

CERNUDA AND THE POETIC IMAGINATION: PRIMERAS POESÍAS AS METAPHYSICAL POETRY

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Since Cernuda first published his collected works, in 1936, under the overall title *La realidad y el deseo*, there has been a persistent critical tendency to limit the range of study of the poetry to certain well-defined thematic areas within a broadly Romantic framework. Nevertheless, certain aspects of the poetry, for example its artistic self-consciousness, its metaphysical (and not merely 'contemplative') nature, and the accuracy — as distinct from the delicacy — of its expression would perhaps be more evident and more admired if the two terms 'realidad' and 'deseo' were taken more strictly in the context in which Cernuda first publicly discussed them. Let us examine what he wrote:

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 atracción del mundo circundante [...]. Y lo que hacía aún más agónico aquel deseo era el reconocimiento tácito de su imposible satisfacción [...]. El deseo me llevaba hacia la realidad que se ofrecía ante mis ojos como si sólo con su posesión pudiera alcanzar certeza de mi

propia vida. Mas como esa posesión jamás la he alcanzado sino de modo precario, de ahí la corriente contraria, de hostilidad ante el irónico atractivo de la realidad [...] concluyo que la realidad exterior es un espejismo y lo único cierto mi propio deseo de poseerla. Así, pues, la esencia del problema poético, a mi entender, la constituye el conflicto entre realidad y deseo, entre apariencia y verdad, permitiéndonos alcanzar 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 (1).

Leaving aside the question of the exact nature of Cernuda's 'vision', of his seeing things as if for the first time, which he never satisfactorily explained, I would like to draw attention to two main features of this statement. In the first place, Cernuda is primarily, if not exclusively, concerned with the urge to find poetic expression for his mental or psychic experiences, or rather these experiences manifest themselves as a desire to express the world poetically. His statement is not offered as a philosophic analysis of perception; indeed, as such an analysis, it would be superficial and vulgar in the extreme, a little as if Jorge Guillén were to append, as an explanatory footnote of his famous 'El mundo está bien/Hecho', a list of those modern conveniences he finds to his taste. No, Cernuda's remarks have an aesthetic purpose, and constitute as coherent a description as he can give of the awakening and continuing working in him of the creative faculty. As such, they are comparable in intention to Coleridge's analysis of the Esemplastic Imagination, rather than to Unamuno's description of the bipartite division of the universe into a species of Immanent Will, on the one hand, and individual striving, on the other.

Secondly, I detect in the expression «el conflicto entre realidad y deseo, entre apariencia y verdad» an imperfect parallelism, the result of rhetoric triumphing over analysis, so that the incautious reader is invited to equate 'realidad' with 'apariencia' and 'deseo' with 'verdad'. But, as is evident from the overall context, this is not quite what Cernuda means, for there is a third, unnamed but obviously critical faculty (Coleridge's Imagination? Keats's Fancy?) which leads him to the 'reconocimiento tácito' of the impossibility of satisfying desire. As a result of the operation of this faculty there arises the principle of irony, which both irreconcilably separates desire from reality and divides re-

(1) Luis Cernuda, *Palabras antes de una lectura*; in *Prosa Completa*, Barral, Barcelona, 1975, p. 872.

ality itself into two warring factions (or perhaps merely reveals the two faces of reality): the reality which is 'hermosura', and the reality which is mere fictitious appearance.

Putting these two ideas together, we may say that the conflict between reality and desire provides the *possibility* of poetic expression, whilst the related conflict between reality and appearance is the outcome of specific observation and the *cause* of such expression. In Cernuda's own words, «dicho conflicto entre apariencia y verdad, que el poeta pretende resolver en su obra» (2).

There is, however, a marked tendency to see in the title, and hence in the poetry itself, merely a modern form of Platonism, or alternatively to continue Cernuda's series of polar opposites in directions he probably never intended (e.g. Silver's (3) prelapsian/post-lapsian; Aguirre's conscious/unconscious, etc.). Besides, the context in which Cernuda's remarks appear — in a discussion of the creative urge and the poetic process itself — is too often overlooked or insufficiently stressed. There is, thirdly, the point that those poems dealing with the dichotomy (by no means all of them do) suggest that reality, far from being the poet's enemy, produces, in its alternate dimensions of mirage and divine idea, the tensions that the poet exploits to create the poignancy and the paradoxical beauty of the 'imagen completa del mundo'.

A passage from poem VII of *Donde habite el olvido*, which is often quoted to demonstrate the reality v. desire opposition in its reduced reality v. appearance version, will do equally well for my purpose:

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.

Certainly these lines describe the inimical forces of reality in eternal recession from the vainly grasping hands of the poet, and the image of the hands stretching out imploringly but encountering only air unquestionably contributes towards this interpretation. Nor can we fail to noti-

(2) *ibid.*, p. 873.

(3) See P. Silver, '*Et in Arcadia Ego*': *A Study of the Poetry of Luis Cernuda*, *passim*; and J.M. Aguirre, '*Primeras poesías de Luis Cernuda*', in *Luis Cernuda (El Escritor y la Crítica)*, Taurus, Madrid, 1977 (ed. Harris).

ce the stress laid on the continued thwarting of desire in the past ('adolescencia'), present ('ardientes') and future ('muerte'). But we must notice too that the ardour with which the hands crave satisfaction is undiminished by frustration, and that 'verdad' is associated not with desire but with the emptiness of the hands: the truth is not something separate from the gesture of the hands, but rather the gesture itself, or better still, the image in the poem is the truth.

Thus, in addition to expressing bitterness at the frustration of desire, these lines find their place in the 'Death, where is thy sting?' tradition, in which death is upbraided, but also exulted over. The poet's victory over death is symbolised, paradoxically, by the very absence of any tangible possession of which death might rob him, so that the poem is an affirmation of the eternity of what Wordsworth called 'man's unconquerable mind'. Moreover, the poem itself — and this a theme which Cernuda was to develop more fully later, almost certainly having learned many of its possibilities in Shakespeare's sonnets — is a living instance of the higher truth resulting from the tensions between the opposing forces in the universe and their reflections in the poet's mind.

Salinas (4), in his commentary on this poem, offers the standard interpretation of desire frustrated by reality, and, misquoting 'recientes' for 'ardientes', he discusses the 'profunda significación poética' of the image. From this distortion, he develops the idea that the only meaningful thing that exists is 'el desear anhelante, aunque no pueda apresar nunca una verdad'. This misunderstanding is significant, since Salinas clearly sees only one dimension of the 'realidad/deseo' opposition, and by confusing the crucial 'ardientes' with the comparatively neutral 'recientes' (which he may have remembered from 'Va la brisa reciente') he fails to see the ambivalence of 'verdad'.

The coincidence in Cernuda's lines of death, desire and ardour awaken, for me, an echo of Quevedo's 'Cerrar podrá mis ojos...' (Quevedo, in one form or another, is often to be sensed hovering in the background of Cernuda's poetry). Apart from these coincidences of detail, both poems present the same affirmation of the power of desire over death (Quevedo's 'venas' and 'medula' are unplatonicly preserved with his 'alma' in 'Serán ceniza más tendrán sentido') and generally, the same passionate sense of the meanness of death, which cannot affect

(4) Pedro Salinas, *Luis Cernuda, poeta*, in *Literatura española Siglo XX*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1979, pp. 215-6.

the love of the one or the unrepentant desire of the other. There is also in both an undramatic acceptance of the inevitability of death ('Cerrar podrá'; 'las hallará') which is, however, the reverse of quietist, since both poems gain in intensity thanks to the greatly increased importance of what of life is affirmed against the beggarly deprivations of death.

This attitude towards reality — and death is the ultimate reality in the second, ironic sense — is constant in Cernuda's poetry, but we cannot overstress the importance of the division of reality into two areas, only one of which is hostile. As F. Charry Lara (5) explains:

la insatisfacción del deseo conduce asimismo a un sentimiento de lucha contra lo real. Se comprende la razón por la que sea también, esencialmente, una poesía de soledad.

This struggle is carried on by desire against those areas of reality that are recalcitrant to it, or are themselves ugly, distorted or otherwise despicable — in a word, undesirable. For, clearly, the relationship obtaining between the two great principles must be, in the first place, a complementary one; and it is only later that the third, critical principle (which, as I have suggested, might be regarded as the poetic imagination) intervenes, and selectively apportions to opposite corners of Cernuda's poetic universe those aspects of reality which are objects, respectively, of desire and revulsion.

In consequence one cannot accept the assertions of Harris (6) and Silver (7) that Cernuda's 'characteristic reaction in the face of difficulties' is one of evasion. In the first place, one can hardly be said to be 'evading' what one simply rejects. Secondly, to reply to Harris's objection to poem VIII of *Primeras poesías* (8), is it relevant to speak of 'evasion' when the poem itself is a *revelation* of an attitude (in this case 'la fuga hacia dentro')? And would it not be preferable to state that the poem affirms, rather than betrays, the attitude? Thirdly, why seems it so particular in him? Such strategies are virtually the hallmark of Romantic poets — think, e.g., of Baudelaire's 'Anywhere out of this world' or Keats's 'how crude and sore/The journey homeward to habitual self'. We are surely

(5) F. Charry Lara 'Luis Cernuda', in *Luis Cernuda* (Taurus), p. 60.

(6) D. Harris, *Luis Cernuda: A Study of the Poetry*, Tamesis Books, London, 1973, *passim*.

(7) Silver, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

(8) Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

not to condemn them all for unmanliness, indolence, escapism or oversensitivity. The 'flight inwards' not only enables the subject to hold tightly on to the one thing that seems secure, tangible, even noble, in a fluctuating, lunatic or discredited world, but also provides the necessary aesthetic distance from actuality which the poem is designed to bridge.

The metaphysical side of the question is surely deeper than such purely psychological criticism allows; moreover, such criticism unnecessarily restricts the scope of the *thought*, in *Primeras poesías* particularly, by assuming without sufficient warrant that they are mere adolescent outpourings, with all the limitations that implies. They are rather philosophic poems with an adolescent protagonist (9), and there is occasionally a gap, one of irony, between the language, which allows us to read beyond itself, and the adolescent's ability to comprehend it — the same gap that lies between the two Cernudas, poet and protagonist, if indeed it is his own experience he has in mind.

José Bergamín (10) describes *Perfil del aire* as an 'ingenuo, espontáneo, sencillo y coherente pensar poético...'. Let us examine the opening stanza of poem 1, bearing this remark in mind:

Va la brisa reciente
Por el espacio esbelta
Y entre las hojas cantando
Abre una primavera.

This first stanza consists of a cluster of images forming a complete metaphor of considerable complexity. The breeze stirs the leaves; the rustle is a kind of song, confused with the singing of birds; and this, taken in conjunction with the adjective 'reciente', suggests the final notion of spring. All of this is deliberately cumulative, clearly the contrary of linear development. Moreover, if we pause to take in the formal and syntactic features, we discover a deliberate foreshortening of grammatical and metrical ordonnance: 'va', a present tense, is qualified by the temporal adjective 'reciente'; 'esbelta', grammatically aligned with 'brisa', is held back until after the masculine 'espacio', which becomes

(9) Yet J.M. Capote Benot, in *El período sevillano de Luis Cernuda* (Gredos, Madrid, p. 142) holds that this first book is 'hasta cierto punto el libro de un adolescente', basing this on the fact that the poet 'desde un principio (...) orientó su poesía hacia una expresión coloquial'.

(10) J. Bergamín, *La Gaceta Literaria* (1 de junio de 1927, p. 7).

tinged with its possibilities; and the enjambement between lines 3 and 4 allows 'cantando' to apply, with equal logic, to 'brisa', 'hojas' and 'primavera'. In addition, the article accompanying 'primavera' is the indefinite 'una' instead of the expected 'la', suggesting that the spring involved may be not only the season, but also a figurative sense of newness and freshness. Finally, 'abre' may be taken with either 'brisa' or 'primavera', so that the total sense of the stanza includes not merely a 'smiling landscape' and a 'vague observer' (11) but rather a conception of the natural world involving highly unusual elements of temporal, logical and aesthetic organisation. So much so that the presiding consciousness, the adolescent of standard criticism, does not immediately, or even principally, appear to us as an adolescent, but essentially as a poet.

It may be argued that Cernuda himself recognised that this book was 'el libro de un adolescente, aún más adolescente de lo que lo era mi edad al componerlo'; But against that he asserts that it was also 'el libro de un poeta que, desde el punto de vista de la expresión, sabía más o menos adónde iba' (12).

It is, therefore, a matter of the emphasis one is prepared to place on the aesthetic, as opposed to the adolescent, element in this collection. One might very well feel that the adolescent nature of the early poems has been exaggerated, and more rewarding approaches, in consequence, neglected. In the case of the poem we have been looking at, the deliberate and creative confusion of the images in the first stanza is to become a motif throughout *Primeras poesías* and *Egloga, Elegía, Oda*, and in particular, the association of feathers (or birds), song and dreams with poetry, along with descriptions of the coming of day and night, are a central concern of the collection. In the final stanza, the window becomes a locus of poetic revelation, and the word 'soñando', a key word in this book and, indeed, throughout Cernuda's poetry, is here first clearly associated, as is sleep in Keats, with the very foundation of poetic inspiration. In this light, it is scarcely accidental that this book, which Cernuda prepared so carefully for the press and subjected to such rigorous examination and correction, should begin with a breeze and end with an enchanted dream.

If we seem to be spending a great deal of time on this first poem, that is because this poetry repays close scrutiny. It should be clear from the

(11) Harris, op. cit., p. 23.

(12) Cernuda, op. cit., p. 900.

outset that *Primeras poesías* cannot be got quickly out of the way with a genuflexion to its disarming simplicity, its youthful freshness and its delicate charm. One might notice here, for example.

Como dichas primeras
Primeras golondrinas.

The repeated adjective, as well as giving cadence and rhythmical point to the poem, associates the birds with joy, and their newness, taken along with the first stanza, with joy in creation.

What is more, the repetition of the adjective draws attention to the respective nouns, one of which is abstract and the other concrete. A tension is thus created by the application of the same modifier to two different categories of noun, and this is only the first of many instances of similar syntactic distributions by means of which Cernuda makes language itself part of the meaning of his early poetry. We may further notice how word like 'huye' (1.14), 'anegándose' (1.15) and 'restituye' (1.18) are early signs of a tendency, which Cernuda never abandoned, to endow his landscapes with life and volition — 'deseo' if one likes. In this particular case, the observer's own life is minimally represented as 'indolencia presente', but despite the frequency of occurrence of this and related states of mind, both in the poetry and in sketches of Cernuda personally which contemporaries have left us, there is no reason to read into it the state of moral and spiritual lassitude which critics commonly detect. The name for that state in Cernuda's poetry is 'hastío'; hence, 'indolencia' is a positive state, associated with creativity, whereas 'hastío', in addition to its ordinary meaning, is frequently found in the environment of sterility and creative and moral incapacity.

Besides, if the observer is indolent, the distance is also 'sleeping'; the poet eagerly seizes on this fundamental similarity between himself and external nature to point out that, just as the tree serves as a focus or point of concentration in the empty landscape, so his own 'fervor' — which is therefore the source of his observation — alerts him to the beauty of his surroundings. This adds point to the last stanza: the window comes to represent the point of contact between the poet's inner life and the external world of nature, seen, in the mimetic universe of the poem, as a mirror of the soul; reciprocally, the poet's mind reflects nature. The objective and subjective elements thus meet and fuse, and the last stanza brings together a definite point in the real world, less tangible realities (stars and air), and the intangible world of dreams, imagination and rapt contemplation.

Touching this last point, there is a long series of words running the gamut from rapture ('embeleso') to prostration ('hastío'), and including 'indolencia', 'ingrávido', 'sueño', 'dormir', 'vacío', 'calma', etc. Although in some cases the words are virtually interchangeable, there is a constant and consistent opposition between states of 'embeleso' and 'indolencia', which are almost always pleasurable and creative, and those of 'hastío' and 'vaciedad', which are inevitably anguished and related to sterility.

From his window, the protagonist of these poems has a limited view of a narrow range of objects and experiences. He contemplates the dawn or the sunset («esto es», as Ricardo Molina (13) notes, «breves y marcadas fases de tránsito, los (momentos) elegidos por Cernuda, o mejor aún, los presentes en su espíritu como símbolos cotidianos del irrefrenable devenir»); he watches the sun beat down on an almost empty and motionless landscape; he sees the rain or the fog send people — present only as a 'desbandada' or 'desvarío' — diving for cover; he watches the lamplight spill out into the darkness of the night; or he takes notice of isolated objects in his room. But if the outside world is vaguely drawn, reflecting perhaps the paucity of the observer's experience, his inner life is a ferment of desire, hope and despondency, and the poems reveal a tendency in him to confuse both these states of mind (14) and the internal and external planes of existence. This leads to further sets of divisions in the objects of cognizance, particularly between body and soul, but also between heaven and earth, and even between 'alma' and 'vida' in the envoi that closes poem XX:

Canción mía, ¿qué te doy
Si alma y vida son ajenas?

where 'alma' signifies the individual and his desires, whilst 'vida' is an alternative expression for 'realidad'.

Uniting all these seemingly disparate elements is the 'mirada' which, even at this early stage, is as fundamental in both Cernuda's poetic theory and in his expression as the more prestigious 'deseo', 'amor',

(13) R. Molina, 'La conciencia trágica del tiempo, clave esencial de la poesía de Luis Cernuda', in *Luis Cernuda* (Taurus), p. 104.

(14) Harris has noted «the equivocal relation between noun and adjective, as in 'calma vacía' [...] a technique Cernuda frequently employs to express the emotional ambivalence of the adolescent». (*Study*, p. 25).

'olvido', 'embeleso', 'soledad', etc. Anticipating a remark of Leopoldo Panero's, one wonders whether this 'mirada' and the later 'mirada interior' are not essentially the same, and whether it may not have been the discovery of the description of the 'inward eye/That is the bliss of solitude' in Wordsworth which first attracted Cernuda to the English poet. Though it is tacitly present in every poem in *P.P.*, the window itself being a species of eye, the window of the soul as well as of the room, its function emerges most clearly from its use in Poem XVIII:

Alzada resucita
Tal otra vez la casa;
Los tiempos son idénticos,
Distintas las miradas.

This poem illustrates the deceptive simplicity of *P.P.* Ostensibly, it describes the coming of night which, depriving the poet of his occupation of observing the world outside, leaves him bored and listless, and makes him aware of an oppressive sense of imprisonment within the walls of his room, as well as of the rain beating against a window-pane, a lapse of memory (¿He cerrado la puerta?), solitude and frustration. As the day declines, the setting reasserts itself, bringing the familiar sense of inertia and lifelessness (11. 2 & 3), which are, however, unaccompanied by 'palabras crueles'. Here, 'crueles' seems to be used predicatively, i.e. we are dealing not with specific cruel words, but with words in general, which are of their nature cruel, particularly for the poet, whose task it is to struggle with them. The mind is now forced to contemplate the narrow limits imposed upon it, and, in the typical movement of *P.P.*, retreats within in search of adequate expression for the experience. In the stanza I have quoted, the language is arresting, in particular the phrase 'otra vez'; in the next line, the poet takes it literally and denies it is 'otra', declaring that time is always the same and it is we who change. This clearly anticipates

No es el amor quien muere
Somos nosotros mismos.

(*Donde habite el olvido*, XII)

Time, like love, is in the eye of the beholder; for inanimate nature, it is non-existent, and everything is identical to itself, always and everywhere.

The tense of the question, '¿He cerrado la puerta?', serves to underline this. There are very few past tenses in the book, and Cernuda is al-

most equally sparing with personal pronouns. Obviously, he intends to stress the fact that memory is only possible for minds conditioned by time, so that 'olvido' opens vast vistas of emptiness and absence, described as bare and airless. Air, being part of timeless nature, has no place in this dimension. The concluding stanza completes the desolation:

Pero nadie suspira.
Un llanto entre las manos
Sólo. Silencio. Nada.
La oscuridad temblando.

The reiterative use of negatives almost suggest a positive sense of 'nadie', akin to Lewis Carroll's wordplay in *Through the Looking-glass*. The soundless wailing is 'entre las manos', i.e. enclosed in itself, both impenetrable and incommunicable, and therefore nothing. This equating of grief with silence and nothingness is repeated in the equally sardonic 'No es nada, es un suspiro' from *Invocaciones* (p. 180), though in the later poem the negation has become even more systematic:

No es nada, es un suspiro
Pero nunca sació nadie esa nada
Ni nadie supo nunca de qué alta roca nace.

Cernuda's awareness of the multiplicity of the categories of non-being rivals Quevedo's or Donne's ('absence, darkness, death, things that are Not') and derives from the steadiness and perspicacity of the gaze he directed on things, inward and outward. The emphasis placed, in this poem from *P.P.*, on the 'mirada' as not only awareness, but awareness in time, together with the rather breathtaking reversal of logic implicit in 'Los tiempos son idénticos/Distintas las miradas', are indications that the presiding consciousness in this poetry is not adolescent, but highly critical, ironic and fully mature.

The 'mirada' is also active in the poem 'Desengaño indolente' (III), in which it anxiously scans the world for some encouraging sign; here, too, we find the elements of solitude — so essential in this poetry for the exact perspective on things which it provides — inertia, and the awareness of time passing:

El afán entre muros
Debatiéndose aislado
Sin ayer mi mañana
Yace en un limbo extático.

Evidently, if sleep banishes time from the consciousness, the implication is that time is normally present to the waking mind, and this is emphasised:

El tiempo en las estrellas.
Desterrada la historia.
El cuerpo se adormece
Aguardando su aurora.

The division of mind and body is also a separation of time from the earth, and it is noteworthy that time and history should join the departed light of day (as in Poem XXI) or the displaced darkness of night (Poem XV) in the ethereal regions. These rhythmic successions in the natural world are a further unifying element in *P.P.*, underscoring the sets of dualities and polar opposites we have noted: body/soul, subject/object, creativity/sterility, etc., all, in this mimetic universe, subjected to the watchful 'mirada', which we are now in position to equate with the discerning or critical principle we have already postulated as the intermediary between the two great principles of reality and desire.

The frequent oxymorons to which Harris alludes in mentioning 'calma vacía', have a *similar organising función*. We have noted 'limbo extático', which is picked up in Poem XIII, in the phrase 'inmóvil paroxismo', and, though less forceful, perhaps, there is the 'desengaño indolente' of the poem we have just considered. We can perhaps now begin to see the aesthetic, as opposed to the emotional, bent of the poems in this collection. Moreover, 'calma vacía' almost inevitably recalls Wordsworth to the English reader: the protagonist of this poem, and many others in the book, is 'in vacant or in pensive mood', and following our argument that, in this mood, the 'mirada' is at its most active, the revelation of the coincidences between Cernuda's and Wordsworth's accounts of the creative imagination and the workings of the poetic mind is almost eerie in its completeness.

Nevertheless, one may agree that the dreams of the protagonist, if not exactly sterile, are marred by a suspicion of their unrealisability:

La almohada no abre
Los espacios risueños;
Dice sólo, voz triste,
Que alientan allá lejos.

This image, or group of images, was frequent in this period, and continues to be frequent until Cernuda develops a distaste for 'lo ingenioso en poesía' about 1934 or 1935. One last example of its occurrence will give us a final clue as to how I believe Cernuda meant these images to be understood: it is in Poem XVI ('La noche a la ventana'):

Levanta entre las hojas,
Tú, mi aurora futura;
No dejes que me anegue
El sueño entre sus plumas

The important Cernudian word 'anegar' indicates the state of total absorption or rapture brought on by the contemplation of beauty. (Happiness in this poetry is inseparable from the sense of attraction, occurring only as a consequence of the 'embeleso' of artistic or sexual selflessness). Which condition, it has been suggested, is associated with the aesthetic response, in its turn associated with dreams and feathers. But in the first two lines, the 'aurora futura' — a hypothetical manifestation of reality, and not of desire — is similarly associated with a bird, taking flight from a tree on this occasion. Rather than expressing a desire to escape from emotional sterility or the emptiness of a merely aesthetic dream, these lines show, on the contrary, a desire to invest reality with the perfection of dream. Dreams, then, like other related states in which the fancy is free, offer a vision of the world in which 'goces y sonrisas' abound, and hence encourage desire by opening vistas of possible joy ('espacios risueños'). But awakening, or brought abruptly back to reality, as we saw in 'Los muros, nada más', the poet is disillusioned by the abyss between dream and actuality, and this deception brings on a mood of fitful langour in which the gap between hope and reality is almost as great as the continued yearning ('El afán entre muros') which together form the condition described as 'limbo extático' - «almost», because the adjective shows that the state is closer to heaven than to hell.

A similar state of imperfect happiness is suggested by the line 'Como flor en la sombra', from 'desengaño indolente'. Like the flower in shadow, the joy to which desire aspires cannot be possessed in all its perfection, so that the poet can perceive of a perfection which he cannot attain. We may notice, in passing, that in this case Cernuda has managed to find an adequate physical image for a purely mental state, as occurs in English 'methaphysical' poetry. But on other occasions he fails to find appropriate images, and it is this abstraction of much of the thought in *P.P.*, rather than the nebulosity of the emotions, which

has led to critical dissatisfaction, and, I believe, misunderstanding. We must not dismiss the dreams as sterile, since this would be a failure to register the paradox in 'Desengaño indolente.../El sueño *fiel* nos brinda'. (My underlining).

This is a statement of the major theme of Cernuda's poetry: imagination and the higher faculties of the mind are faithful to the superior vision of the 'reality that lies behind appearance', whereas, as the world wags, we can expect only disillusionment. Hence the poet pleads with the dawn in 'La noche a la ventana':

No dejes que me anegue
El sueño entre sus plumas.

He is aware that dream without reality would be as destructive as reality without the dream: each needs the complement which the other provides, and the poem itself is the result of the tensions between them. To say that the dreams in these poems are sterile is to ignore the fact that reality without them is quite as barren. The marvellously precise expression of the poem underlines this: the senses awaken, or rather, like flowers, bloom

'Frente a un mundo'.

The preposition occupies the crucial initial position, and its force is thereby intensified. We thus have two flowers, the one (desire) blooming in shadow, whilst the other (the bodily senses) blooms over against the world, demanding satisfaction. Desire is beating at the walls of the flesh ('entre muchos/Debatiéndose aislado'), in an image that recurs insistently throughout *P.P.*, and which, as commentators agree, derives from Reverdy, though it was a Romantic commonplace.

It is unlikely, however, that Reverdy was more than a passing influence on Cernuda, and even then only in a few details from a few poems, predominantly the night pieces. It is difficult to accept the view that Cernuda learnt restraint and the importance of the direct colloquial style from Reverdy, partly because it is not entirely clear that these are permanent features of the French poet's style, but principally because they simply do not exist in the early Cernuda. And despite Cernuda's insistence that in composing his first poems 'me ayudaron algunas cualidades suyas' (de Reverdy), 'en favor de las cuales estaba yo predisuesto: desnudez, pureza (sea lo que sea lo que esta palabra) tan abu-

sada, suscite hoy en la mente del lector) reticencia,' (15) it must be said that there are other forms or verbal complexity than mere ornamentation. I suppose Cernuda had in mind the ostentation of Rubén Darío and his successors when he upheld the colloquial style against 'lo folklórico y lo pedantesco', but both '*Perfil del Aire*' and *Primeras poesías* are pretty dense, though in another sense: in the sense in which Quevedo, Góngora or Mallarmé are also dense.

For if the externals of *P.P.* are, on the whole, fairly typical of the Twenties (Cubism, incipient post-Modernism, a certain note of abstraction) there are unmistakable resonances of the Baroque style, or styles, and of the Symbolist tradition of intellectual imagery, which Cernuda, in common with others of his generation, made his own. More than Reverdy's, and incomparably more than Juan Ramón Jiménez's, it was this poetry of dense imagery, abstract thought and subtle cadences that influenced the young Cernuda, who continued to develop it in *Egloga*, *Elegía*, *Oda*, and did not fully escape its fascination even in the Surrealist poems of *Un río, un amor* and *Los placeres prohibidos*. As Gullón pointed out, and as others such as Bodini and Ferraté have confirmed, Cernuda's surrealism was anything but automatic, uncontrolled or merely modish. The use of imagery in poems like 'He venido para ver' or 'Unos cuerpos son como flores' from '*Los placeres prohibidos*' owes a great deal to the precision Cernuda learned from his early masters, and which he had already turned to such account in *P.P.* Furthermore it was in these poets that Cernuda discovered the qualities of plastic imagery combined with intense intellectual activity that he later so much admired, divested of ornament, in the English Metaphysicals.

(15) Cernuda, *Prosa*, pp 900-1.