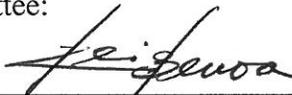


THE POET AND HIS REFLECTION: AUTOBIOGRAPHY, REALITY, AND
FICTION IN THE POETRY OF LUIS CERNUDA

by

Nilofar J. Burke
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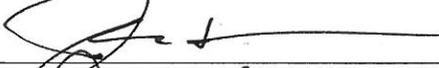
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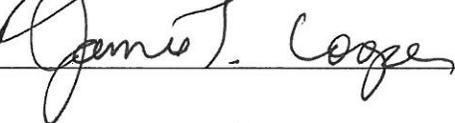


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ABSTRACT

THE POET AND HIS REFLECTION: AUTOBIOGRAPHY, REALITY, AND FICTION IN THE POETRY OF LUIS CERNUDA

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The Spanish poet Luis Cernuda (1902-1963) is one of the members of the Generation of 1927. He is exiled from Spain in 1938 and spends the rest of his life in countries such as Great Britain, France, the United States, and Mexico where he dies in 1963. As a young poet, Cernuda doesn't receive the credit he deserves for his poetry; however, as the years go by, Cernuda emerges as a prominent 20th Century Spanish poet. It isn't until after his death that his critics begin to notice the genius behind Cernuda's verses and recognize him for the quality and maturity of his work as well as his contribution to the poetry of exile. It is the goal of this thesis to provide evidence that Cernuda's poetry is autobiographical, which he demonstrates through his treatment of the themes of solitude, exile, homosexuality, and memory. Additionally, the thesis will treat the topic of reality and fiction as an important aspect of Cernuda's body of writing.

INTRODUCTION

No recuerdo que, antes de sorprenderme a mí mismo descubriéndome una vocación poética, hubiese yo pensado, ni deseado, ser poeta, aunque mi aceptación del hecho siguiera al despertar de la vocación. Ya entrado en la edad madura, volviendo sobre mi niñez y adolescencia, percibí cómo todo en ellas me había preparado para la poesía y encaminado hacia ella. Y, como un poeta lo dijo: 'El niño es padre del hombre.'

(Luis Cernuda, *Historial de un libro*)

Luis Cernuda was born Luis Mateo Bernard José Cernuda Bidón in Seville on September 21st, 1902. He was the youngest of three children and the only male child. His mother, Amparo Bidón Cuéllar, was also from Seville with French ascendancy, and his father, Bernardo Cernuda Bauza, was from Puerto Rico with a Spanish ascendancy. Cernuda spent most of his infancy under the disciplined hand of his military-minded father living in a monotone bourgeois household. He describes his family in the poem “La familia” in the following manner:

Era a la cabecera el padre adusto
La madre caprichosa estaba en frente
Con la hermana mayor imposible y desdichada,
Y la menor más dulce, quizá no más dichosa.
La familia, el nido de los hombres
Inconsistente y rígido, tal vidrio

Que todos quiebran, pero nadie dobla.

...

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. (*Poesía Completa*¹ I, 334)

The image of a strict father and the unhappiness of the women in his life are portrayed clearly in his poem giving a glimpse into the life of young Cernuda. His rigid environment is responsible for his timid² and sensitive nature. We shall discover through his poetry that being raised in such an unyielding atmosphere led Cernuda to have solitary tendencies and remain in internal and external solitude for the rest of his life. He suffers internal solitude due to his claustrophobic domestic environment which contributed towards his introverted nature. He did not become fully aware of his sexual orientation until the age of fourteen, which also was a major cause of his timidity. Cernuda's external solitude was caused by his inability to find a companion with whom he can share his life. He spent 25 years in exile all the while leading a solitary life focused only on his teaching and writing poetry. It was through these experiences that the theme of solitude became the main focus of his adolescent and mature poetry.

¹ From this point forward, *Poesía Completa* will be cited as *PC* I.

² Cernuda speaks of his timidity and social awkwardness in *Historial de un libro* stating it was “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)

Cernuda discovered his love for poetry at a young age upon reading three volumes of the poetry of Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer that his cousins had lent his sister in 1911. To his surprise, the richness of Bécquer's verses would forever change his life and inspire him to begin writing poetry. In 1914 while attending high school, Cernuda wrote a few short verses at the request of his professor Antonio López, which increased his unpopularity among his classmates, who had already viewed Cernuda as an odd and quiet person, and intensified his tendency to distance himself from the world around him. He came to the realization that poetry was his only companion as he continued to shut himself into a solitary existence. He confessed this fact in *Historial de un libro* that during puberty, he experienced a sexual awakening as well as feeling himself being drawn to poetry, both of which occurred at the same time:

Hacia los catorce, y conviene señalar la coincidencia con el despertar sexual de la pubertad, hice la tentativa primera de escribir versos. Nada sabía acerca de lo que era un verso, ni de los que eran formas poéticas; sólo tenía oído o, mejor dicho, instinto del ritmo, que en todo caso es cualidad primaria del poeta. La idea de escribir, y sobre todo la de escribir verso, en parte por las burlas acostumbradas y que no pocas veces había oído acerca del poeta, suscitaba en mí rubor incontrolable, aunque me escondiera para hacerlo y nadie en torno mío tuvo noticia de tales intentos. (*Prosa*³ I, 626)

He described enjoying the pleasure of his poetry's company and the force with which his feelings of solitude and separation from the outside world intensified during this period of his life.

³ From this point forward, *Prosa* I will be cited as *P* I.

Later, as it was expected of most young men of his status, Cernuda began studying Law at the University of Seville where he took classes under the guidance of Pedro Salinas. Once Salinas read Cernuda's verses, a lifelong friendship was formed between them as he recommended Cernuda to familiarize himself with the classical Spanish as well as the modern French writers⁴.

After his father's death in 1920, he enlisted in the army in 1923 for a short term ending in 1924. According to *Historial de un libro*, while in the army, Cernuda had a revelation that deepened his desire to write poetry. The poet admitted writing a few poems about this specific experience; however, none of them have survived. The poetry composed in 1924 is part of his first book of poetry *Perfil del aire*⁵ published in 1927. The publication of this book brought mixed feelings towards the poet's work. Many accuse him of lacking originality and imitating other poets such as Jorge Guillén, while others criticized him for not employing modern views. In *Historial de un libro*, Cernuda expressed his reactions towards the criticism his first book of poetry received, and indicated that the views of the critics were the opposite of what he had hoped. Still, the poet takes heart and advises himself saying:

⁴ In *Historial de un libro*, Cernuda speaks of reading the classics suggested to him by Salinas: "Leía entonces por vez primera, y digo por vez primera porque sólo en aquellos días percibí el sentido de lo que dejaron escrito, aunque en algunos casos fuera relectura, a los poetas españoles clásicos: Garcilaso, Fray Luis de León, Góngora, Lope, Quevedo, Calderón. Salinas me indicó la necesidad de que leyera también a los poetas franceses, de que aprendiera una lengua extranjera. Baudelaire fue el primer poeta francés a quien entonces comencé a leer en su propia lengua y hacia el cual he conservado devoción y admiración vivas. Luego, aunque mi conocimiento de la lengua era aún deficiente, emprendí la lectura de Mallarmé y de Rimbaud, no creo que yo, en aquella primera lectura, me diera cuenta del alcance de su pensamiento, aunque aquel contacto preliminar con su obra dejara una huella que las lecturas posteriores fueron profundizando." (P I, 627)

⁵ Cernuda was criticized that he had imitated the style of the poet Jorge Guillén, to which Cernuda responds that his book of poetry *Perfil del aire* was published a year before Guillén's *Cántico*.

‘Aquello que te censuren, cultívalo, porque eso eres tú’⁶. No digo que esa máxima sea sabia, ni prudente, pero yo la puse en práctica poco después de publicar mi primer libro. Porque mis versos siguientes fueron, decididamente, aún menos “nuevos” que los anteriores. (*P I*, 631)

These words are proof that from the very beginning Cernuda demonstrated an understanding spirit contributing towards the value of his work, a value that will captivate all of Cernuda’s future critics.

1927 was an important year in his life thanks to his participation in a celebration in Seville giving tribute to the poet Luis de Góngora, and in this way he formed part of the group of poets who will later be known as the Generation of 27, to which Cernuda refers as the Generation of 1925⁷ in *Prosa I*. The nomination to this group of poets included: Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, Rafael Alberti, Federico García Lorca, Dámaso Alonso, Gerardo Diego, Luis Cernuda, Vicente Aleixandre, Manuel Altolaguirre, and Emilio Prados.

After his mother’s death in 1928⁸, Cernuda moved first to Malaga and later to Madrid working within different literary circles. He published *Un río, un amor* in 1929 and *Los placeres prohibidos* in 1931. The poems in *Donde habite el olvido* were inspired

⁶ Cernuda does not provide a reference of the source of the quote in his *Historial de un libro*.

⁷ According to the poet, he preferred 1925 because it was the mid-point date of first publication of works by the member of the group known as the “Generation of 1927”. Cernuda states: “A falta de denominación aceptada, la necesidad me lleva a usar la generación de 1925, fecha que aun cuando nada signifique históricamente, representa al menos un término medio en la aparición de sus primeros libros.” (*Prosa I*, 183-84)

⁸ Cernuda expresses a sense of freedom that he experiences after his mother’s death in *Historial de un libro*: “En julio de 1928 murió mi madre (mi padre había muerto en 1920) y a comienzos de septiembre dejé Sevilla. La sensación de libertad me embriagaba. Estaba harto de mi ciudad nativa, y aún hoy, pasados treinta años, no siento deseo de volver a ella. Las ciudades, como los países y las personas, si tienen algo que decirnos requieren un espacio de tiempo nada más; pasado éste, nos cansan.” (*P I*, 633)

by his relationship with Serafín F. Ferro⁹ that started in 1932. It was very difficult for Cernuda to publish these poems; although he never hid from his homosexuality, he was very reluctant about it. He finally decided to publish *Donde habite el olvido* in 1934 without fearing any form of social and political retaliation. Later, the Cernuda compiled all his poetic books under one title: *La realidad y el deseo*¹⁰, which publishes in 1936. The publication of this volume of poetry brought Cernuda much needed attention and very positive feedback.

Octavio Paz praised this volume of poetry in *La palabra edificante*¹¹ written about Cernuda, in the following terms:

Todas las edades del hombre aparecen en *La realidad y el deseo*. Todas, excepto la infancia, que sólo es evocada como un mundo perdido y cuyo secreto se ha olvidado. El libro de poemas de Cernuda podría dividirse en cuatro partes: la adolescencia, los años de aprendizaje, en los que nos sorprende por su exquisita maestría; la juventud, el gran momento en que descubre a la pasión y se descubre a sí mismo, periodo al que debemos sus blasfemias más hermosas y sus mejores poemas de amor—amor al amor; la madurez, que se inicia como una contemplación de los poderes terrestres y termina en una meditación sobre las obras humanas; y el final, ya en el límite de la vejez, la mirada más precisa y reflexiva, la voz más real y amarga. (Paz 61)

To celebrate the publication of his first volume, the writers of the Generation of 1927 gave a tribute to Cernuda in Madrid. Soon after, praiseworthy articles about Cernuda's

⁹ Serafín F. Ferro was introduced to Cernuda by the poet Federico Garcia Lorca in 1932.

¹⁰ See the "Cronología biografía" and the "Bibliografía descriptiva" in the *Obra Completa* for a more detailed chronology of Cernuda's life and work. Also see James Valender's "Chronología 1902-1963" (2004: 107-181) for details of Cernuda's life and work.

¹¹ Paz, Octavio. *La palabra edificante*.

collection of poetry appeared by Juan Ramón Jiménez and Pedro Salinas. Regarding the title of his first volume, Salinas states:

El título de la compilación corresponde a la entraña del drama del hombre, tal y como se la plantearon los románticos. Realidad y el deseo enfrentados, como el luchador y la fiera en el coso del mundo. El hombre desea sin tasa y sin concreción: el mundo le ofrece, por un lado, concreciones –la realidad es concreción—; por otro, tasa porque la realidad nos está inevitablemente tasando. Y así el conflicto nunca tendrá solución. Porque apenas el deseo aprehende la concreción de lo real, la suelta desengañado, porque es la realidad hay siempre al propio tiempo que una satisfacción del deseo, una tasa a su incesante afán. En la visión romántica del mundo, la criatura humana, pequeña e insignificante en sí mismo, se agiganta por el pujante vuelo de deseos inmensos a que sirve de apoyo material; y, en cambio, la magnitud real del cosmos se achica y se reduce a las proporciones de una nuez vacía, de un desengaño. (Salinas 214)

Where Salinas further explains the conflict between “Realidad y deseo”, Jiménez takes a poetic path of praising Cernuda and comparing him to Bécquer:

Solo en el fondo de otra casa de otra calle, calle del Aire, esculpido, labrado suavemente por esa íntima tarde eterna andaluza, de las cuatro a las nueve, Luis Cernuda fue, es, sigue siendo el más esencial, hondo sobrebecqueriano de los poetas jóvenes españoles. No tiene cara de Bécquer, tiene calidades de Bécquer cuarenta años delate, equivalentes transparencias generales, oro, marfil, plata en espíritu, góticas bandas anjélicas alrededor de sus diferente verso. Sus huesos de alabastro suenan como otro teclado preciosamente pálido en lo oscuro, otra arpa, sin polvo, por milagro autentico, en el ángulo penumbra de otro largo salón del mediodía. Todo en su canto es pétalo si flor, pulpa si fruta. Confunde, como la magnolia, la acacia rosa y blanca, el nardo, fruto y flora. No tiene leña su tierra granada rosicler en punto. (Jiménez 264)

1938 is a year that Cernuda will never forget because he began the second period of his life in this year. In February, Cernuda went to London for a series of lectures at the request of his English friend Stanley Richardson. Soon after, the political situation and the dangers of the Spanish Civil War kept him from returning to his country. About this event, Cernuda says:

En febrero de 1938 un amigo inglés, el cual, sin saberlo yo, había gestionado desde Londres que el gobierno de Barcelona me otorgara pasaporte con destino a Inglaterra, para dar unas conferencias, me avisó de que podía emprender el viaje. No creía que mi ausencia durase más de uno o dos meses, creencia que sin duda me facilitó la aceptación del proyecto. Pero mi ausencia ha durado ya, a estas fechas, más de veinte años. A ese amigo, Stanley Richardson, que murió en Londres en 1940, durante un bombardeo, debo haberme salvado de los riesgos eventuales, después de terminada de la guerra civil, si su final me alcanza en España. (P I, 643)

It is difficult to say what Cernuda's fate may have been had he rejected the invitation of his friend. Would he have been killed brutally like the poet Federico Garcia Lorca or would he have been able to survive the brutalities of war and give a firsthand account of the bloody Spanish Civil War? Richardson may have very well saved the life of Cernuda without ever knowing it.

The composition of his seventh collection of poetry *Las nubes*¹² had begun in 1937 in Spain and finished in 1940 in Glasgow, a city Cernuda hated with passion. In

¹² In *Historial de un libro*, Cernuda credits his experiences as an educator for employ such a depersonalized and detached manner of writing in *Las nubes*. He states: "El trabajo de las clases me hizo comprender como necesario que mis explicaciones llevaron a los estudiantes a ver por sí mismo aquellos de que yo iba a hablarles: que mi tarea consistía en encaminarles y situarles ante la realidad de una obra literaria española. De ahí solo un paso a comprender que también el trabajo poético creador exigía algo equivalente, no

1940, he wrote the first part of his next poetic book *Ocnos*, which was published in London in 1943. In this year, he set out to teach at Emmanuel College of Cambridge, but returned to London in the middle of 1945¹³. In 1947, Cernuda left England and Europe forever to teach in the United States at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts.

It is during this period of his life that he composed the majority of *Como quien espera el alba* and began the composition of *Vivir sin estar viviendo*. The years spent in the United States are some of the most depressing years of his life. In the midst of his depression, he is reminded of the warmth of Spain and the sound of his language during a visit to Mexico in the summer of 1949, which he continued during his summer breaks of 1950 and 1951. During this time, he began writing the collection of poems titled *Con las horas contadas*. In 1951, he met a young man by the name of Salvador who inspired Cernuda to write the poems published in *Poemas para un cuerpo*.

Cernuda had become bored with the environment of Mount Holyoke College, and the weather of Massachusetts, which he describes in *Historial de un libro*, was colder than he would have preferred:

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. La lectura, que siempre tuvo para mí atractivo

tratando de dar solo al lector el efecto de mi experiencia, sino conduciéndole por el mismo camino que yo había recorrido, por los mismos estados que había experimentados y, por fin, dejarle solo frente al resultado.” (PC I, 645)

¹³ Cernuda reads and studies English poetry during his time in London. In *Historial de un libro*, he refers to this experience as “la experiencia más considerable de mis años maduros.” (PC I, 645)

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. (P I, 656)

In November of 1952, Cernuda moved to Mexico and began teaching from 1954-1960 at La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México about Spanish and French theater. He returned to the United States in 1960 and served as a poetic lecturer in different institutions in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Berkeley while continuing his visits to Mexico. In November of 1962 he published his last book of poetry *Desolación de la quimera*, which was mainly written in Mexico. In June of 1963 he returned to Mexico with the intentions of visiting the United States periodically and teaching at the University of California; however, problems with his visa forced him to give up his tries of return to the U.S.

In the dawn of November 5th, 1963, Cernuda died suddenly from a heart attack. He is buried in Panteón Jardín in Mexico City.

CHAPTER 1: DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE

*En el jardín solo está el niño
Tendido boca arriba sobre el césped
Mirando al cielo de la tarde.
De apenas cinco años,
Propenso a irrazonables rabias,
A obscenos juegos a su edad lastimosos,
Flacucho, cara triste,
Por broma afectuosa
Le llamas Entelequia.*

(Luis Cernuda, *Desolación de la Quimera*)

Language plays a major role in the formation of poetry. By manipulating the language, the poet demonstrates his ability to successfully set himself apart from the rest. Cernuda uses the Spanish language to give his poetry a distinct style and meaning. The goal of this chapter is to discuss the manner in which Cernuda uses language to give an account of his life experiences through his poetry. This chapter will also discuss another important element in Cernuda's poetry: the line between reality and desire. It will explore the ways in which he distinguishes between the two realities and the reasons behind his search for a space that is unreal and fantastic. Many critics such as Derek Harris, José Angel Valente, and Octavio Paz have praised Cernuda for his lucidity of thought and persistent search for self-awareness. Paz states:

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. [Su] biografía poética, *La realidad y el deseo* es algo más: la historia de un espíritu que, al conocerse, se transfigura. (Paz 140-149)

Cernuda's search for knowledge of himself and the world begins at a young age.

Unfortunately, many of his early poetry didn't survive, but the desire for self-discovery continued within the poet. Throughout his life, he writes about love, exile, solitude, and nostalgia, among others. It is his descriptive style of expression that draws the reader to his written word.

Published in 1929, *Un río, un amor* is among the first books of poetry by Cernuda in which he uses the Spanish language in a skillful manner to narrate the experiences of his young life. The themes of solitude and anguish are consistently developed within this book where his descriptive style of writing demonstrates its appeal to the reader¹⁴. To describe his experiences, Cernuda uses simple adjectives in his poems that act as the driving force of his poetry. "Quisiera estar solo en el sur" from *Un río, un amor*, is an

¹⁴ Although it took decades before Cernuda's poetry was appreciated by literary critics, it is valid to state that Cernuda is a poet of the masses. No other recorded time in human history has seen as many displaced people as much as the 20th Century has witnessed due to World War I and II, numerous dictatorships, genocides, etc. The poetry of Cernuda appeals to the simple man because he can relate to Cernuda's exilic experiences and life in solitude.

example of such a poem in which the poetic voice speaks of his homeland from a state of exile:

Quizá mis lentos ojos no verán más el sur
De ligeros paisajes dormidos en el aire,
Con cuerpos a la sombra de ramas como flores
O huyendo en un galope de caballos furiosos.

El sur es un destierro que llora mientras canta,
Y esa voz no se extingue como pájaro muerto;
Hacia el mar encamina sus deseos amargos
Abriendo un eco débil que vive lentamente

En el sur tan distante quiero estar confundido
La lluvia allí no es más que una rosa entreabierta;
Su niebla misma ríe, risa blanca en el viento.
Su oscuridad, su luz son bellezas iguales. (*PC I*, 143)

Nostalgia and a sense of loss are conveyed from the title of the poem “Quisiera estar solo en el sur.” Being an important part of the poet’s life and reason for writing poetry, nostalgia for his country is expressed through the use of surrealistic techniques. Nostalgia and longing for his native Spain is expressed throughout his poetry because he spends nearly 25 years in exile, away from his country and people.

This poem was written during his years on exile in France while working as a lecturer in Toulouse. The term “sur” refers to Seville, Spain. The poem gives a glimpse into the speaker’s love for his country. The first stanza expresses the longing the speaker has for his country while the second stanza describes and defines the term “sur.” The third stanza returns to a nostalgia towards his home and his wish to return to it. The speaker does not

describe the landscape in a conventional manner. Instead, he takes a surrealistic approach to describe it as:

De ligeros paisajes dormidos en el aire,
Con cuerpos a la sombra de ramas como flores
O huyendo en un galope de caballos furiosos.
El sur es un destierro que llora mientras canta,

For the speaker, the South is a lost paradise, to which he wishes to return, and the poem ends with the antithesis of “oscuridad” and “luz.” It is in the third stanza that the speaker returns to describing the reality in Seville with the use of terms such as “niebla” and “oscuridad” hinting at the poet’s surrealistic language, which is a major part of his early poetry.

Cernuda distinguishes between his reality, from which he constantly attempts to escape into his poetry and a world filled with the objects of his desire; one that he creates within his poetry. In order to construct such a world, the poet employs adjectives to describe a place that clearly does not make up a part of his reality. The nostalgia for his homeland makes it a place of dreams and fantasy, a place that is unattainable for a person in exile.

In the second stanza, Cernuda uses negative adjectives describing the contrasting characteristics of the same landscape indicating a state of confusion. By using “pájaro muerto,” “deseos amargos,” and “eco débil,” the poet provides his readers with two conflicting realities: both of which he calls home. The “destierro” that cries, while singing, refers to the poetic voice, who wanders the land in search of a desired reality that

no longer exists. The speaker also states that this voice does not go out or is extinguished like a “pájaro muerto,” referring to the legend of the phoenix that goes up into flames. Unlike the phoenix that burns and dies, the voice of the solitary soul does not die. By giving the soul of a wandering man an eternal voice, the poet goes further into describing the endless state of the speaker’s anguish and solitude in exile.

The poem uses “amargos” to describe his “deseos” indicating that his bitter desires point towards the depths of the oceans where dreams and desires are lost, never to be found again. The speaker mentions an “eco débil” that his voice produces in the direction of the ocean. This voice lives “lentamente” through an echo. The use of the adjective “débil” to describe the echo of his singing voice, points to the weak physical state of the wandering soul, while the word “eco” points to his solitary state. It suggests that he is the only living soul present in his dual reality. Salvador Jiménez-Fajardo speaks of the poet’s nostalgia for his country stemming from the obvious problems caused by the Spanish Civil War, and due to the Civil War, the poet’s time in exile is spent writing about the passing of time and the reality of death as the only “concrete reality of life”. The poetry of the period directly following the poet’s exile and the Civil War, therefore, consists of the treatment of nostalgia of his lost reality: Spain. Jiménez-Fajardo states:

In exile, time becomes an active element in the poet’s life. The Civil War intensifies the frequent pessimism of the poetry, and a subjacent death wish surfaces in many poems of *Las nubes*. Death appears as the most concrete reality of life. Soon, however, in *Como quien espera el alba*, the death wish disappears. The poetry seeks forms of self-affirmation in exile. Although Christianity may offer some solace, God remains

impassive and man must seek the way within himself. The tragedy of the Civil War keeps present the image of Spain in the poet's mind¹⁵. (Jiménez-Fajardo 23)

The topic of nostalgia is further discussed in "La familia" which describes a family is suffering from problems that are never discussed and bonds that are never formed:

¿Recuerdas tú, recuerdas aún la escena
A que día tras día asististe paciente
En la niñez, remota como sueño al alba?

El silencio pesado, las cortinas caídas,
El círculo de luz sobre el mantel, solemne
Como paño de altar, y alrededor sentado
Aquel concilio familiar, que tantos ya cantaron,
Bien que tú, de entraña dura, aún no lo has hecho.

Era a la cabecera el padre adusto,
La madre caprichosa estaba en frente,
Con la hermana mayor imposible y desdichada,
Y la menos más dulce, quizá no más dichosa,
El hogar contigo mismo componiendo,
Las casa familiar, el nido de los hombres,
Inconsistente y rígido, tal vidrio
Que todos quiebran, pero nadie dobla.

...

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,

¹⁵ Jiménez-Fajardo goes on to say that "His ambivalent attitude toward Spain, anger and love together, leads to construct legendary moments of the country's past as escape from the bitter present, such as the dream of Sansueña ("Resaca en Sansueña") or the idealization of "El ruiseñor sobre la piedra." Later, nostalgia for Spain actually turns to nostalgia for Andalusia and the hortus conclusus, a nostalgia that becomes assuaged to some extent in the poetry written in Mexico. (23-24)

Sin servidumbre de mover batanes,
Irreducible al mar, que es su destino.
...
El tiempo que pasó, desvaneciéndolos
Como burbuja sobre el haz del agua,
Rompió la pobre tiranía que levantaron,
Y libre al fin quedaste, a solas con tu vida,
Entre tantos de aquellos que, sin hogar ni gente,
Dueños en vida son del ancho olvido. (PC I, 334)

Gloomy and negative adjectives are used to describe this family. The poem begins by describing the house with the “cortinas caídas” indicating that there is an absence of natural light while an artificial light must have been used to break the darkness in the rooms. The poet mentions a lack of natural light in the house to point out that the individuals residing in the house employ artificial means to carry on their lives and that there is no natural source of inspiration for the residents of this dark house. There is a “luz solemne” present in the house suggesting that the environment is serious and strict. The strict environment echoes the presence of a harsh and “adusto” father who lacks the warmth that the members of this “familia” so desperately need and crave. Cernuda uses the above adjective appropriately to describe the character of the father who does not possess the ability to be affectionate with his children.

The poet describes the mother as “caprichosa” and impulsive which implies her unhappiness with her life¹⁶. The unhappiness of the mother implies that she too is lacking

¹⁶ The unhappiness of the mother with her life refers to the mental state of any individual who lacks happiness when he/she is constantly changing to find that which satisfies the body and mind. In this case, the unhappy mother is described as “caprichosa” by the poet, suggesting that neither the children nor the mother were happy living in strict household in the absence of natural inspiration and affection.

the affections of a husband. “Imposible” and “desdichada” are used to describe the two sisters indicating their peculiar qualities. Once the family members are described and more details are provided about them, it is unavoidable to suggest that Cernuda has just described the family with which he grew up, even though the poet never mentions that the individuals in “La familia” are in fact his own family members.

This poem is written as an adult brought by the memory of a childhood that was less than perfect. The speaker speaks of his relationship with his father, mother, and sisters as an analysis of the meaning of his existence. He begins by describing a family seated together, but the scene lacks warmth that comes to mind when picturing a family sitting together in a living room or a dining room. Such a description is provided by the memory of the then child who is confused about the relationships that surround him. Even as a child, the speaker knows that there was something unreal about his family, like an act put on by bad actors, as if his life and relationships were a charade. However, dark and doubtful of his relationships, the speaker ends the poem with a wish that his parents may rest in peace and a plea for forgiveness:

Por esta extraña llama hoy trémula en tus manos,
Que aun deseándolo, temes ha de apagarse un día,
Hasta ti transmitida con la herencia humana
De experiencias inútiles y empresas inestables
Obrando el bien y el mal sin proponérselo,
No prevalezcan las puertas del infierno
Sobre vosotros ni vuestras obras de la carne,
Oh padre taciturno que no le conociste,
Oh madre melancólica que no le comprendiste.

Que a esas sombras remotas no perturbe
En los limbos finales de la nada
Tu memoria como un remordimiento.
Este cónclave fantasmal que los evoca,
Ofreciendo tu sangre tal bebida propicia
Para hacer a los idos visibles un momento,
Perdón y paz os traiga a ti y a ellos. (PC I, 334)

While the speaker's plea for forgiveness and well wishes for his parents' souls may be virtuous, there is something more expressed in these lines. In *A Study of Poetry* Harris says:

There is an even more positive intention in the wish by Cernuda to understand himself and be understood. The replacement of the sentimentalism, which might be expected in a poem on the subject of the family, by an almost brutal frankness, is a clear indication that the primary function of "La familia" is self-analysis. The search for some meaning in the life thrust upon him without his consent, and for some way of dispelling "la amargura de haber vivido inútilmente" is the basic preoccupation of *Como quien espera el alba*. Cernuda is seeking to come to terms with the contrast between the expectations he had of life and the reality of his experience of what life has been... (Harris 153-154)

Cernuda's poetry continues to search for the knowledge of self¹⁷, reality, and desire as it progresses from the surrealist poetry of *Como quien espera el alba* to the mature poetry of *Desolación de la quimera*.

¹⁷ In the process of self-discovery, at times Cernuda loses hopes. In *A Study of Poetry* Harris, however, maintains that Cernuda's faith in himself was never lost. "...notwithstanding the awareness of the probable futility of his attitude, he still declares that he cannot relinquish this last article of faith, this last staff of life, his poetry. He is, in effect, declaring that when there is nothing left to believe in he will cling, against all odds, to his belief in himself" (157).

CHAPTER 2: HOMOSEXUALITY

*No sé qué nombre darle a mis sueños
La vida puso entonces una lámpara
Sobre muros sangrientos;
El día ya cansado secaba tristemente
Las futuras auroras, remendadas
Como harapos de rey.*

*La lámpara eses tú,
Mis labios, mi sonrisa,
Forma que hallan mis manos en todo lo que alcanzan.*

*Si mis ojos se cierran es para hallarte en sueños,
Detrás de la cabeza,
Detrás del mundo esclavizado,
En ese país perdido
Que un día abandonamos sin saberlo.*

(Luis Cernuda, *Un río, un amor*)

Cernuda was openly homosexual and he shamelessly expressed it in his writing. His sexual orientation does not define him, nor does it define his body of writing. It is, however, an important element of his writing and contributes towards the richness of his poetry and prose. He was fascinated by the brevity of sexual pleasure, and as a poet, he was very confident and secure in his sexual identity and convinced that he was correct in his beliefs which went against the views of the morally stern Spanish society. He became one of the first writers of his time to publish on such a taboo-worthy topic.

Octavio Paz sheds light on the importance of Cernuda's homosexuality in his work and life. "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" (139). Paz states that as the readers of Cernuda's work, it is not possible for us to gain a deeper understanding of his work without fully appreciating the crucial role that erotic desire plays in the act of creating the poetry. He says:

Se corre el riesgo de no comprender el significado de su obra si [...] se atenúa su homosexualidad, no porque su poesía puede reducirse a esa pasión [...] sino porque ella es el punto de partida de su creación poética. (Paz 160)

Manuel Ramos Otero adds that that Cernuda's homosexuality is "más que pasión erótica, es concepción ética del mundo, product directo de su marginación"¹⁸. An other critic, Harris, expresses similar thoughts about the poet's homosexuality. He states that the "erotic concern of [the poet's] poems is, in fact, just another vehicle for the analysis of his personality". He adds that "Cernuda's search for love [is] part of his struggle for self-affirmation"¹⁹.

The poet writes of his desire of love and be loved; however, his homosexuality contributes towards his woes as an exile as loneliness, without a doubt, is part of Cernuda's exilic reality. His homosexuality intensifies his state of solitude leading to a state of double exile, in which he is exiled from his country as well as the society of the

¹⁸ Manuel Ramos Otero, "La ética de la marginación en la poesía de Luis Cernuda," *Cupey*, 5 (1988): 16-29

¹⁹ Derek Harris, *Luis Cernuda: A Study of the Poetry* (London: Tamesis Books, 1973) p.119.

time for his sexual orientation. Without a partner to share the uncertainties of a life in exile, Cernuda, evident through his poetry, hungers for love and companionship. En *Los placeres prohibidos*, Cernuda writes about the desire to find physical love and the misery of being lonely. Poems such as “Si el hombre pudiera decir” and “Te quiero” among others are part of a collection of that clearly expresses the need to be loved by the poet.

Despite the overwhelming amount of evidence in the poet’s writing regarding his homosexual nature, some Cernudian critics are not ready to face the homosexual aspect of the poet’s writing. The fact remains that his sexual orientation is an important aspect of his life as well as his writing; therefore, it would be an injustice to dismiss it easily. This chapter will analyze the role of homosexual love in the poetry and, therefore, the life of Cernuda.

It is without a doubt that Cernuda has expressed the object of his love better than most poets of his generation. He has openly expresses his love for men where other poets such as Federico Garcia Lorca have attempted to hide their love for a man in their poetry as a love for a woman. Cernuda accomplishes this task with sincerity and complete honesty as his expression of his homosexual love is not hidden or presented with a sense of shame. He is very clear about his choice in love: homosexual. He continues to express himself and fight for his right to be different than the rest. Paz’s analysis of the poet’s poetry includes the following about his “difference” from the rest:

Reconocerse homosexual es aceptarse diferente de los otros. ¿Pero quiénes son los otros? Los otros son el mundo; y el mundo es la propiedad de los otros. En ese mundo se

persigue con la misma saña a los amantes homosexuales, al revolucionario, al negro, al proletario, al burgués expropiado, al poeta solitario, al mendigo, al excéntrico y al santo. (Paz 151-152)

Cernuda defends himself, as well as others like him, against the morally righteous in the society. In “Diré cómo nacisteis” from *Los placeres prohibidos*, the speaker talks about the deteriorating society that suppresses and silences its people who defy societal norms of love and affections.

Cernuda was exiled for his political views of the Second Republic, established in 1931 by Francisco Franco. The poet always employed a definitive view of the François uprising:

Sólo el nombre de franquista basta para levantar una ola de asco y repulsion en mis sentimientos. Para mí, el levantamiento es responsable no solo de la muerte de miles de españoles, de la ruina de España y de la venta de su future, sino que todos los crímenes y delitos que puedan achacarse a los del lado opuesto fueron indirectamente también ocasionados por los franquistas. (“Cartas a Nieves de Madriaga” 14-12 –1942)

Living in a state of exile, the poet suffers emotionally as well as economically, an experience he shares with the world in his *Prosa Completa*:

Fue aquella una de las etapas más miserable de mi vida: sin recursos, como dije, sin trabajo, solo la compañía y la ayuda de otros amigos y conocidos cuya situación era semejante a la mía, me permitieron esperar y salir adelante. (*P I*, 920)

After spending several years in Europe, Cernuda is presented with an opportunity to work in the United States. Upon his departure from Great Britain, he reveals emotions of curiosity and excitement verses abandonment of England in his poem “La partida”. In *Historial de un libro*, Cernuda recounts his departure from England:

A medianoche partí de la estación de Waterloo, el diez de septiembre de 1947, camino del puerto, de donde saldría rumbo a Estados Unidos. Coexistían en mí dos emociones contrarias: una, la de la curiosidad y atracción hacia un país nuevo, y la otra, algo fúnebre, sobre cubierta esperé la partida, pensando en aquellos nueve años que había vivido en tierra inglesa. No sé si el poeta experimenta sus emociones con intensidad mayor o igual a la de cualquier otro hombre; no puedo conocerlo, puesto que como decía Hopkins, ‘bebo en un solo jarro, que es el de mi propio ser’. Aquellos momentos nocturnos en Southhampton, antes de la partida, bastaron para que recorriese, en un trance agónico, como se dice que ocurre a los moribundos, toda una fase de mi vida. (*Historial* 653)

Once in the United States, Cernuda records his emotional departure and mixed feelings about leaving England and further continuing his journey into exile in the poem “La partida” in *Vivir sin estar viviendo*:

Bajo el cielo, en la oscura
Medianoche del puerto,
Viró el navío rumbo al agua.
Reposo y movimiento en uno fueron.

(Por prados de asfodelos el río gris se duerme
Y la torre normanda asoma en aire húmedo
Tras los olmos antiguos y las roncadas cornejas.)
Solo junto a la sombra,
Con voces y con risas

Ajenas allá abajo,
Lejos miró. ¿Era sueño o vigilia?

(Siglos en piedras, muros limitando los claustros
Sobre jardines mudos, donde los estudiantes
Pasan y flotan tras de ellos negras alas.)

Nada suyo guardaba aquella tierra
Donde existiera. Por el aire,
Como error, diez años de la vida
Vio en un punto borrarse.

(Es el pórtico neoclásico de la ópera:
Pinta el pobre en el suelo retratos lastimosos,
Van diademas entre montones de hortalizas.)

Nula oquedad dejaban
En el tiempo, horas que no sonaron.
Y a ciegas le llevó el navío
Como al muerto temprano.

(Adiós al fin, tierra como tu gente fría,
Donde un error me trajo y otro error me lleva.
Gracias por todo y nada. No volveré a pisarte.) (PC I, 423)

The people of England are described as cold as the country itself as the poet departs to a faraway land once again. The speaker's mixed emotions signal the beginning of a new era in the poetry of Cernuda, who continues to debate his return to his native Spain. Leaving for the United States means increasing the proximity to Spain, which he addresses earlier in *Historial de un libro*: "No creía que mi ausencia durase más de uno o dos meses." (P I, 643) Leaving for the U.S. is a confirmation, on some level, that his return to Spain may never be possible.

His displacement takes him to Massachusetts to work at Mount Holyoke where he teaches Spanish until 1952. Still suffering from alienation from his people, Cernuda calls México home in 1952 where the sound of his native language bring a considerable amount of joy to the nomadic poet despite his monetary needs. In his *Prosa Completa*, Cernuda share the following: “El dinero no lo es todo; aquí en México gano menos dinero que en los Estados Unidos; sin embargo, me siento tranquilo, feliz. Aquello me era insoportable.” (P I, 798)

Living in Mexico may have brought the poet a temporary sense of belonging and happiness, but the topic of abandonment of one’s country is introduced in his later poetry. Cernuda struggles with the idea of loving his country and people.

Raíz del tronco verde, ¿quién lo arranca?
Aquel amor primero, ¿quién lo vence?
Tu sueño y tu recuerdo, ¿quién lo olvida?
Tierra nativa, más mía cuanto más lejana.

His feelings towards Spain become harsher as time passes. In *Desolación de la Quimera* (1956-1962), the poet denies his connection with Spain. In poems such as “Peregrino” and “Díptico español”, Cernuda demonstrates his bitterness towards returning to his country and being Spanish. This bitterness stems from the impossibility to return to the native land by an exile. Returning was always out of the question, and Cernuda never comes to terms with the reality of a life in exile.

The poem “Desdicha” from *Un río, un amor* deals with the theme of disintegration of the object of the poet’s affection. The poem expresses frustration of the impossibility of feeling a lover’s embraces, which the poet likens to a cloud:

Un día comprendí cómo sus brazos eran
Solamente de nubes;
Imposible con nubes estrechar hasta el fondo
Un cuerpo, una fortuna.

La fortuna es redonda y cuenta lentamente
Estrellas del estío.
Hacen falta unos brazos seguros como el viento,
Y como el mar un beso.

Pero él con sus labios,
Con sus labios no sabe sino decir palabras;
Palabras hacia el techo,

Palabras hacia el suelo,
Y sus brazos son nubes que transforman la vida
En aire navegable. (*PC I*, 155)

As the speaker reaches for an embrace, the arms of his lover dissolve like a cloud. The term “nubes” is used to indicate the phantom-like characteristic of his lover. The latter is not able to hug or be hugged. He only exists in the speaker’s imagination. The frustration continues when the mentioned “labios” are not capable of a kiss. They, too, disintegrate into “el mar” and are not able to return the speaker’s affection. Like an ocean tossing waves every which way, the “labios” do no more than “toss” words at every direction. The arms and the lips of the lover are never able to full-fill their natural purpose.

“Si el hombre pudiera decir” from *Los placeres prohibidos* utilizes the surrealist techniques for which Cernuda was known to employ in his poetry as a young man living in Spain, France, and Great Britain²⁰. The poem expresses a paradoxical existence of the speaker in which he is not free to express his love, his homosexual love, and at the same time the only thing that makes him feel free is love:

Si el hombre pudiera decir lo que ama,
Si el hombre pudiera levantar su amor por el cielo
Como una nube en la luz;
Si como muros que se derrumban,
Para saludar la verdad erguida en medio,
Pudiera derrumbar su cuerpo, dejando sólo la verdad de su amor,
La verdad de sí mismo,
Que no se llama gloria, fortuna o ambición,
Sino amor o deseo,
Yo sería aquel que imaginaba;
Aquel que con su lengua, sus ojos y sus manos
Proclama ante los hombres la verdad ignorada,
La verdad de su amor verdadero.

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
Libremente, con la libertad del amor,
La única libertad que me exalta,
La única libertad porque muero.

Tú justificas mi existencia:
Si no te conozco, no he vivido:
Si muero sin conocerte, no muero, porque no he vivido. (*PC I*, 179)

²⁰ His surrealist period ends soon after he migrates to the United States.

Consisting of three stanza of blank verse, as it was customary of the writer of the Generation of 1927, Cernuda's poem explains the speaker's lack of ability to show his true feelings, his erotic feelings of love, and demonstrate it freely for the fear of the close-minded society that does not understand the type of love he feels. Even though he is not free to express his love to his beloved, the only form of freedom he desires is the freedom to love and be loved by a man. The poem ends with the statement that if such a love has never been experienced, the lover hasn't lived at all.

Cernuda's persistent use of the words "verdad" and "verdadero" do not refer to "true love." They refer to the fact that he wants the truth about his homosexuality to be known and accepted by all. He speaks of the truth about his sexual preference, which is silenced by the society. The use of the term "libertad" signifies the act of love and loving freely without fear of any retaliation from the society. This poem makes it very clear that love is an essential part of the poet's existence. He feels that without love, he has not lived. The themes of reality and desire come into play at the end of the poem when the speaker negates his existence without freely experiencing the love he desires.

The impossibility of acquiring love is the theme of this and many other poems by Cernuda. His constant expression of a love never realized is the reason behind his solitude and sadness as this theme of a longing for a homosexual love continues throughout his poetry. Cernuda's poetry serves as a witness to his life in Spain, Europe, United States, and Mexico. It is autobiographical, and Cernuda as the biographer of *La realidad y el deseo* records the facts of his life through the poetic voice.

CHAPTER 3: SOLITUDE

*Silencio y soledad nutren la hierba
Creciendo oscura y fuerte entre ruinas,
Mientras la golondrina con grito enajenado
Va por el aire vasto, y bajo el viento
Las hojas en las ramas tiemblan vagas
Como al roce cuerpos invisibles.*

*Todo lo que es hermoso tiene su instante, y pasa.
Importa como eterno gozar de nuestro instante.
Yo no te envidio, Dios; déjame a solas
Con mis obras humanas que no duran:
El afán de llenar lo que es efímero
De eternidad, vale tu omnipotencia.*

(Luis Cernuda, *Como quien espera el alba*)

Solitude is a significant theme that appears consistently in Cernuda's writing. This chapter will focus on Cernuda's portrayal of a solitary man in his poetry. Additionally, it will argue that it is due to his homosexual nature and exile from Spain that has made solitude a major aspect of his life and writing.

As the only male child, young Cernuda lives under the rigid regime of his military father and his submissive mother, solitude has always accompanied the poet. Before his exile, Cernuda's poetry is witness to the lack of a companion in his life. He separates himself from society and social situations for fear of facing mockery over his homosexuality. As evidenced by his writing, the young poet's only companion remains

his solitary thoughts due to his traditional catholic environment, to which his sexual orientation is unacceptable. He did, however, frequent the company of other poets who understood his homosexual nature and were homosexual themselves. As an exile, he is accompanied by none other than his solitude on his journey from one foreign land to another in search of love and belonging. On his journey, Cernuda misses the sound of his own language, among other things, which he finds in Mexico in the summer of 1950, 12 years into his exilic life, where he savors the warmth of the weather as well as the sound of his native tongue. For a brief period in his life, solitude seems to have disappeared, but it returns when he realizes his true need for companionship and belonging.

En *El Laberinto de la Soledad*, Paz defines solitude and the solitary nature of mankind in the following terms:

La soledad, el sentirse y el saberse solo, desprendido del mundo y ajeno a sí mismo, separado de sí, no es característica exclusiva del mexicano. Todos los hombres, en algún momento de su vida, se sienten solos; y más: todos los hombres están solos. La soledad es el fondo último de la condición humana. El hombre es el único ser que se siente solo y el único que es búsqueda de otro. Su naturaleza consiste en un aspirar a realizarse en otro. El hombre es nostalgia y búsqueda de comunión. Por eso cada vez que se siente a sí mismo, se siente como carencia de otro, como soledad. (Paz 227)

This definition of solitude that Paz establishes reflects the cold and distant sentiments of man's solitary condition, which, Paz argues, man is fated to suffer. Cernuda also expresses these sentiments through and throughout his poetry. One can argue that Cernuda may have been fated to be alone because of his homosexuality. It is his very

nature that isolates him from the society of his time and contributes towards his marginalization by the society. In exile, Cernuda experiences the loss of his people and country as he lives alone, his only companion being solitude. He records his life's solitary moments in his poetry so that the world can be a witness to his anguish. His solitary state of life is a reality that endures until his last breath.

The Palestinian philosopher Edward Said is another cultural critic whose analysis of an exiled individual resonates truly with the condition of loneliness from which Cernuda suffers interminably. In his essay "Reflections on Exile", Said defines the term "exile" in the following manner:

Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. And while it is true that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile's life, these are no more than efforts meant to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever. ... To see a poet in exile –as opposed to reading the poetry of exile –is to see exile's antinomies embodied and endured with a unique intensity. (Said 173-174)

According to Said, the state of exile is very impactful, and it is an experience that is accompanied by feelings of abandonment, sadness, and loneliness. En *La soledad y la poesía española contemporánea*, Birute Ciplijauskaite explains solitude in exile as follows:

La nueva soledad que brota con el abandono de la patria enriquece este tema con posibilidades nuevas. Aparte de una nostalgia cada día más fuerte, surgen las consideraciones acerca de la autenticidad del ser del hombre desterrado. Su vida se nos presenta como trunca y necesariamente lleva a una meditación más triste aún: la posibilidad de la muerte en tierra extraña. Para los que se encuentran en países de habla diferente, el exilio implica también el peligro de perder la plena capacidad de expresión. En fin, la pérdida de la patria terrestre induce a algunos entre ellos a buscar una patria más amplia: sentirse partícipes en el orden cósmico o añorar la admisión en el reino divino. (Ciplijauskaite 189)

Cernuda's existence in exile coupled with his homosexual orientation act as a double edged sword to intensify the loneliness of the poet. Ciplijauskaite uses the word "amarga" to state the resulting state of loneliness for a poet in exile and lacking a partner: "A pasar los años, la soledad patriótica así como la soledad amorosa y ensoñadora dejan paso a una soledad más amarga, a la expresión más auténtica del alma desengañada del poeta." (15) Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer states that a poet is always a quiet and isolated dreamer who listens to the silence within disregarding the realities of the world that surrounds him²¹. Bécquer says, "la soledad es muy hermosa... cuando se tiene alguien a quien decirselo," bringing to light a slightly more positive side of solitude (Bécquer, *Obra Completa*). This, unfortunately, was never fully experienced by Cernuda, as we know from his biography in *Historial de un libro* and most importantly by his poetry in which he speaks of the anguish of a solitary life.

²¹ G. A. Bécquer, the Spanish modern poet, explored themes of love, death, and war; and explored the connection of disillusionment with loneliness, making this writing deeply subjective.

En “Jardín”, the speaker reflects on the passing of time from the corner of a tranquil garden. This imaginary garden symbolizes a world of fantasy in which the speaker hides to escape his reality. He contemplates on all the nature that surrounds him, and sitting from the corner of a small garden, the speaker observes his dreams:

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. (*PC I*, 332)

Written in blank verse, in this poem the passing of time is observed from a solitary point of view. The speaker is the only one of his kind in this garden, as if he were comparing himself to Adam before Eve was created by God. He is separated from the rest of nature. Man is a part of nature just as much as plants and trees are, and the positioning of the speaker in the corner of the garden signifies his isolation from the rest of nature. Additionally, the poet refers to himself in the third person, which further indicates that he has perhaps isolated himself from himself. By avoiding mentioning that “yo” that is speaking, the poet subjects his readers to become witnesses of his solitude.

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

El la hora apacible

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

Libre de gozo y pena,
A la luz porque pronto,
Tal tú de aquí, se parte. (*PC I*, 332)

The nature that the speaker creates for himself is a solitary and safe haven to which he finds himself running leaving the realities of the world behind. He finds a quiet place within himself, but he is aware that this solitude is temporary. He cannot stay in this reality for very long, and his dream, just like time and mankind himself, is fleeting:

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 traspasada,
Han yacer con largo
Sueño, mudos, sombríos. (*PC I*, 332)

The solitary speaker feels the passing of time. Winter is coming. It is time for nature to die in the dead of winter. The speaker feels as if his “Jardín” has been a horrible joke, an imaginary dream that will end in darkness. Perhaps he realizes that he will have

to come back to reality and wake up from his dream. Throughout this poem, the Cernuda has referred to himself in the third person, and his spirit is observing his body contemplating in the corner of an imaginary world. It becomes clear to him at the end that he will awake from his dream and return to his solitude. His body and spirit will become one once the poet awakes from his dream. The separation of the body and soul in the poetry of Cernuda is a clear indication of his solitary mentality. This theme continues in another poems as well, where the poet's body and soul are separate from each other.

In "Tarde oscura" the speaker experiences the separation of his body from his soul in a dreamlike state comparing it to the separation of heaven and earth by the clouds:

Lo mismo que un sueño
Al cuerpo separa
Del alma, esta niebla
Tierra y luz aparta.

Todo es raro y vago:
Ni són en el viento,
Latido en el agua,
Color en el suelo.

De sí mismo extraño,
¿Sabes lo que espera
El pájaro quieto
Por la rama seca? (*PC I*, 337)

While dreaming, this separation he experiences is yet another sign of his loneliness. The intensity of his solitude is made clear when the speaker feels separated even from his own body. He likens himself to a "pájaro quieto" living his life on a "rama

seca,” a branch of a tree that is lifeless. Just as the body is lifeless without a spirit, the speaker is lifeless in exile accompanied by his loneliness. In another poem “Alegría de la soledad” from *Invocaciones*, Cernuda likens the solitude of the speaker to that of the surrounding natural world:

A solas, a solas,
Camino de la aurora,
Bajos las nubes cantan,
Blancas, solas, las aguas;
Y entre las hojas sueña,
Verde y sola, la tierra.

Rubia, sola también, tu alma
Allá en el pecho ama,
Mientras las rosas abren,
Mientras pasan los ángeles,
Solos en la victoria
Serena de la gloria. (*PC I*, 288)

The solitude of nature is representative of the speaker’s solitude as well. There is a sense of serenity and peace in this poem that the speaker hopes to imitate in his lonely life. It is a way to remind himself that perhaps he is not alone, and the world around him can and has joined him in his loneliness. In the above poem, the speaker is an adult recounting his lonesome journey, in “Niño tras un cristal” from *Desolación de la quimera*, the speaker reflects on the loneliness of a child who is watching the rain and waiting for nightfall:

Al caer la tarde, absorto tras el cristal, el niño mira
Llover. La luz que se ha encendido
En un farol contrasta
La lluvia blanca con el aire oscuro.

La habitación a solas
Le envuelve tibiamente,
Y el visillo, velando
Sobre el cristal, como una nube,
Le susurra lunar encantamiento.

El colegio se aleja. Es ahora
La tregua, con el libro
De historias y de estampas
Bajo la lámpara, la noche,
El sueño, las horas sin medida.

Vive en el seno de su fuerza tierna,
Todavía sin deseo, sin memoria,
El niño, y sin presagio
Que afuera el tiempo aguarda
Con la vida, al acecho.

En su sombra ya se forma la perla. (*PC I*, 492)

The speaker observes a child in his room surrounded by light and fantasizing about the happenings of the rainy world outside his small window. He is alone, but surrounded with warmth that protects his innocence. The speaker emphasizes the innocence of the child who is “Todavía sin deseo, sin memoria ... sin presagio,” and as the realities of life wait for him, for this moment he is free to imagine, read, and enjoy his solitude, which unbeknownst to him is a reality of life. Written sometime after 1956, the poem is a reflection of Cernuda’s years as a child describing a particular time in his life

when his innocence was still intact and the realities of the world hadn't begun to affect him. The child's solitude in his room may have been a sign of things to come, but at the moment, he busies himself with school work and his colorful imagination, just as any child would.

En "Jardín antiguo" from *Las nubes*, the speaker expresses nostalgia for a paradise-like place from his youthful days. He recalls the beauty and serenity of the hidden garden and wishes to return to its simplicity and innocence:

Ir de Nuevo al jardín cerrado,
Que tras los arcos de la tapia,
Entre magnolios, limoneros,
Guarda el encanto de las aguas.

Oír de nuevo en el silencio,
Vivo de trinos y de hojas,
El susurro tibio del aire
Donde las almas viejas flotan.

Ver otra vez el cielo hondo
A lo lejos, la torre esbelta
Tal flor de luz sobre las palmas:
Las cosas todas siempre bellas.

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

The speaker longs to return to that place, where he felt safe and young, and to the beauty of things unnoticed at the time. As much as he would like to return to the past, he is fully aware that the past is a dream to which he cannot return. The speaker wishes to

end his existential search and return to the uncomplicated past and “oír de nuevo en el silencio ... el susurro tibio del aire.” In *A Study of Poetry* Harris observes the following about Cernuda’s “Jardín antiguo:”

Cernuda remembers with longing and affection the ‘paradise substitute’ of his youth. It would give him great pleasure to abandon his search for existential security in the chaos of his present life in favour of that sense of security he once felt away from his temporal world. At the same time, however, he is too honest to pretend that the present is, or could ever be, the same as the past. The poem expresses a dream, not reality, and, however positive the poet may be towards dreams, the speculative ‘sentir’ as opposed to the affirmative ‘siento’ makes his unreality clear. It is gone, and again the world seems to have little to offer. (Harris 70)

Harris makes a keen observation about the fleeting of time in the above poem. Time is always short-lived. It doesn’t go back nor does it stand still. The speaker takes a break from his life to look back on a time to which he cannot return. He expresses his nostalgia, and then he moves on. Harris compares this “Jardín cerrado” to a mystical hidden garden to which the speaker longs to return in order to escape his reality.

To sooth the pain that is caused by his solitude, young Cernuda turns to the spiritual world of mythical gods and goddesses that promises an escape from his ordinary existence on earth. Harris says:

Here the classical myths are clearly linked with the concept of a hidden, superior reality, but they are also related to the motivation of poetic experience, which is likewise involved with that invisible world of harmony referred to in ‘Palabras antes de una lectura’. This statement by the mature Cernuda points to the conclusion that his faith in the ancient gods is, besides being an evasive nostalgia for a lost Golden Age, also a

symptom of his commitment to a set of values which are tragically not those of the mundane world in which he must live. (Harris 70)

Nostalgia for a mystical world is expressed in Cernuda's "Jardín antiguo" where the speaker envisions his return to the simplicity of an old garden where he can once again live in silence and peace. The speaker describes the garden as "jardín cerrado" drawing the reader's attention to the privacy of a garden where he can find "silencio" which he desperately covets at this point due to the unrest caused by the Spanish Civil War.

Cernuda wishes to reach a state of harmony in the mystical world he searches as well as escape his repressive reality into an ideal existence in a hidden garden.

En "Himno a la tristeza" from *Invocaciones*, the speaker expresses sadness over the existence of man who is fated by a god to inherit sadness. The speaker acknowledges the existence of a god to whom he refers as "tú" making it safe to assume that this "god" is not the same as the Christian God. This god is the creation of man's compassion and thought existing only in the imagination of man. Although only existing in the imagination of Cernuda, the gods represent a simple and Golden Age to which Cernuda wishes to escape:

Hermosas y vencidas soñáis,
Vuelos los ciegos ojos hacia el cielo,
Mirando las remotas edades
De titánicos hombres,
Cuyo amor o daba ligeras guirnaldas
Y la olorosa llama se alzaba
Hacia la luz divina, su hermana celeste.
...
Hoy yacéis, mutiladas y oscuras,

Entre los grises jardines de las ciudades,
Piedra inútil que el soplo celeste no anima,
Abandonadas de la súplica y la humana esperanza.

...

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 trono de oro
Y vuestra faz cegadora,
Lejos de los hombres,
Allá en la altura impenetrable. (*PC I*, 242)

Long forgotten by man, these statues of the pagan gods are now present only to represent the age of simplicity. Harris says: "The gods still represent an age of joy, innocence, and harmony, when love was still possible" (70-71). Harris maintains that even though the stories of the gods are a thing of the past, the poet keeps his faith in the gods of old alive in order to find comfort from his solitary existence of the real world. Harris states: "The world in which he lives has lost its faith, and his continuing belief acquires an air of madness which separates him from his fellow men, while at the same time consoling him for this alienation" (71). Through his poems, Cernuda is expressing his search for love and harmony, something he lacks in reality. After his exile from Spain, Cernuda continues his search for harmony as he tries to come to terms with his solitude and the fate of Spain at war. He comes to a conclusion that death is the answer to his painful existence in exile which is why many of the poems written between 1938 and 1947 express the desire for death as a way of finding peace in life. To Cernuda, death is a peaceful constant that will replace the ever changing reality he calls life.

CHAPTER 4: MEMORY

*Es el olvido la verdad más alta.
De todos esos años ya pasados,
Llevándose mi vida, solo quedan,
Como cirio que arde en cuerva oscura
...
Recuerdos destinados a morir de mi olvido.*

(Luis Cernuda, *Poesía completa*)

The complex exploration of the concept of oblivion is present throughout Cernuda's *La realidad y el deseo*. In this chapter, I will focus on *Donde habite el olvido* and will analyze how Cernuda treats the themes of memory and escape from its "amargura." His obsession with oblivion is his escape from his search for love and desire into a state of nothingness. Cernuda uses Bécquer's rima LVXI as the basis for the collection of poems in *Donde habite el olvido*. First, I will quote Bécquer's poem to make an analysis of it, and then I will elaborate on how Bécquer and Cernuda define "olvido":

¿De dónde vengo? ... El más horrible y áspero
de los senderos busca;
las huellas de unos pies en sangrentados
sobre la roca dura;
los despojos de un alma hecha jirones
en las zarzas agudas,
te dirán el camino
que conduce a mi cuna.

¿A dónde 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.

Cernuda does not copy Bécquer's rima LXVI. On the contrary, he changes the meaning of oblivion and goes further into its description. Bécquer's poetry expresses anguish, pain, and nostalgia, and it deals with the death of man and his immortality. The above poem focuses on the origin and destiny of man expressing that pain and oblivion are part of man's fate. It expresses sorrow over a death which is symbolized by the bare headstone. Furthermore, the speaker feels remorse for mankind and his eternity in a state of oblivion where his life is marked "sin inscripción alguna."

The poem consists of two parts where the first asks the question: "¿De dónde vengo?" and the speaker answers: "cuna." and the second asks: "¿A dónde voy?" and the speaker answers: "tumba." meaning the origin and fated end of man. Bécquer's speaker expresses regret over man's fate in an unknown state of oblivion, or perhaps an afterlife where nothingness exists. Cernuda, however, embraces the possibility of an escape into the same oblivion that Bécquer fear so much. Cernuda wants to go into the emptiness where nothing will exist of his life and identity but an inscriptionless headstone. He wants to fade away into a state of oblivion which is a direct contrast to his celebration of erotic love and desire in *Los placeres prohibidos*.

Taking on a new twist on Bécquer's "olvido," Cernuda dedicates an entire book of poetry to a state of mind *Donde habite el olvido*. I will conduct an analysis of a few poems in the book beginning with the poem I:

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 gracias 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.

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, ausencias,
Ausencia leve como carne de niño.

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

The poetic voice in the above poem is concerned with evading the memory of his present and escaping into a world "sin aurora" where time does not exist. His poem is

free from wishes for desire and erotic love suppressing those desires. With the use of “no exista,” “no esconda,” and “no sean,” the speaker is expressing a detachment from the world and all of its realities and wishes to exist in a fantastic world where “pena y dichas” are nothing but mere words and his identity and name are meaningless. The end of the poem with “Allá, allá lejos;” the speaker wishes to fade away into a far away existence leaving no trace of himself behind but the simple memory of a bare headstone.

As the collection of poems progresses, Cernuda’s treatment of the theme of desire does not disappear. In fact, it persists and becomes a mourning of his lost adolescence. In the poem VII, the speaker contemplates on his emptiness and realized that is the same void he had experienced in his youth:

Adolescente fui en días idénticos a nubes,
Cosa grácil, visible por penumbra y reflejo,
Y extraño es, si ese recuerdo busco,
Que tanto, tanto duela el cuerpo de hoy.

Perder placer es triste
Como la dulce lámpara sobre el lento nocturno;
Aquél fui, aquél fui, aquél he sido;
Era la ignorancia mi sombra.

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. (*PC I*, 205)

At the beginning, the speaker paints himself as a fantastic being and moves on to expressing a strangeness over the pain he is experiencing by the memories of his childhood with “Y extraño es, si ese recuerdo busco, / Que tanto, tanto duela el cuerpo de hoy.” He is saddened by the memory of a childhood lamp in his room at night accompanied by his innocence to which he refers as “ignorancia” as his shadow and only companion, expressing sorrow over the loss of his youth. In *A Study of Poetry*, Harris makes an observation regarding Cernuda’s treatment of his lost innocence:

[It] is not only the meaning of lost love that pains Cernuda, he is grieved just as strongly by the recollection of the innocent dreams of his adolescence. [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. (Harris 58-59)

In the third stanza his innocence is further validated by the lack of “gozo” and “pena.” He was simply a child. Then he realizes that even as a child, solitude and his four walls were the only things he knew. Within a changing world, he was a lonely child living as a “Prisionero entre muros cambiantes.” The poem ends with a possible solution to his painful memory: giving up all his memory to oblivion leaving him with nothing but empty hands, empty from desire and pain of his lost childhood. This gives the speaker all the more reason to evade his reality and search for the oblivion were the painful memories of the past will not haunt him, and where pain is nothing as will be his very existence. However painful his memories, Cernuda uses them to further his search for his identity and true self.

In the poem XI, the speaker addresses his memory directly and tries to give his reasons for avoiding the recollection of his past:

No quiero, triste espíritu, volver
Por los lugares que cruzó mi llanto,
Latir secreto entre los cuerpos vivos
Como yo también fui.

No quiero recordar
Un instante feliz entre tormentos;
Goce o pena, es igual,
Todo es triste al volver.

Aún va conmigo como una luz lejana
Aquel destino niño,
Aquellos dulces ojos juveniles,
Aquella antigua herida.

No, no quiero volver,
Sino morir aún más,
Arrancar una sombra,
Olvidar un olvido. (*PC I*, 209)

The speaker refers to his memories as “triste espíritu” in the opening stanza of the poem. He is pleading with his memories and giving it all the reason he can for not wanting to return to the past. He says “no quiero” alluding to the fact that he is forced by his memories to revisit his past and relive the pain he endured when he was young. In the third stanza, he states that the “dulces ojos juveniles” of his youth still accompany him on his journey through life despite his attempts to free himself from the bitterness of his past. In the last stanza, he states, once again, his unwillingness to return, and wishes to give up

himself into a state of oblivion where his memories will not haunt him, reminding him of the emptiness he has always felt and will always feel.

Cernuda says good-bye to his memories and to Spain in his last poem “A sus paisanos” from *Desolación de la quimera*:

No me queries, lo sé, y que os molesta
Cuanto escribo. ¿Os molesta? Os ofende.
¿Culpa mía tal vez es de vosotros?
Porque no es la persona y su leyenda
Lo que ahí, allegada a mí, atrás os vuelve.
Mozo, bien mozo era, cuando no había brotado
Leyenda alguna, caísteis sobre un libro
Primerizo lo mismo que su autor: yo, mi primer libro.
Algo os ofende, porque sí, es el hombre y su tarea.

...

Mas no todos igual trato me dais,
Que amigos tengo aún entre vosotros,
Doblemente queridos por esa desusada
Simpatía y atención entre la indiferencia.
Y gracias quiero decirles ahora, cuando amargo
Me vuelvo y os acuso. Grande el número
No es, mas basta para sentirse acompañado
A la distancia en el camino. A ellos
Vaya así mi afecto agradecido.

Acaso encuentro aquí reproche nuevo:
Que ya no hablo con aquella ternura confiada, apacible de otros días.
Es verdad, y os lo debo, tanto como
A la edad, al tiempo, a la experiencia.
A vosotros y a ellos debo el cambio. Si queréis
Que ame todavía, devolvedme
Al tiempo del amor. ¿Os es posible?
Imposible como aplacar esa fantasma que de mí evocasteis. (PC I, 546)

Cernuda's last words to his countrymen are harsh and filled with contempt towards them. He still remembers the criticism his first book of poetry received, and he accuses his countrymen of wrong-doing for their negativity towards his poetic verses. He says it is too late for them to change their minds about him because they cannot turn back the hands of time. "Devolvedme" he says, "Al tiempo del amor," which he knows is not possible. At the end of the poem he leaves his countrymen with a sense of guilt that they took from him valuable time and memories. He make them responsible for the bitter memories he's taken from Spain and with which he's lived in exile, not being able to reconcile from such a distance. Jiménez-Fajardo states the following regarding Cernuda's attitude towards his countrymen in this poem:

There is no thought of return for Cernuda because his own Spain stays with him, not merely a burden but also part of his liberation. Yet in some ways he was unable to gain complete freedom from bitter recollection. His last poem "A sus paisanos" ("To His Countrymen") is, in the guise of a farewell, a harsh invective against his compatriots who, he feels, rejected him from the beginning with their accustomed intolerance. It is astonishing to find in this final composition, alive and still painful, the memory of the reviews – not all bad by any means –of *Perfil del aire*. (Jiménez-Fajardo 147)

"A sus paisanos" is Cernuda's final good-bye to his countrymen, to the world. It is with this poem that he wants to leave behind all traces of his memory of the past in the past. He does not want to return to the past, nor to Spain because at this point in his life, he knows that Spain holds nothing more than the pain of his life in exile. All the years he has spend in exile, he's hoped for his return to Spain. Now that old age is nearing, he doesn't know Spain anymore. He is ending his search for Spain in his last poem.

CHAPTER 5: THE QUESTION OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*Mozo, bien mozo era, cuando no había brotado
Leyenda alguna, caísteis sobre un libro
Primerizo lo mismo que su autor: yo, mi primer libro.
Algo os ofrende, porque sí, en el hombre y su tarea.*

(Luis Cernuda, *Desolación de la quimera*)

In the last poem “A sus paisanos” from his last book of poetry *Desolación de la quimera*, Cernuda addresses his countrymen with resentment that he has been holding on to since 1927 when his first book received harsh criticism, giving a tremendous blow to Cernuda’s pride. In this chapter, the poem “A sus paisanos” is used to argue that Cernuda’s poetry is autobiographical²². First, I will provide a brief definition and history of autobiography, and then I will introduce the term “autofiction” and differentiate the two. Lastly, I will demonstrate the classification of Cernuda’s body of writing as autobiography.

Autobiography is derived from the Greek words “self”, “life”, and write. It has existed since the beginning of recorded time. Robert Southey coined the term in 1809,

²² In *Palabras antes de una lectura*, Cernuda makes a connection between the written verses of a poet and his personal experiences: “Y me dirá, ¿cuás es el propósito del poeta? Permítaseme que refiera ahora la poesía a mi experiencia persona, lo cual supone no poco presunción, aunque el poeta, si es que se me puede llamarr así, tiene fatalmente que referir a su propia persona las experiencias poéticas que con sus medios limitados percibe; y al fin y al cabo, acaso las experiencias del poeta, por singulares que parezcan, no lo sean tanto que no puedan encontrar eco, en sus líneas generals, a través de diferentes existencias” Prosa I, 601-602, thus providing first hand reference from the poet himself that his created poetic voice is in fact speaking from experiences that Cernuda has had in his life time.

and it wasn't until the late eighteenth century that autobiography was established as a genre. The genre has been defined broadly by some literary critics. Philippe Lejeune, however, takes a narrow approach of defining autobiography. In *The Autobiographical Pact* written in 1957, the scholar defines autobiography in the following terms:

“Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality” (Lejeune, 4). As a form of introspection, autobiography is filled with emotions which make known the writer's intentions. Cernuda speaks through the poetic voice revealing his life's journey. Composed in 1958, *Historial de un libro* is the first hand account of Cernuda's life in which he takes his readers through the thought process behind his major life experiences that bring about the birth of each poem of every book of poetry that form the collection *La realidad y el deseo*. Cernuda begins the book *Historial de un libro* by stating the following:

Debo excusarme, al comenzar la historia del acontecer personal que se halla tras los versos de *La Realidad y el Deseo*, por tener que referir, juntamente con las experiencias del poeta que creó aquéllos, algunos hechos en la vida del hombre que sufriera éstos. No siempre será aparente la conexión entre unos y otras, y al lector corresponde establecerla, si cree que vale la pena y quiere tomarse la molestia. (*PC I*, 625)

It is true that the connection between Cernuda's verses and his personal experiences are not always apparent, as stated by the poet himself; nonetheless, the connection is there; if the reader makes a sincere attempt to see it, because Cernuda has based his entire collection on his life experiences from the time he is a student to the days leading to his

death. Cernuda provides a description of his books of poetry, and he includes the circumstances under which each book was written as well as the transitory period between each one. Upon reading his poetry from start to finish, the reader is able to see a growth in the poet's writing and personality. Regarding his personal growth, he says:

Importa que el poeta se dé cuenta de cuándo acaba una fase y comienza otra en su desarrollo espiritual; mientras el poeta está vivo, es decir, mientras no se agota su capacidad creadora, esa mutación ocurre de modo natural, como la de las estaciones del año, nutriéndose de cuanto le depara nuestro vivir. Creo que es necesidad primera del poeta el reunir experiencias y conocimiento, y tanto mejor mientras que más variados sean.

...

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)

Cernuda's own words serve as a confirmation of the fact that his body of poetry was composed to recount his personal journey through the different stages of his life and the spiritual and emotional growth he experienced along the way. This process of autobiography is, therefore, more subjective than objective. This fact raises the question of a dividing line between autobiography and fiction.

It is important to mention that Cernuda takes a depersonalized approach to his poetry due to his experiences and training as a teacher to present his life's experiences in an unattached manner. This has led some critics to conclude that Cernuda's work is not his autobiography, to which the poet states the following in this *Historial de un libro*:

El trabajo de las clases me hizo comprender como necesario que mis explicaciones llevaron a los estudiantes a ver por sí mismos aquellos de que yo iba a hablarsle: que mi tarea consistía en encaminarles y situarles ante la realidad de una obra literaria española. De ahí un paso a comprender que también el trabajo poético creador exigía algo equivalente, no tratando de dar solo al lector el efecto de mi experiencias, sino conduciéndole por el mismo camino que you había recorrido, por los mismos estados que había experimentado y al fin, dejarle solo frente al resultado. (*PC I*, 645)

The intuition of a teacher leads him to take this approach in not only teaching his students, but also presenting his experiences to the world. He wants the reader to take “el mismo camino” that he had taken to get to where he/she wishes to be. It is only then that the reader will fully be able to understand the poet and his anguish.

Furthermore, the title of his collective poetry, *La realidad y el deseo*, serves as evidence of Cernuda’s real life struggle in differentiating the real from the fantasy. His solitude and his exile are to blame for his search of love and comfort in a fantastic world. In his search for the object of his affection and belonging to a world that refused him in more than one way, Cernuda feels compelled to withdraw himself in an imaginary world where the pain of reality does not exist. In *Palabras antes de una lectura*, Cernuda describes the separation he has from the world:

El instinto poético se despertó en mí gracias a la percepción más aguda de la realidad, experimentando, con un eco más honda, 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.

A partir de entonces comencé a distinguir una corriente simultánea y opuesta dentro de mí: hacia la realidad y contra la realidad, de atracción y de hostilidad hacia lo real. El deseo me llevaba hacia la realidad que se ofrecía ante mis ojos como si solo con su posesión pudiera alcanzar certeza de mi propia vida. (*P I*, 602)

Cernuda begins to distinguish between the two realities in his life as well as poetry that lead him to address the topics of reality and desire. It is the story of this search that Cernuda records through his poetic voice in his poetry. The lifelong search for the truth about reality and desire is an ethical one for Cernuda, and he continues it until the very end. The means of recording his search for this sacred truth is through his poetry, which in turn forms his autobiography. In *Historial de un libro* he states very truthfully: “Solo he tratado, como todo hombre, de hallar mi verdad, la mía, que no será mejor ni peor que la de los otros, sino solo diferente.” (*P I*, 659) He tells the truth according to his own experiences, one, which he acknowledges, may be different, but it belongs only to him.

Cernuda takes a step back into his past to relive his life through his memories and record it in his poetry. Janet Varner Gunn to this point stating that, “autobiography, at the level of perspective, involves a certain mode of self-placing in relation to the autobiographer’s past and from a particular standpoint in his or her present” (16). It is the poet himself who looks back at his life and serves as a witness to all the events that have taken place in his past and have shaped him into the man he is: a solitary man fated to live and die in exile.

CONCLUSION

*El testimonio más auténticos
respeto a un hombre
es sin duda su obra.*

(Luis Cernuda, *Poesía completa*)

This thesis has provided evidence that Cernuda's poetry is autobiographical by making a connection between the poet's life and the experiences expressed in his poetry. As a child, adolescent teen, and adult, Cernuda suffers from internal and external solitude. The lack of a lover and exile from Spain affect him tremendously as he lives a quiet and solitary life in Spain, Europe, the United States, and finally Mexico.

Chapter one has explored the use of descriptive language to express nostalgia for the country Cernuda loves so much and sadness over the inability to ever return to it. He creates a dreamlike world to avoid his reality through his symbolic and surrealistic language. Chapter two has focused on the homosexuality of Cernuda and his inability to fully and completely experience the erotic love he so desires. He does not shy away from expressing himself as a homosexual indicating that he has accepted himself and his sexual orientation.

Chapter three has explained the solitary condition of the poet as a child, adolescent, and an adult. It has focused on his exile from Spain, one of the primary

reasons behind his solitary existence, and his failure to fully experience the love he desires. Chapter four has explored the topic of memory and desire to live in oblivion to avoid the painfulness of existing with the realm of human reality. He uses Bécquer's concept of "olvido" and romanticizes it. Where Bécquer mourns the death of man at the end of his day and his departure into an "olvido," Cernuda longs to live in such a world where "olvido" dominates every thought and every being. He wants to leave behind his painful existence and flee into oblivion.

Chapter five has answered the question of autobiography and argued that Cernuda's *La realidad y el deseo* is autobiographical consisting of the poet's life experiences. The poet lives a short but painful life of solitude that develops in him a strange numbness towards life and living. He prefers death over his love-less solitary existence. In his work, as he does in his life, he has created a friction between the real and the imaginary, between the life and oblivion. He convinces himself that existing in the imaginary world surrounded by oblivion is his only mission in life, all of which he records in his *La realidad y el deseo*.

Cernuda is natural-born poet who realized the power of his poetic gift early and used it to record his personal journey. It is through this gift of poetry that he learns to live in his time period. Through his verses, he discovers himself, his identity, sexuality, social preferences, and values in life. He learns morality through his poetic verses. Cernuda's poetry is his entire world as it consumes him and brings him on the other side of reality. Jiménez-Fajardo states the following regarding Cernuda's gift of poetry:

Cernuda was one of those few poets whose early and demanding poetic vision already accompanied an exceptional gift of words. The more specific aspects of that vision, however, were to define themselves more slowly than did his craft because of their profoundly existential character. Cernuda had to discover them within himself after arduous, wrenching efforts. They involved the acceptance of his homosexuality... and the rejection of traditional religious values with their customary ballast of social convention. (Jiménez-Fajardo 156)

Cernuda is a poet *of* the exilic life and *by* the life in exile as he expresses his nostalgia for happier days in Spain. Additionally, the subject of homosexuality is expressed throughout his poetry as well as the pain of a love never realized. His desire for the fulfillment of an erotic love drives him to a state of oblivion where his only desire is to be non-existent, living only among the forgotten ones. To the poet, the pain and memory of his past also prove to be a reason for his search for the unrealistic: a world where reality has no place and fantasy takes the place of time and space. Cernuda's poetry possesses healing powers for others who have been exiled from their land and have lived a solitary life. As his poetry is autobiographical, the reader who has experienced life in exile can relate to Cernuda and his struggles. The verses of Cernuda will forever echo in the soul of an exile who cannot find the remedy for his pain: the pain of eternal homelessness from his native land.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1902 Luis Cernuda was born on September 21, 1902.
- 1919 Cernuda enrolls at the University of Seville and begins his law program. He meets Pedro Salinas at this time while taking literature classes.
- 1920 His father dies in this year.
- 1924 Cernuda begins writing the first poems of *Perfil del aire*, his first book of poetry.
- 1925 Cernuda graduates from Law school. He also publishes a few of his poems in *Revista de Occidente*.
- 1927 *Perfil del aire* is published. He attends a celebration giving homage to the poet Luis de Góngora in Madrid. During this event, a few of his published poems are recited. Cernuda also forms part of a group of poets known as the Generation of 1927.
- 1928 His mother dies in July of this year, and Cernuda moves from Seville to Madrid. He attends a celebration in honor of the poet Fray Luis de León. He also travels to Toulouse as a lecturer in Spanish.
- 1929 Returns to Madrid and begins writing *Un río, un amor*.
- 1931 Begins writing *Los placeres prohibidos*.
- 1934 Cernuda writes *Donde habite el olvido*.

- 1936 First edition of *La realidad y el deseo* is published which compiles all of his books of poetry up until this year. In July, the Spanish Civil War begins. Cernuda travels to France as secretary to Ambassador Alvaro de Albornoz, and returns in September.
- 1938 Cernuda goes to London and never returns to Spain again, thus beginning his period of life in exile.
- 1940 He completes the composition of *Las nubes*, and publishes the second edition of *La realidad y el deseo*.
- 1944 Cernuda completes *Como quien espera el alba*.
- 1947 Leaves Europe indefinitely for the United States to teach at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts.
- 1949 He completes *Vivir sin estar viviendo*.
- 1950 Cernuda permanently moves to Mexico.
- 1956 He completes *Con las horas contadas*.
- 1958 The third edition of *La realidad y el deseo* is published.
- 1962 Cernuda completes *Desolación de la quimera*.
- 1963 Cernuda died of a heart attack on November 5th, 1963.

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