saxon countries, illuminate Said’s claim that: “For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally” (2001: 186).

It is precisely this “contrapuntal” point of view adopted by Cernuda which ensures that the spatial deictics “here” and “there” are denied a stable meaning or a fixed reference point. As Sánchez Aguilera notes, if the speaker does not situate himself in Mexico “‘allá’ señala una meta, la patria del deseo” (1996: 126). This occurs in both “Mercaderes de la flor” and “Centro del hombre”. If on the other hand, he locates himself in Mexico:

“allá” designa entonces un espacio en el que no se es (o no se siente ser) a plenitud, a excepción de los casos en que “allá” remite a un tercer espacio (tiempo) afectivo-familiar [...]: “España/ Andalucía”, evocado por el estímulo de las vivencias “aquí” (“México”). (Sánchez Aguilera, 1996: 126)

In “Los ojos y la voz”, for example, the “aquí” (Mexico) is contrasted with an “allá” which refers to the speaker’s exile in Anglo-Saxon countries: “Muchos años viviste entre gentes de ojos apagados y de voz inexpresiva” (RD, 640). However, in “Lo

¹⁵⁵ Christina Karageorgou perceptively observes that, “*Variaciones sobre tema mexicano* gira alrededor de dos identidades; por una parte, un observador andaluz frente al mundo mexicano, que adopta las personas del yo o del nosotros. [...] Por otra parte, la voz principal — a veces en primera persona del plural y, otras, como un yo implícito al discurso casi impersonal —, habla con un ‘tú’, al que se le cede la expresión escasas veces, pero cuya función en tanto portador de un conocimiento intuitivo del entorno es fundamental” (2003: 2-3). It is interesting to note that even within “El tema”, a text designed to confer unity on the book, Cernuda switches from the “nosotros” to the “tú” form of address. As Sánchez Aguilera remarks, the alteration from the first person plural in the passages in which he talks about Spain, to the second person singular in the sections in which he discusses his own attitude to Mexico “fija los códigos y condiciones de la lectura” (1996: 134).

nuestro”, “La imagen” or “El patio”, the “aquí” (Mexico) triggers the evocation of an “allá” located in Spain or Andalusia.

Thus, rather than simply permitting the poet to recover his *rinconcillo andaluz* and root himself within a single unified “espacio epifánico” (Sánchez Aguilera, 1996: 128), memory in fact complicates his relationship with and his notion of place. This is most clearly seen in “Un jardín” (RD, 644-45) in which memory separates Cernuda from the landscape of his past and present.¹⁵⁶ As in previous texts, the crossing of a threshold triggers the process of recollection, alerting the speaker to “una simpatía que nace” (644). However, instead of simply recording his bond with the “rincón” as in “El patio”, he attempts to clarify the nature of his attachment to the place, alternating between instinct and reason, emotion and thought:

¿En cuántos lugares, por extraños que algunos fueran para ti, no has hallado ese rincón donde te sentías vivo en lo que es tuyo? ¿Tuyo? Bueno. Di: en lo que es de tu casta, y no tanto por paisanaje, aunque lo que de tierra nativa hay en ti entra por mucho en la afinidad instintiva, como por temperamento. Y este rincón es de los más hermosos que has visto. (644)

In the second paragraph he recognises the potent and pernicious role that memory plays in his identification with the garden, fully aware that “al primer golpe de vista, abarcando los terrados, las escalinatas, las glorietas del jardín, algo te trae a la memoria aquel otro cuya imagen llevas siempre en el fondo de tu alma” (644).¹⁵⁷ Chastising himself, he urges himself to accept the self-contained unity of the present moment: “Pero es loco comparar: lo que existe plenamente, lo que está, es por eso único, y nada puede desalojarlo ni reemplazarlo” (644). As if compelling himself to focus on his immediate surroundings, he describes the garden itself, at times honing and clipping his sentences in order to eliminate verbs: “En las sendas, el piso es desigual. Muchos peldaños están rotos. Las fuentes, secas”. Observing the “árboles

¹⁵⁶ Carlos-Peregrín Otero (1962: 39-44) notes that the theme of the garden recurs in three poems in *La realidad y el deseo*: “XXII” from *Primeras poesías*, “Jardín antiguo” from *Las nubes* and “Jardín antiguo” from *Ocnos*. Sicut claims that “Cette liaison du souvenir et des sites isolés, enclos, patios, cloîtres ou jardins est l’un des grands thèmes récurrents de l’œuvre de Cernuda” (1995: 320). He also refers the reader to “Un jardín” from *Variaciones* and to “Jardín” from *Como quien espera el alba*. He correctly points out that “Ce sont donc cinq poèmes majeurs et non pas trois qui constituent ces variations sur un thème central” (1995: 321).

¹⁵⁷ Henri Bergson underlines that “memory-images” are closely linked to our perception of the present moment. In ‘Of The Survival of Images. Memory and Mind’, he notes that “Perception is never a mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it” (1911: 170).

[...] fatigados, envejecidos” (644), he notes that the desolation “no supone aquí abandono. [...] Todo indica manos cuidadosas que atienden, que reparan en lo posible, [...], los ultrajes del tiempo” (644). Instead of imbuing the garden with melancholy, the presence of decay “le da hondura, lo penetra de sosiego” (645).

In the final two paragraphs, his dual awareness of his own memories and of prior presences within the garden imbues him with a heightened self-consciousness and exiles him from his own self. Suspended at the intersection between different temporal existences, he observes himself walking through the garden, attempting to possess “una historia que no fue tuya” (645). As he submits to the “influencia letal del paraje” (645), he experiences what de Certeau, following Heidegger, terms “un ‘déracinement dans ses origines’” (190: 160).¹⁵⁸ The precision of the demonstrative adjectives in the phrases “Este aire”, “Esta nostalgia” and “Esta espera” contrasts with and intensifies his disassociation from his surroundings, self and memory.¹⁵⁹ The speaker’s desire to “expiar los actos de un ser ya muerto” also contains several meanings, at once relating to his former self and the former inhabitant of the garden. In view of the importance of the concluding two paragraphs, I will quote them in full:

Pasado y presente se reconcilian, se confunden, insidiosamente, para recrear un tiempo ya vivido, y no por ti, en el cual, al pasar bajo estas ramas, entras, respiras, te mueves, un poco inhábilmente, como quien va distraído, dejando que su pie caiga sobre las mismas huellas de alguien que le precediera por el mismo camino. Sentado al borde de la alberca, bajo los arcos, piensas como tuya una historia que no fue tuya.

Este aire que mueve las ramas es el mismo que otra vez, a esta hora, las moviera un día. Esta nostalgia no es tuya, sino de alguno que la sintió antaño en este sitio. Esta espera no eres tú quien la haces, sino otro que aquí esperó una tarde a la criatura deseada. Abandonado así a la influencia letal del paraje, de pronto te

¹⁵⁸ de Certeau claims that “Le voyage (comme la marche) est le substitut des légendes qui ouvraient l’espace à de l’autre. Que produit-il finalement sinon, par une sorte de retournement, ‘une exploration des déserts de ma mémoire’, le retour à un exotisme proche par les détours au loin, [...], en somme comme un ‘déracinement dans ses origines’ (Heidegger)?” (1990: 160). Speaking more specifically about the journey involved in a *retour*, Rose Duroux and Alain Montandon observe that it involves an “expérience d’une altérité peu ordinaire, celle du propre et de l’intime devenu lointain, celle du même devenu autre” (1999: 5).

¹⁵⁹ Michael Seidel offers an interesting insight into the complexities of the exilic imagination by drawing on one of Kierkegaard’s parables from *Either/ Or*. In the parable one territory lies off limits to the other and is imagined by an inhabitant standing at his country’s boundary as being very different from his own. Seidel suggests that “it is worth speculating for a moment on what happens [...] if the imaginer, instead of peering across the border from the known territory to the unknown, finds himself in an opposite position on the unknown side of the border trying to sustain the image of distant familiarity. Properties have, in effect, changed places. The imaginer remembers from where he used to project” (1986: 4). This process occurs in both “Un jardín” and “El patio”. In each case, Cernuda recalls the “known territory”, Spain, from the “unknown side of the border”, Mexico. Consequently the once familiar land is relegated to the realms of memory and the imagination.

sobrecoge el miedo, la atracción de vivir, desear, expiar los actos de un ser ya muerto, de quedar perdido para siempre, como fantasma, en una intersección del tiempo. (645)

As recollection alters the poet's perceptions of the Edenic landscape, forcing him to recognise his own alterity and that of Mexico itself, the poem illustrates de Certeau's claim that memory "médiatise des transformations spatiales" (1990: 129). Given that a recollection suddenly stems from and evokes a different temporal period from that of the present, the critic argues that it disrupts and subverts the notions of order and of "stabilité" contained within a "lieu". He writes:

La mémoire médiatise des transformations spatiales. Sur le mode du "moment opportun" (*kairos*), elle produit une rupture instauratrice. Son étrangeté rend possible une transgression de la loi du lieu. Sorti de ses insondables et mobiles secrets, un "coup" modifie l'ordre local. [...] Ce changement a pour condition les ressources invisibles d'un temps qui obéit à d'autres lois et qui, par surprise, dérobe quelque chose à la distribution propriétaire de l'espace. (1990: 129)

Crucially, it is the "étrangeté" of the memory of a pre-Hispanic past which distances the speaker in "Por el agua" (RD, 629-30) from the topography of Mexico.¹⁶⁰ Unlike "Miravalle" in which the speaker overlooks "Los ecos trágicos de leyenda y de historia" (626) in favour of a contemplation of the scenery, in this text he is alert to the traces and echoes of the "recuerdo ahogado" (630) of a prior civilisation. Able to sense, but not comprehend the secret of the land, he recognises that this is available only to the passing "cuerpos callados y misteriosos" (630). The insistent repetition of the preposition "bajo" in the closing sentence emphasises the occult, yet all-pervasive presence and pressure of the "secreto opresivo del paisaje":

Un decaimiento inminente acecha a todo esto, tan dolorosamente hermoso. ¿Tierra nueva? No sabes qué ecos de sabiduría extinta, de vida abdicada, yerran por el aire. Esos cuerpos callados y misteriosos, que al paso de sus barcas nos tienden una flor o un fruto, deben conocer el secreto. Pero no lo dirán.

La lluvia arrecia sobre el toldo, y pues el canal se alarga interminable, desembarcamos en un merendero de la orilla. Allí, donde todo se disfraza de banalidad contemporánea, casi olvidamos el secreto opresivo del paisaje. Mas éste queda afuera, bajo el cielo, bajo la lluvia estival, bajo las ramas fúnebres, bajo las

¹⁶⁰ In a discussion with Ermilo Abreu Gómez, Cernuda observes that, "En México el pasado es pasado para los extraños: no para el mexicano y menos para el indio, el pasado es una actitud presente. En México la gente no recuerda el pasado: lo vive y hasta da la impresión de que lo proyecta como una posibilidad del futuro", PC II, 807. In 'Reflejo de México en la obra de José Moreno Villa' (1955) he also claims that "México, para la comprensión del extranjero, no es país de acceso fácil, ni tampoco el mexicano, que sabe escudar su intimidad bajo una cortesía reticente", PC II, 219.

aguas turbias, adonde las barcas con flores parecen ir a rendir tributo periódico a su recuerdo ahogado. (630)

Cernuda demonstrates an equally acute sensitivity to Mexico's "*otredad* sumergida" (Sánchez Aguilera, 1996: 144) in "El mirador" (RD, 632). As in "El patio" or "El regreso" his examination of the landscape leads him to enumerate the topographical and cultural parallels between Spain and Mexico. Nonetheless, he recognises that there is an elusive element contained within the land, an "*otra cosa*" which resists definition and lies outside his cultural frame of reference. Inverting the relationship between the "subyugados" and the "conquistadores", he attempts to convey its power and pull. The text concludes with a fragile sense of unity, evoked only as a hypothesis, as the known and the unknown intermingle:

Pero con todo eso hay otra cosa, algo exótico sutilmente aliado a cuanto es tuyo, que parecías presentir y se adueña de ti. Así debió también adueñarse de los viejos conquistadores, con el mismo dominio interior, como si ellos hubieran sido entonces, como tú lo eres hoy, los subyugados. Algo diferente de tu mundo mediterráneo y atlántico, que se asoma ya al otro lado de este continente, al otro mar por donde Asia se vislumbra, y tan admirablemente se empareja contigo y con lo tuyo, como si sólo ahora se completara al fin tu existencia. (632)

Rather than complementing and completing the poet's former world, in "La gruta mágica" (RD, 641-43) his visit to a church, whose décor finds no analogy within his personal or cultural memory, signals his entrance into an entirely distinct world. Despite the deceptively ordinary appearance of the church's nave, the act of crossing a threshold, of entering the nave itself, brings the speaker into contact with a new and unexpected reality. As he strives for precision, he debates with himself. He recognises that he is lost in a flickering cavern: "Te encuentras? ¿No sería más atinado decir que te pierdes? Porque perdido estás; la realidad ha cesado y flotas en otro medio" (641-42).¹⁶¹ Unable to describe his surroundings, he draws an improbable comparison and likens the scene to "la tienda de un bárbaro guerrero asiático" (642). Multiplying nouns, adjectives and gerunds, he struggles with and against language in an effort to convey the interior design of the nave. Seeking repose from the scene, which can be

¹⁶¹ Sicot's interpretation of "La gruta mágica" overlooks Cernuda's disorientation in favour of a stress on his search for protection within "un espace en creux, réduit et fermé, arrondi et enveloppant. Parvenu dans cette 'gruta mágica', mais également 'pozo' et 'caverna', le poète écrit, tant est forte la sensation de descente ou de fouissement chthonien: 'Bajo tierra te crees, en un antro [...] [...] Mais un antre qui n'aurait rien d'inferral [...] Il s'agit d'un antre bienfaisant, accumulant en lui tous les symbols et toutes les protections du ventre maternel" (1995: 314).

described only through “la reiteración monótona y variada de las palabras” (642), he reflects on the combination of “lo elemental” and “lo artificial” (642) within the church. As if realising the futility of his attempts to find a semblance of balance or order in the design, he declares that: “Pero la obra no recuerda al hombre; no se concibe la mente que la meditara y planeara, ni la mano que la trazara y ejecutara” (642). Continuing with the series of negative statements, he then observes that the work defies the boundaries of his own memory: “Ni el recuerdo puede clarificarla, sino que, al contrario de como suele operar con las impresiones, en éstas que aquí suscitan, lejos de depurarlas, aumenta la confusión” (642). In contrast to “La imagen” in which he asserts that Catholicism is Spain’s “obra más duradera” (633), in this text he is forced to recognise the presence of a non-Spanish belief system in Mexico:

¿Son aquí posibles siquiera las creencias tradicionales de tu tierra y tu gente? ¿No ha usurpado el símbolo a la creencia, el culto a la religión? Un culto mucho más remoto, en todo caso, es el que parece perdurar, a pesar de los símbolos familiares visibles. (642)

It is, however, in “El mercado” (RD, 645-46) where Cernuda offers the reader his most subtle and intricate reading of his “condición excéntrica” (Sánchez Aguilera, 1996: 130) in Mexico. Far from deploying the gaze as a means of possessing or savouring the landscape, in this text the act of looking becomes more complex and multi-layered. The speaker studies silent groups in a market place and comments on the pictorial nature of the scene: “En grupos quietos por la mayor parte, silenciosos también, más que escena real te parecieron pintura de una muchedumbre” (645). He focuses on the colours and shades contained in the market and conveys the intense visual appeal and harmony of the figures: “Ellas, arropadas en sus rebozos oscuros, negro, azul o marrón [...] Ellos, con camisa y pantalón claros, rosa, crema o celeste” (645-46). He then contemplates his memory of the market. Attempting to distinguish between the buyers and the sellers, he considers the effect of the veiled light on his perception of the scene:

¿Quién compraba? ¿Quién vendía? Bajo la luz nublada de la mañana, esta escena, donde ni los tonos gritaban ni los gestos exageraban, te parecía sin otro motivo que el de componer para la contemplación una pura imagen plástica. (646)

In the final paragraph he draws the reader into a delicate *mise en abyme* as he observes himself within his own poem. Like Valéry's M. Teste who "se voyait se voyant se voir",¹⁶² he reveals a studied self-consciousness, divided between the "self that experiences and the self that watches".¹⁶³ Aware of his status as an outsider to the group and "nostálgico de abandonar tan pronto el lugar", he poses a question to one of the figures in order to "entrar, para quedar sutilmente en el cuadro con ella". Likening his presence to the figures reflected in the mirror of what is presumably Velázquez's *Las Meninas*, he hovers on the edge or frame of the *cuadro*. His sense of self is reduced to a mere reflection: "Lo mismo que el personaje ausente, que sólo está en el lienzo, esfumado y circunstancial, al fondo de él, en un espejo, así quedaste tú allí, actor elusivo y testigo invisible, reflejado en unos ojos" (646).¹⁶⁴

5.3 Memory and Meditation: Poetry and Perception

Situated on the boundaries between place and displacement, past and present, exile and return, throughout *Variaciones* Cernuda deploys the interstitial space of the border as a vantage point from which to impose a greater degree of objectivity and discipline on his portraits of Mexico. Instead of projecting his recollections of his past onto Mexico, in poems such as "Alborada en el golfo", "Perdiendo el tiempo" and "Ocio", he recreates and recalls the Mexican landscape as faithfully as possible. Before analysing the poems, it is instructive to examine the theoretical section of the article 'Aire de la Habana', published in 1953 as a result of a visit to Cuba. In the text, as in "La soledad" from *Ocnos*, Cernuda classifies himself amongst "gentes para quienes entender es cuestión de distancia" (PC I, 806).¹⁶⁵ He then elucidates the way in which "dichos seres" react to and assimilate new experiences:

¹⁶² Quoted by Jiménez-Fajardo (1989: 30).

¹⁶³ Quoted by Morris (1989: 50). In his study of the various masks and projections of the self deployed in *Un río, un amor*, Morris notes that Cernuda's figures could never say as Lorca did in *Canciones*: "Quiero vivir sin verme./ ¿Por qué nací entre espejos?" (1989: 48).

¹⁶⁴ Cernuda also weaves his knowledge of the visual arts into his literary criticism. In his essay on André Gide (1946), he discusses the role of the Édouard in *Les Faux Monnayeurs* and writes: "Sería difícil no ver en él, en sus perplejidades de escritor enamorado de su arte, al mismo Gide, y el *Journal des Faux Monnayeurs* prolonga la confusión y la subraya: 'Personnage d'autant plus difficile à établir que je lui prête beaucoup de moi. Il me faut me reculer et l'écarter de moi pour bien le voir'. Ese juego de proyección, entre el novelista como personaje y el novelista como autor, recuerda aquella intromisión en un lienzo, gracias a un espejo en él representado, de personajes ausentes que se suponen en el lugar que ocupa el espectador fuera del lienzo", PC I, 578.

¹⁶⁵ In "La soledad" (RD, 604) he writes: "Hay quienes en medio de la vida la perciben apresuradamente, y son los improvisadores; pero hay también quienes necesitan distanciarse de ella para verla más y mejor, y son los contempladores".

No quiere esto decir que cuando a uno de dichos seres se le ponga bruscamente ante una experiencia para él inusitada vaya a conducirse con inconsciencia o irresponsabilidad. Lo que suele ocurrir es todo lo contrario. Pues que no ve sino lo que quiere y no quiere sino lo que conoce, de ahí que, en aquel trance, haya en él un retraimiento dentro de su conciencia, traducido a lo exterior por una impasibilidad que los demás suelen llamar frialdad, mientras por lo interior todas las potencias actúan para asimilar, entender y revelar a la manera que la placa fotográfica herida por la luz. Más tarde es cuando la reacción aparece, cuando el entendimiento puede ya pronunciarse a la distancia. (PC I, 806)

The reference to the “placa fotográfica” is vital as it alerts the reader to the poet’s attempts to depict the Mexican reality with increased precision and accuracy. Valender also underlines that the analogy of the “placa fotográfica” is particularly apt as it demonstrates the workings of the meditative mind. He states that, “así como la luz da en la placa fotográfica y no viceversa, así ocurre también con la mente recogida: es el mundo exterior que determina tanto la experiencia en sí como el entendimiento de esa experiencia” (1984: 108). Thanks to meditation and a careful use of the meditative poem, based on a composition of place, analysis and will, the critic underlines that “el proceso normal de conocimiento se invierte: en lugar de una proyección subjetiva desde dentro hacia afuera, el mundo externo se convierte en parte de la experiencia interna del individuo” (1984: 108).

“Alborada en el golfo” (RD, 649) provides the reader with a clear example of this meditative process. It opens with a simple and sparse evocation of a still early morning beach. The opening two paragraphs swiftly situate the reader in a precise moment in time and space, enclosing him within the poet’s sensuous world in which body and spirit harmonize:

Al amanecer, a solas la playa y aun dormida, ya estás en el agua. El aire rubicundo y el mar blanquecino, ambos tempranamente tibios, casi no refrescan, aunque entonen, tu cuerpo mal descansado y ardoroso. Bienestar animal que regocija el alma.

Por la playa, a lo lejos, sólo aparece el sombrero de la cantina, bajo el cual resguardar del sol mesas y bancos. Detrás, grupos de palmeras, no tanto decoración como testimonio de latitud. Tierra caliente. (649)

As the text progresses from a concrete evocation of the beach to a distilled meditation on the writer’s place within it, the transition from description to comprehension, from memory to analysis, is accompanied by an increasingly concise poetic diction. Upon contemplating the solitude of the beach, words become superfluous. Consequently in the third paragraph, Cernuda hones his use of language and conveys the peace of the

beach through a series of nouns. Through the symmetry of the paragraph's first and third sentences, structured around a positive and a negative statement, he conveys the harmony of the landscape: "La mañana crece, y nadie todavía. El mundo es esto: sol, arena, agua. Soledad y tiempo lo habitan, y nada más". He also contracts a sentence to a single word, opening up spaces and pauses within his text: "¿Tú? Tú eres su pensamiento circunstancial, hijo de esa soledad bien hallada y ese tiempo demorado. Pausa." In the fourth paragraph, he reviews the value of the experience for him, fusing memory, analysis and will into a single meditative act:

Vivir siempre así. Que nada, ni el alba, ni la playa, ni la soledad fuesen tránsito para otra hora, otro sitio, otro ser. ¿La muerte? No. La vida todavía, con un más acá y un más allá, pero sin remordimientos ni afanes. (649)

Although neither "Perdiendo el tiempo" nor "Ocio" follow the tripartite structure of the meditative poem as closely as "Alborada en el golfo", both poems offer discreet reflections on the writer's relation with Mexico and on the nature of poetry itself. Like "Alborada en el golfo", "Perdiendo el tiempo" (RD, 635) commences with a skillful *mise-en scène*. As Valender acutely observes (1984: 112), the "ritmo guasón" created by the parallel structures in the opening line imbue the text with an ironical tone: "La plaza, hay que reconocerlo, es informe; la fuente, hay que reconocerlo, es absurda. Pero la noche, el aire, los árboles, son benévolos e inclinan tu ánimo a la benevolencia." By interspersing his prose with what Gil de Biedma calls "las ocasionales punzadas de bienhumorada ironía con respecto a sí mismo",¹⁶⁶ Valender underlines that Cernuda strives to avoid any false sentimentality in his descriptions of Mexico (1984: 112). Content to simply observe his companions, the speaker luxuriates in his sensory contact with the night air and allows the body to become the conduit for the written word: "El soplo nocturno del trópico descansa sobre la piel, oreándola. Te sientes flotar, ligero, inconsistente. Sólo los sentidos

¹⁶⁶ Gil de Biedma (2001: 380). The opening section of "Poniente inusitado" (RD, 636) provides another example of irony and self-deprecation: "El poblado minúsculo está allá, detrás de las palmeras que bordean la playa. Bajo el sombrero, sentado en la hamaca, aunque no es cómoda, sorbiendo el agua de un coco, aunque no es fresca, riéndote de ti, miras cómo acaba el día./Riéndote de tu falta de costumbre, aquí donde todo te es nuevo". At the end of "Los ojos y la voz" (RD, 640-41), he also adds a sardonic aside to his prose: "Hay quienes se pierden por codicia y quienes se pierden por vanidad; quienes se pierden por ambición y quienes se pierden por no querer perderse; hay quienes se pierden por una criatura, y tú te perderías por unos ojos y por una voz. Podrías seguirlos hasta el infierno (si ya no estás en camino), por una palabra, por una mirada, y aún te parecería poco el precio" (641).

velan, y con ellos el cuerpo; pero éste vela sin insistencia, no con el entrometimiento acostumbrado, queriendo y exigiendo.” As the poem surges from his physical contact with the breeze, the text illuminates the final line of “El pueblo” (RD, 634-35) that, “Verdad es que la poesía también se escribe con el cuerpo” (635).

In “Ocio” (RD, 638-39), a simultaneously grave and ludic text, the reader also detects the tight link between contemplation and the creative process. As in “Perdiendo el tiempo”, the speaker’s indolent quasi somnolent state is accompanied by a heightened perception of the present moment. Studying a nearby bay, he enters into a playful and intimate dialogue with himself:

Sentado en esta terraza, cuya bóveda le da apariencia de claustro, pasado el jardín en declive, pasado el camino que lo bordea, miras la bahía. Es temprano en la mañana, y apenas hace calor. Afuera, tras uno de los arcos, cae desde la altura una delgada fronda constelada de flores escarlata, que cubre el horizonte y al mismo tiempo, como sutil colgadura, lo trasluce. ¿Qué árbol es éste? [...] (Acuérdate de preguntar su nombre.) (638)

Just as in “Dúo” (RD, 643-44) the recollection of an intellectual literary memory perturbs the “trance de animalidad pura” (643) of the poet and his lover, the sight of men working suddenly interrupts his reverie: “¿Trabajan? Aquí tu conciencia parece de pronto sobresaltarse. ¿Trabajo? En este ambiente todo es, o parece ser, tan gratuito, que la idea de trabajo instintivamente quedaba excluida” (638). The men remind him of the poet’s creative labour and he surrenders to the task of self-analysis. He urges himself to consider the acuity and accuracy of his vision of Mexico. As in “El regreso” he doubts the reality of the landscape and his ability to possess it. Throughout his process of self-interrogation, he deploys direct questions and interjections such as “Veamos” in order to achieve the desired balance between the written and the spoken word.¹⁶⁷ Valender perceptively points out that the integration of every day speech patterns into the text “constituye, [...], una medida de la intensidad de la meditación, de la concentración con que se está asimilando la experiencia viva, con que ésta se está convirtiendo en conocimiento espiritual” (1984: 113):

¹⁶⁷ In ‘Acerca de mis versos’ (1946) Cernuda writes: “Lenguaje hablado y lenguaje escrito. Equilibrio necesario entre ambos”. In a footnote, he then adds: “Riesgo del lenguaje escrito, pedantería. Riesgo del lenguaje hablado, vulgaridad”, PC II, 773.

Veamos. El mundo sensual, marino, soleado, donde por unas horas crees vivir, ¿es real? ¿No es un sueño inconcluso de tu juventud, que todavía persigues a lo largo de la vida? Aunque ese mundo fuera real, ¿sería el tuyo propio?¹⁶⁸ Bien está hacer el amor, nadar, solearse, pero ¿podrías vivir así el resto del tiempo? Sé lo que vas a decir, ese mundo, sea o no real, es bastante. No hacer nada es para ti actividad bastante. (638)

Lulled and seduced by the sensual climate, the speaker then considers the profound value of “ocio”. He rejects the “vanidad” and the “aburrimento” which “contribuyen al exceso de actividad humana” (638).¹⁶⁹ As in “Alborada en el golfo” he becomes aware of both the limitations and excess of words and he urges himself to abandon the soliloquy and “echa una mirada en torno” (639). The poem, then, becomes a meta-poem as he reflects on the tools of his own art. At once playful and provocative, his meditations enter into an inter-textual dialogue with the opening poem of the collection “La lengua”. Whereas in “La lengua” he defines language as the foundation for a poet’s existence, in “Ocio” he recognises that both “mirada y palabra hacen al poeta” (639). The repetition of the deceptively simple infinitive “Mirar” (639) heightens the importance of his task: that of actively perceiving and revealing with the poet’s cool objective gaze the hidden world of nature and the “hermosura oculta del mundo” (PC I, 606). By nuancing and deepening his concept of poetry, he imbues the text with a circular structure, instructing himself to return to the contemplation of the land.¹⁷⁰ As he waits for rather than pursues the creative act, he

¹⁶⁸ Cernuda also questions the validity of his perceptions of Mexico in several of the verse poems in *Con las horas contadas*. In “El viajero” (RD, 457-58 [457]) he writes: “¿No te extraña// Ir así, en el halago/De otro clima? Parece/Maravilla imposible/Estar tan libre. Mira// Desde una palma oscura/Gotear las estrellas./Lo que ves ¿es tu sueño/O tu verdad?”. In “Otra fecha” (RD, 466) he reflects on the subtle, almost taunting difference between Spain and Mexico, past and present identities: “Aires claros, nopal y palma,/En los alrededores, saben,/Si no igual, casi igual a como/La tierra tuya aquella antes./ También tú igual me pareces,/O casi igual, al que antes eras:/En el casi sólo consiste,/De ayer a hoy, la diferencia”. It is interesting to note the word “casi” reappears throughout *Variaciones* as the poet notes the persistent sense of separation between himself and the landscape and people of Mexico. In “Centro del hombre” he writes: “Estabas en tu sitio, o en un sitio que podía ser tuyo; con todo o con casi todo concordabas” (652). Similarly, in “La imagen” (633) he states that, “mucha parte de ti no pueda compartir el fervor de estas criaturas, pero cercano a ellas, casi unido con ellas”.

¹⁶⁹ The lines “Para vivir, ¿es necesario atarearse tanto? Si el hombre fuera capaz de estarse quieto en su habitación por un cuarto de hora” (638-39) recall Pascal’s claim that, “tout le malheur des hommes vient d’une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas (*vivre*) demeurer en repos dans une chambre” (1951: 91).

¹⁷⁰ Cernuda’s celebration of *ocio* and his ability to dwell within the moment, penetrating nature through the gaze, is akin to Ricœur’s concept of an “oubli désœuvré” (2000: 655). In the book’s epilogue entitled ‘Le Pardon difficile’ Ricœur suggests that memory is fundamentally “une figure du souci” (2000: 655). He claims that “Dans la mémoire-souci, nous nous tenons auprès du passé, nous en restons préoccupés” (2000: 655). He then asks: “N’y aurait-il pas dès lors une forme suprême d’oubli, en tant que disposition et manière d’être au monde, qui serait l’insouciance, ou pour mieux dire l’insouci? [...]

exists on the borders between language and silence, dwelling in the space between words:

Mirar. Mirar. ¿Es esto ocio? ¿Quién mira el mundo? ¿Quién lo mira con mirada desinteresada? Acaso el poeta, y nadie más. En otra ocasión has dicho que la poesía es la palabra. ¿Y la mirada? ¿No es la mirada poesía?¹⁷¹ Que la naturaleza gusta de ocultarse, y hay que sorprenderla, mirándola largamente, apasionadamente. La mirada es un ala, la palabra es otra ala del ave imposible. Al menos mirada y palabra hacen al poeta. Ahí tienes el trabajo que es tu ocio: quehacer de mirar y luego quehacer de esperar el advenimiento de la palabra.

Ahora levántate y marcha a la playa. Por esta mañana ya has trabajado casi suficientemente en tu ocio. (639)

In conclusion, in “La lengua” the act of border crossing permits the poet to recover his native language and regain the very core and substance of his existence as a poet: “la palabra” (625). The tripartite structure of the text, with its polyphony of voices, also invites the reader to perceive the various facets of his identity which are refracted and explored throughout the book, whether that of an exile, a Spaniard or a poet. As the exiled “tú” crosses the border from America into Mexico, in “Lo nuestro” and “La imagen” he enters into a cultural and socio-economic reality at once foreign and familiar. Nonetheless, through recollection and his examination of the surrounding landscape and architecture, the poet reunites with his former self and topography. Consequently, memory becomes a potent and vital force, containing “secreto y profundo, el pulso mismo de la vida” (RD, 650).

However, as recollection separates rather than links Cernuda to his youthful self, exiling him in “Un jardín” in time as well as in space, he examines the complex relations between memory and place, recollection and perception. Not only does he

C'est bien en effet aux 'soucieux' que s'adressait l'exhortation de l'Évangéliste à 'considérer les lis des champs et les oiseaux du ciel': 'Si le soucieux, note Kierkegaard, prête une réelle attention aux lis et aux oiseaux, s'il s'oublie en eux et dans leur vie, il apprendra de ces maîtres, par lui-même et insensiblement, quelque chose de lui-même'" (2000: 655-56). As Harris observes, the same biblical allusion appears in “El ruiseñor sobre la piedra” (RD, 313-18) and the short story ‘El sarao’ (1942), (1973: 100-01, n11). In ‘El sarao’ Cernuda writes: “¿No nos preocupamos demasiado de lo útil y lo práctico, olvidándonos de vivir? Quizá sea incomprendible hoy para nosotros la verdad de aquellas palabras divinas: ‘Reparad en los lirios del campo, cómo crecen, que no trabajan ni hilan; mas os digo que ni Salomón en su gloria fue vestido así como uno de ellos’”, PC 11, 350.

¹⁷¹ Given that Cernuda defines seeing as an essential part of the poet’s “trabajo”, references to “la mirada” occur throughout *La realidad y el deseo*. In “Los espinos” (RD, 354), one of Cernuda’s favourite poems, the speaker commands himself and the reader to: “Aprende cómo es la dicha/Ante los espinos blancos/Y rojos en flor. Ve. Mira”. In “El poeta” (RD, 403-05) he celebrates the gift of poetry and its unifying power. He thanks Juan Ramón Jiménez for having taught him to “mirar quieto, como/Espejo, sin el cual la creación sería/Ciega, hasta hallar su mirada en el poeta” (404).

realise that the alterity of a hidden cultural memory alienates him in “Por el agua” from the surrounding landscape, but he also attempts in “La gruta mágica” and more successfully in “El mercado” to study the delicate sense of unreality created by his role as a spectator to the Mexican culture. Moreover, as memory plays an increasingly meditative and analytical role in the book, in “Alborada en el golfo”, “Perdiendo el tiempo” and “Ocio”, he strives to portray his place within Mexico with the “mirada desinteresada” (RD, 639) of the poet rather than the subjective or nostalgic gaze of the exile. By permitting external reality rather than his recollections to determine his responses to Mexico, in each text he transforms exile into a craft and a moral discipline rather than a source of loss or division.

Crucially, as he uses his border-position in Mexico to reflect, both directly and indirectly, on the sources of his creativity and, in the case of “Perdiendo el tiempo” on the link between the senses and the intellect in the production of poetry, the reader detects the self-referential nature of the book. Just as “La lengua” defines the conditions of a poet’s existence, “Ocio” elaborates on the actual nature of poetic activity, permitting Cernuda to exist within the present moment and the creative demands of the “ave imposible” (RD, 639) of poetry. Mirroring the tension between passivity and activity, repose and effort in “Ocio”, Cixous claims that:

Le paradis c’est cela, c’est arriver à vivre le présent. [...] Mais cela c’est un travail, c’est un dur travail [...] C’est un grand travail de vivre l’instant, cela demande une rapidité de l’âme et en même temps une grande lenteur. C’est pourquoi il m’est arrivé de dire: ‘le paradis c’est infernal’.

Ce n’est pas le repos, mais l’acharnement, l’incessant effort pour être là, l’affrontement à la richesse épuisante du ‘il y a’, du ‘Es gibt’. A un certain moment on peut espérer arriver à l’époque où l’on va écrire non pas pour faire le deuil du passé, mais pour devenir prophète du présent. A ce moment-là on **a à faire le paradis**, on le fait. Il ne nous est pas donné. On risque de le perdre, on le regagne sans cesse.¹⁷²

Drawing on what he considers to be the twin components of his art, the word and the gaze, language and silence, it is in the closing lines of “Alborada en el golfo” that Cernuda becomes the “prophète du présent”, existing not within the memory of his homeland or childhood, but “entre antes y luego, como entre sus dos valvas la perla, este momento irisado y perfecto. Ahora” (RD, 649).

¹⁷² Cixous (1990a: 22). Cixous uses bold in her text.

CONCLUSION

El testimonio más auténtico
respecto a un hombre
es sin duda su obra.
L.C., 'Bécquer y el romanticismo español'

This thesis has analysed the meditative and ethical role played by memory in a selection of texts contained in Luis Cernuda's early and mature poetry. Despite the fact that his principal critics (Valente, Harris, Paz) view him as a moralist and as a truth-seeker, they have tended to overlook the salient role played by memory in his journey of "autoconocimiento ético" (Harris, 1993: 85) both before and after his exile from Spain in 1938. Critical commentary has frequently stressed the evasive rather than the ethical role played by memory in *La realidad y el deseo*, particularly in the prose poems *Ocnos* and *Variaciones*. Given the poet's distaste for an excessively personal poetry, this study has argued that he avoids the sentimentality of nostalgia and appraises his past in a controlled and cerebral manner.

The first chapter has argued that the poet uses memory as an analytical and meditative tool in his pre-exilic poetry as he strives to affirm and assert his own personal truth within the confines of a materialistic and bourgeois society. As clearly stated in the introduction, this study has not provided a complete examination of Cernuda's early poetry. It has focused on his two Surrealist-influenced collections, *Donde habite el olvido* and *Invocaciones*. The decision was based on the fact that the poet acquires a "faculty of memory" (Harris, 1973: 39) in *Un río, un amor* after his departure from Seville. The first section of this thesis has provided a detailed analysis of the poet's experience and concept of exile in *Un río, un amor*. Whereas Harris claims that the collection gives voice to the poet's emotional turmoil following his discovery of the hostile dimension of *realidad* and his failure to realise the youthful dream of desire (1973: 34), this study has proposed that Cernuda's failed love affair leads him to experience a metaphysical crisis and a crisis of faith in the act of writing itself. It has demonstrated that in poems such as "Cuerpo en pena" and "Remordimiento en traje de noche" the poet reflects on his fragmented sense of self and his desolate existence in a godless universe. It has also argued that in ironic and self-deprecating texts such as "Vieja ribera", "Dejadme solo" and "Drama o puerta

cerrada” he doubts the validity, meaning and purpose of his craft. Thus, the discussion in the opening section of this thesis has highlighted the depth and complexity of the poet’s sense of exile inside Spain as well as the self-reflexive nature of his early Surrealist work. Far from simply expressing his emotional pain following a failed love affair, he presents the reader with a disquieting vision of “un mundo de angustia” (RD, 169) in which creative activities are futile and self-defeating. In doing so, he challenges and unsettles the reader, subdues and controls the emotional content of his work and draws universal meaning from his own profound sense of alienation in Spain.

The second section of the first chapter has studied the various tones and registers contained in *Los placeres prohibidos*. As the poet accepts and asserts his homosexuality, the voice of dissent and rebellion is accompanied by a quieter and more pensive voice which meditates on his previous erotic experiences and the sacred nature of erotic desire. In prose and verse poems such as “Veía sentado”, “Estaba tendido” and “No decía palabras”, he uses memory and poetry in order to explore deeper aspects of his self. The first and second sections of this opening chapter have also highlighted the various meanings contained in the word “olvido” in *Un río, un amor* and *Los placeres prohibidos*. The third section, which studied *Donde habite el olvido* and *Invocaciones*, has examined in greater depth the poet’s intricate concept of oblivion. This study does not pretend to exhaust the range of meanings contained in the polysemic term “olvido”. It does, however, point to the complexity of the term, which has received little detailed critical attention. The final section of the chapter has focused on the detached and contemplative manner in which the poet studies his past in *Invocaciones*. Through his detailed process of self-examination, he constructs a system of personal values, based on poetry, desire, nature and the ancient gods of antiquity, with which he defines and asserts his own personal reality and his poetic identity in a hostile society.

The central body of this thesis (chapters two, three, four and five) has examined verse and prose texts written during the years of geographical exile in Great Britain, America and Mexico. The aim of each chapter has been to refine and deepen our understanding of the poet’s use of memory in his mature work. The second chapter has concentrated on a series of carefully chosen verse poems from *Las nubes*, *Como quien espera el alba*, *Vivir sin estar viviendo* and *Con las horas contadas*. As the solitude of physical exile in Scotland, England and America forces the poet to

explore and analyse his identity with an increased degree of precision and rigour, memory assumes an increasingly important role in his poetry. Not only do recollections form the basis of many of his poems, but, crucially, the act of recollection also permits him to reach a deeper and more precise understanding of himself and his craft. The close textual readings of “El ruiseñor sobre la piedra”, “Jardín”, “La familia” and “Vereda del cuco” reveal that his use of memory becomes increasingly subtle and sophisticated in his mature exilic poetry. Far from seeking solace in the nostalgic recollection of his homeland or youth, the poet meditates on his poetic vocation, the transience of beauty, his commitment to solitude and the mystical nature of love. Throughout the above poems Cernuda accepts the fact of physical exile, surrenders to the demands of his “conciencia insobornable” (PC I, 758) and undertakes a voyage of self-exploration. In keeping with his concept of the poet as a seer and a truth-bearer, he seeks to learn from his past and remain faithful to his “inner moral self” (Jiménez-Fajardo, 1978: 73). Consequently, his recollections move swiftly from exterior reality to his inner reality as he searches to discover the “realidad profunda” (RD, 383) of his former experiences and enter into an intimate dialogue with his “hombre interior” (PC, 508). The final section of the chapter has analysed the effect that the poet’s acute temporal consciousness has on his mnemonic discourse. Through the examination of his increasingly dislocated inner world, in poems such as “El intruso”, “La sombra” and “Viendo volver”, he speaks not only to and for himself, but also to and for the exile who, in the words of Julia Kristeva, dwells within us all (1988: 9).

Cernuda also offers a bold, critical and highly original treatment of his childhood, adolescent and adult recollections in the three editions of *Ocnos*. In contrast to Harris and Silvers’ readings, which emphasise the nostalgic and evasive role played by memory in the texts, this thesis has proposed that in the first edition of *Ocnos* the poet meditates on the metaphysical nature of poetry and the birth of his poetic instinct. The act of recollection becomes an act of poetic faith in the existence of a hidden transcendent reality which the child-poet Albanio senses and which the mature poet celebrates through the written word. The meditative function assumed by memory ensures that the poems open and unfold like an “arco al espacio ilimitado” (RD, 613) as he contemplates his experience of harmony with the world as a child. His memories of adolescence concentrate on the youth’s attempts to escape from his crisis of self-consciousness and regain the child’s still communion with nature. In the

poems concerning adolescence it is also possible to find some of the clearest examples of the meditative tripartite structure. Cernuda's keen observation of the meditative framework in "La música y la noche" permits him to affirm his faith in the magnetic role played by desire throughout his life, which is a defiant expression of his "deseo de ser" (Paz, 1977: 155). The close readings of poems such as "La ciudad a distancia" and "La catedral y el río" have also demonstrated that the poet's commitment to the meditative discipline ensures that his portraits of Andalusia avoid the subjectivity of nostalgia. Through his transparent prose and his carefully structured poems, the reader is able to share his imaginative vision of his homeland. Indeed, as Olivio Jiménez acutely observes, in the first edition of *Ocnos* "se asiste a una espiritualización de las sensaciones de tal calidad de pureza como resultaría muy difícil encontrar en la lírica y en la prosa castellanas" (1962: 46).

The penultimate chapter has studied the increasingly philosophical role played by memory in the later editions of *Ocnos* as the poet seeks to transform his personal experiences into objective truth. As seen in poems such as "La luz", "Ciudad de la meseta" and "El brezal", a single recollection is the point of departure for a complex and meticulously structured thought process. By including both childhood and adult recollections in the later editions of *Ocnos*, the poet strives, through memory, to unify his disparate experiences and "ver en unidad el ser disperso" (RD, 371). Moreover, as he appraises his recollections and the nature of memory itself, he remains faithful to the spirit and purpose of poetry which, in the words of Matthew Arnold, should offer a "crítica de la vida" (PC I, 413). The final chapter has studied the process of self-examination undertaken by the poet in *Variaciones sobre tema mexicano*. This thesis has stressed that *Variaciones* does not herald the poet's return to an Edenic Andalusian paradise. The poet, faithful to his poetic conscience, refuses to view Mexico as the mirror-image of his native Andalusia. As he exists on the borders between exile and return, past and present, reality and desire, he meditates on his identity as a poet, a Spaniard and an exile. Far from seeking to resolve his acute experience of alienation, he scrutinises the validity of his perceptions of Mexico as well as his sense of *otredad* in Mexico. Throughout these dense and challenging texts, the reader realises that he is in the presence of a vigilant and scrupulously honest poet, a poet who "tiene conciencia de su fatalidad, [...] que escribe porque no tiene más remedio que hacerlo" (Paz, 1977: 140).

The close textual readings in this thesis have examined the skill and integrity with which the poet recalls his past throughout his exilic journeys. They have demonstrated that the act of recall is an act of self-affirmation, self-definition and self-redemption for the poet. For Cernuda, then, as for Keats, ““El genio de la poesía debe procurar en el hombre su salvación propia. No puede madurar por ley ni precepto, sino por sensación y vigilancia de sí. Lo creativo debe crearse a sí mismo”” (PC I, 341). Having created the truth of his identity through poetry and his journey of ethical introspection, he invites the reader not to recall him as an effete and aloof poet, but to remember him as an ethical writer who is searching to affirm his own personal reality. His poetry is a quest not only to analyse and create his identity, but also to create an alert and intuitive future reader.¹⁷³ In “A un poeta futuro” (RD, 339-43) from *Como quien espera el alba*, he struggles to convey the fervour with which he attempts to transform the written word into an echo, an echo which will resonate, reach a future audience, and defeat the threat of oblivion. In the final stanza, he professes his faith in the power of his work to reach a future poet, who also becomes his reader. Communication between present and future writers is transformed into communion as Cernuda realises that his voice will reach the writer/reader not from the words of a forgotten volume, but from the reader’s own “entraña”:

Yo sé que sentirás mi voz llegarte,
No de la letra vieja, mas del fondo
Vivo en tu entraña, con un afán sin nombre
Que tú dominarás. Escúchame y comprende.
En sus limbos mi alma quizá recuerde algo,
Y entonces en ti mismo mis sueños y deseos
Tendrán razón al fin, y habré vivido.
(339)

¹⁷³ In a letter to Rica Brown, dated 28 September 1943, he states: “Yo nunca he deseado popularidad, porque sabía que las calidades estéticas que siempre me esforcé por alcanzar traían consigo, una vez conseguidas en todo o en parte, la falta de popularidad. Hay un tipo de escritor, y es el único tipo de escritor que me interesa, que tiene que crear su público, y eso es tarea de siglos. Sólo me interesa el público ‘a la medida’, si puedo decirlo así; el público hecho, como las ropas hechas, no vale la pena”, in *Epistolario* (2003: 359).

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