

Poetry

CRITICISM

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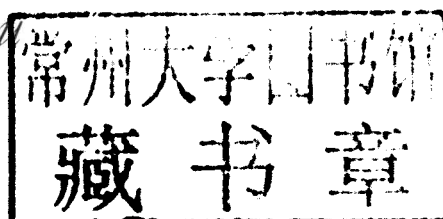
158

Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

Volume 158

Lawrence J. Trudeau
Editor



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Poetry Criticism, Vol. 158

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ISBN-13: 978-1-56995-627-4

ISSN: 1052-4851

Poetry Criticism

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Preface

Poetry Criticism (PC) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. This series was developed in response to suggestions from librarians serving high school, college, and public library patrons, who had noted a considerable number of requests for critical material on poems and poets. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (LC), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (CMLC), librarians perceived the need for a series devoted solely to poets and poetry.

Scope of the Series

PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, PC is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research.

Approximately three to six authors, works, or topics are included in each volume. An author's first entry in the series generally presents a historical survey of the critical response to the author's work; subsequent entries will focus upon contemporary criticism about the author or criticism of an important poem, group of poems, or book. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from critics who do not write in English whose criticism has been translated. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a PC volume.

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Each PC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author's name (if applicable).
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. In the case of authors who do not write in English, an English translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is either a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. In the case of such authors whose works have been translated into English, the **Principal English Translations** focuses primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are

printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** describing each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

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In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *PC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*." *Interpreting Blake*. Ed. Michael Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978. 32-69. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism*. Ed. Michelle Lee. Vol. 63. Detroit: Gale, 2005. 34-51. Print.

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Dámaso Alonso

1898-1990

(Also wrote under the pseudonym Alfonso Donado) Spanish poet, literary critic, and linguist.

INTRODUCTION

Dámaso Alonso is known for his passionate and erudite explorations of the limitations of language and meaning in his long career as a poet and literary critic. Although his early poems were influenced by the Surrealist aesthetic of the Generation of 1927, a group of writers that also included the poets Federico García Lorca, Rafael Alberti, and Jorge Guillén, Alonso moved far beyond the concerns of this group. The horror of the Spanish Civil War (1936-39) and World War II (1939-45) led Alonso to produce complex verse that addressed religious and philosophical questions. His most famous work of poetry, *Hijos de la ira* (1944; published as *Children of Wrath*), is a stylistically innovative collection written in the wake of war. *Oscura noticia* (1944; may be translated as *Dark News*) and *Hombre y Dios* (1955; may be translated as *Man and God*) have also been recognized as fundamental examples of Alonso's inventive style and provocative thought.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Alonso was born on 22 October 1898 in Madrid. Although he was raised in the distant northwest region of Asturias, he returned to his birthplace to study at the University of Madrid. In 1916, when an ulcer in his right eye caused him to abandon his study of mathematics and his plan to become an engineer, he began to study law and, after obtaining his *licenciatura*, philosophy and literature. Following the publication of his first book of poetry, *Poemas puros, poemillas de la ciudad* (may be translated as *Pure Poems, Little Poems of the City*) in 1921, Alonso became involved with the thriving cultural circles based in the city's Residencia de Estudiantes, a student center that in the 1920s was home to such artists as García Lorca, the Surrealist painter Salvador Dalí, and the filmmaker Luis Buñuel. In 1928, he completed a doctorate under the tutelage of the historian and philologist Ramón Menéndez Pidal, whose work focused mainly on Spanish folklore and literature, particularly the legend of El Cid and the works of Miguel de Cervantes. This emphasis on early modern literature and the history of the Spanish language profoundly influenced Alonso's own areas of interest, as can be seen in his extensive study of the Spanish Baroque poet Luis de Góngora,

published as *La lengua poética de Góngora* (1935; may be translated as *The Poetic Language of Góngora*).

During the 1920s and 1930s, Alonso taught at several universities in Europe and the United States, eventually returning to succeed Menéndez Pidal at the University of Madrid. His expertise ranged from the Renaissance works of Góngora and San Juan de la Cruz to the Modernist works of James Joyce, whose *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) he translated as *El artista adolescente* (1926). In 1944, Alonso produced two of his most influential works. His *Ensayos sobre poesía española* (1944; may be translated as *Essays on Spanish Poetry*) examines the nature and usefulness of stylistics for analyzing a reader's literary experience, arguing, as noted by Antonio Sánchez Barbudo (1974), that style is "everything that individualizes a literary entity." A landmark of mid-century Spanish literature, Alonso's celebrated *Children of Wrath*—described by Dominique Russell (2004) as presenting a "nightmarish inner world populated by monsters"—not only is an impassioned social protest against the misery and poverty of contemporary Spain but also is notable for its experimental free verse, which defied the strict metrics that dominated the work of previous generations of Spanish poets.

In the later decades of Alonso's career, he continued to thrive. He served as editor of the journal *Revista de Filología Hispánica* and was a member of the Real Academia Española, where he served as director from 1968 to 1982. In 1978, he received the Premio Cervantes, Spain's most prestigious literary award. After a career that spanned almost seventy years, Alonso died on 25 January 1990 at the age of ninety-one.

MAJOR POETIC WORKS

Most of Alonso's work, both critical and literary, was concerned with the craft of poetry. His scholarly criticism is praised for its accessible style as well as its groundbreaking arguments. In his seven volumes of poetry, he strove to achieve a style that was capable of moving the reader. This emphasis on the notion of style evolved from his own experience as a reader of poetry and was an attempt to address the one question of primary concern to him, as quoted by Sánchez Barbudo: "How, with what elements does this particular poem move me?" Sánchez Barbudo cited a key passage from *Essays on Spanish Poetry* to explain how Alonso understood the relationship of the three main elements—the imaginative, the affective, and

the logical—of poetic expression: “All these elements, the imaginative, which opens up our interior chambers, the affective, which passes through them like a shimmering breeze, and the logical, which constructs, informs, joins and gives meaning to everything, form a complexity which penetrates the reader’s mind and gives rise there to that individual intuition: which is exactly the understanding of the work.” For Alonso, therefore, style may be said to generate the impression and understanding that a reader ultimately takes away from the poem.

Alonso’s first published collection, *Pure Poems, Little Poems of the City*, can be considered an example of Surrealism, which dominated Spanish literary and artistic production at the time. It is a work of stylistic experimentation, in part concerned with the purity of poetic form detached from context, as the title suggests. In *Pure Poems, Little Poems of the City*, as described by Andrew P. Debicki in “Dámaso Alonso’s Views on Poetry” (1966; see Further Reading), “a central contrast is established between a meaningless petty reality and a meaningful poetic one; this distinction accents the role of the poet as discoverer and conveyor of fundamental meanings.” In the poem “Racimos de burgueses” (may be translated as “Bunches of Bourgeois People”), for example, the speaker feels trapped with the herd: “Ando / caído y cojo / y triste / y calvo. / ¿Cuándo / romperemos, extáticos, la luna / amigo mío, hermano?” (may be translated as “I walk / dejected and crippled / and sad / and bald. / When / will we, enraptured, shatter the moon, / my friend and brother?”). Dissatisfied with the mundaneness of his reality, the speaker yearns to break free into a more meaningful world embodied by the poetic image of “shattering” the moon. Although many critics agree that Alonso’s early work and style were inferior to those of his contemporaries, the central impetus of *Pure Poems, Little Poems of the City*—the “view of poetry as the communication of meanings,” in Debicki’s words—remained consistent in his later, more mature writings.

Children of Wrath is arguably Alonso’s most creatively complex collection of verse. The first poem, “Insomnio” (may be translated as “Insomnia”), begins with the macabre observation “Madrid es una ciudad de más de un millón de cadáveres (según las últimas estadísticas). / A veces en la noche yo me revuelvo y me incorpo en este nicho en el que hace 45 años que me pudro. . . .” (may be translated as “Madrid is a city of more than one million corpses (according to the latest statistics). / At times in the night I turn over and sit up in this niche where for 45 years I’ve been rotting away. . . .”). The poem evolves into a sobering rumination on the difficulty of finding meaning amid a violent and absurd world. Stylistically, “Insomnia” differs dramatically from the verse in *Pure Poems, Little Poems of the City* in its long, meandering lines of free verse.

With the publication of *Man and God*, Alonso continued his metaphysical explorations with a diverse collection of poetry that focuses on the conflicted relationship between

man and the deity. In the volume’s final poem, “A un río le llamaban Carlos” (may be translated as “A River Was Called Charles”), the speaker reflects on his fate as a man and his inevitable path toward death: “Y ahora me fluye dentro una tristeza, / un río de tristeza gris, / con lentos puentes grises, como estructuras funerales grises. / Tengo frío en el alma y en los pies. / Y el sol se pone” (may be translated as “And now flows within me a sadness, / a river of gray sadness, / with heavy gray bridges, like gray funeral structures. / My soul and feet are cold. / And the sun sets”). Through the image of the river, the poem presents an allegory of man’s journey toward death, while the presence of God, who does not intervene, is implied.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Though much of the critical discussion surrounding Alonso tends to focus on his own accomplishments as a critic, his poetic work has also attracted attention, particularly his preoccupation with style, which was also a focus of his critical writings. Early criticism concentrated on the symbolism and themes of Alonso’s two most prominent volumes of poetry, *Children of Wrath* and *Man and God*. In his essay on *Man and God*, Debicki (1966) argued that Alonso’s poems entail “a complex poetic inquiry into the question of Man’s role in the universe.” In “Dámaso Alonso’s Views on Poetry,” Debicki examines Alonso’s views on poetry as expressed in both his criticism and poetic work. For Debicki, the apparent split between the formal preoccupations of Alonso’s early poems and his more emotive pieces of the 1940s and 1950s was not a split at all but, rather, a “change in emphasis”: “a single theme—that of the conflict between opposite outlooks on life—is permanently present. But this theme, initially formulated somewhat abstractly (the conflicting outlooks are the prosaic and the poetic), is later presented in a more particular way, and is focused more specifically on the fate of the individual human being. (The conflicting outlooks are now the existential or mundane and the supernatural or divine.)”

The question of Alonso’s place in the larger pantheon of poets and literary scholars permeated the critical discussion of his works in the 1970s. Philip Silver (1970; see Further Reading) argued that while Alonso’s *Children of Wrath* is varied and innovative, it was the poet’s approach to literary tradition—specifically, his use of imagery taken from the works of religious ascetics and mystics—that was the source of the collection’s originality. Steven P. Meshon (1972) placed Alonso and particularly his *Poesía española. Ensayo de métodos y límites estilísticos* (1950; may be translated as *Spanish Poetry: Essay of Stylistic Methods and Limits*) at the center of the “Spanish School of Stylistics.” Sánchez Barbudo acknowledged the significance of Alonso’s work in both creative and analytical writing, asserting that the critic and the poet “actually are fused and combined. We could even say that the erudite one is born of

the sensitive one. It is always the emotionally moved reader who lives just below the surface in Alonso's discussions with other critics." Alberto Porqueras-Mayo (1974) also argued that Alonso's career should be understood as more cohesive than contradictory, asserting that "it is almost impossible to study his critical works without developing a mysterious affinity for his poetic production. Alonso is above all a poet, and the poet is always implicit in his critical work."

Among criticism that has focused on Alonso's poetic style, Sharon Ghertman (1976) cited examples from "La obsesión" (may be translated as "The Obsession"), a poem from *Children of Wrath*, to demonstrate that "syntactic similarity controls poetic unity"—or put another way, that word-order patterns direct the reader's understanding of the poem. On the basis of this analysis, Ghertman argued for greater attention to the relationship between word order and meaning in Alonso's poetry and literature in general. In her study of the monsters that populate *Children of Wrath*, Russell reinforced the view that Alonso's poetic form and content convey a sense of reconciliation and unity. Ultimately, Russell suggested, "Alonso's intimate diary of a monster is, then, in some sense a search, an escape from monstrous duality into wholeness and resemblance to the creator."

Katrina Oko-Odoi

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

**Poemas puros, poemillas de la ciudad* [may be translated as *Pure Poems, Little Poems of the City*]. Madrid: Galatea, 1921.

†*Hijos de la ira. Diario íntimo* [published as *Children of Wrath*]. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1944.

‡*Oscura noticia* [may be translated as *Dark News*]. Madrid: Hispánica, 1944.

Hombre y Dios [may be translated as *Man and God*]. Málaga: Arroyo de los Angeles, 1955.

Antología: Creación [may be translated as *Anthology: Creation*]. Ed. Vicente Gaos. Madrid: Escelicer, 1956.

Poemas escogidos [may be translated as *Selected Poems*]. Madrid: Gredos, 1969.

Obras completas [may be translated as *Complete Works*]. Ed. Valentín García Yebra. 10 vols. Madrid: Gredos, 1972-85.

Gozos de la vista [may be translated as *Joys of Sight*]. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1981.

Antología de nuestro monstruoso mundo. Duda y amor sobre el Ser Supremo [may be translated as *Anthology*

of Our Monstrous World: Doubt and Love about the Supreme Being]. Madrid: Cátedra, 1985.

Poesía y otros textos literarios [may be translated as *Poetry and Other Literary Texts*]. Ed. García Yebra. Madrid: Gredos, 1998.

Other Major Works

El artista adolescente. Trans. Dámaso Alonso [as Alfonso Donado] from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* by James Joyce. Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1926. (Novel)

Soledades [may be translated as *Solitudes*]. By Luis de Góngora. Ed. Alonso. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1927. (Poetry and prose)

María Antonieta. Trans. Alonso from *Marie Antoinette* by Hilaire Belloc. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1933. (Biography)

La lengua poética de Góngora [may be translated as *The Poetic Language of Góngora*]. Madrid: Aguirre, 1935. (Criticism)

La poesía de San Juan de la Cruz [may be translated as *The Poetry of Saint John of the Cross*]. Madrid: Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas, Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 1942. (Criticism)

Tragicomedia de Don Duardos [may be translated as *Tragicomedy of Don Duardos*]. By Gil Vicente. Ed. Alonso. Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1942. (Play)

Ensayos sobre poesía española [may be translated as *Essays on Spanish Poetry*]. Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1944. (Essays)

Poemas [may be translated as *Poems*]. By T. S. Eliot. Trans. Alonso. Madrid: Hispánica, 1946. (Poetry)

Poesía española. Ensayo de métodos y límites estilísticos [may be translated as *Spanish Poetry: Essay of Stylistic Methods and Limits*]. Madrid: Gredos, 1950. (Essay)

Seis calas en la expresión literaria española (Prosa, poesía, teatro) [may be translated as *Six Samples of Spanish Literary Expression (Prose, Poetry, Theater)*]. With Carlos Bousoño. Madrid: Gredos, 1951. (Essays)

Poetas españoles contemporáneos [may be translated as *Contemporary Spanish Poets*]. Madrid: Gredos, 1952. (Essays)

Estudios y ensayos gongorinos [may be translated as *Gongorine Studies and Essays*]. Madrid: Gredos, 1955. (Criticism)

Antología: Crítica [may be translated as *Anthology: Criticism*]. Ed. Gaos. Madrid: Escelicer, 1956. (Criticism)

Menéndez Pelayo, crítico literario (Las palinodias de Don Marcelino) [may be translated as *Menéndez Pelayo, Literary Critic (The Palinodes of Don Marcelino)*]. Madrid: Gredos, 1956. (Criticism)

De los siglos oscuros al de Oro [may be translated as *From the Dark Ages to the Golden Age*]. Madrid: Gredos, 1958. (Essays)

Dos españoles del Siglo de Oro. Un poeta madrileñista, latinista, y francesista en la mitad del siglo XVI. El Fabio de la "Epístola moral": Su cara y cruz en Méjico y en España [may be translated as *Two Spaniards from the Golden Age: A Poet Scholar of Madrid, Latin and French Studies at the Halfway Point of the XVI Century; Fabio of the "Moral Epistle": Opposing Views in Mexico and in Spain*]. Madrid: Gredos, 1960. (Criticism)

Góngora y el "Polifemo" [may be translated as *Góngora and the "Polyphemus"*]. Madrid: Gredos, 1960. Enl. ed. 2 vols. Madrid: Gredos, 1961. 3 vols. Madrid: Gredos, 1966. (Criticism)

Primavera temprana de la literatura europea. Lírica, épica, novela [may be translated as *The Early Spring of European Literature: Lyric, Epic, Novel*]. Madrid: Guadarrama, 1961. (Essays)

Cuatro poetas españoles: Garcilaso, Góngora, Maragall, Antonio Machado [may be translated as *Four Spanish Poets: Garcilaso, Góngora, Maragall, Antonio Machado*]. Madrid: Gredos, 1962. (Essays)

Del Siglo de Oro a este siglo de siglas [may be translated as *From the Golden Age to This Age of Abbreviations*]. Madrid: Gredos, 1962. (Essays)

Para la biografía de Góngora. Documentos desconocidos [may be translated as *For the Biography of Góngora: Unknown Documents*]. With Eulalia Galvarriato de Alonso. Madrid: Gredos, 1962. (Essay)

Romance de Angélica y Medoro [may be translated as *The Ballad of Angélica and Medoro*]. By Góngora. Prose vers. by Alonso. Madrid: Acies, 1962. (Prose)

Principal English Translation

Hijos de la ira = *Children of Wrath*. Trans. Elias L. Rivers. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1970. Print.

*Includes "Racimos de burgueses" [may be translated as "Bunches of Bourgeois People"].

†Includes "Insomnio" [may be translated as "Insomnia"] and "La obsesión" [may be translated as "The Obsession"].

‡Includes the twelve-poem cycle "El viento y el verso" [may be translated as "Wind and Poetry"].

CRITICISM

Andrew P. Debicki (essay date 1966)

SOURCE: Debicki, Andrew P. "Dámaso Alonso's *Hombre y Dios*." *Hispania* 49.1 (1966): 44-53. Print.

[In the following essay, Debicki explores Alonso's poems in *Man and God*, arguing that the collection "constitutes a

complex poetic inquiry into the question of Man's role in the universe."]

The central subject of Dámaso Alonso's *Hombre y Dios* is clearly a religious one: the presence of God and man's relationship to Him.¹ This fact and the seemingly straightforward and easy to understand language in which the book is written might tempt us into thinking of it as a direct philosophical statement. We might even surmise that Dámaso has abandoned the complex art of his earlier poetry to give us a neat vision of a religious creed.² Yet such a view would obviously be unsatisfactory; for one, it is clear that the overt theses of some poems of *Hombre y Dios* contradict those of others, so that a single simple philosophical statement cannot encompass them all.

What is, then, the nature of the book? It is our opinion that *Hombre y Dios* constitutes a complex poetic inquiry into the question of Man's role in the universe. It does not achieve its complexity, on the whole, by embodying all the different meanings and shadings in each individual poem, but rather by building a carefully constructed whole out of a balance of individual poems, each of which presents a partial (and sometimes simple) view. In this sense, *Hombre y Dios* is a tightly-knit dramatic whole, which juxtaposes several opposite views of Man's situation and his relationship with God, and then constructs a new and multifaceted total view. (The use of dramatic devices by Dámaso Alonso will not surprise the reader of his earlier *Hijos de la ira* and especially of the poem "Monstruos," which twice forces us to shift perspectives.)³ In this fashion the poet gives us individual works that are easily apprehended; but at the same time he creates a whole which includes all the tensions and ambiguities which a full vision of his theme entails, and which, as Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren have both pointed out, distinguish the valuable poem from a summary conceptual statement.⁴

Elsewhere we have suggested that Dámaso Alonso's earlier poetry represents an increasingly more complex, more essential, and at the same time more human treatment of the issue of certain conflicting outlooks on the world.⁵ (The conflict between the poetic and the prosaic which we observe in *Poemas puros*, for example, gives way to the conflict between the supernatural and the mundane in *Hijos de la ira*.) In *Hombre y Dios*, Dámaso Alonso again gives us a contrast, this time between different views of human existence. An easy, God-centered faith shown in the first poems contrasts diametrically with a simple, earth-centered view presented in the last ones; in between these, the central section develops an ultimately positive and religious but at the same time complex and ambiguous resolution. The very titles of poems and of sections of the book illustrate this dialectical process: titles like "Primera palinodia," "Segunda palinodia," "Primer comentario," "Segundo comentario," etc., show the shifts and reversals present,

while *Hombre y Dios* points at the dual subject and might hint at the tensions present in the relationship.

The initial part of the book, entitled “Prólogo: Mi tierna miopía,” contains six poems. Of these, the first three are built around the image of the speaker’s myopia as a gift from God, destined to improve his outlook on the world. The very first poem points out the role of this improved vision in leading the speaker to a world of absolute beauty—which might be the world of Heaven, or that of “pure poetry”:

Disuélveme, mi tierna miopía,
con tu neblina suave, de este mundo
la dura traza, y lábrame un segundo
mundo de deshilada fantasía,
tierno más, y más dulce; y todavía
adénsame la noche en que me hundo,
en vuelo hacia el tercer mundo profundo:
exacta luz y clara poesía.

(pp. 11-12)

This myopic vision that guides the speaker to perfection seems to be presented quite attractively, as illustrated in the second poem of the series:⁶

PEQUEÑOS PLACERES

Mi tierna miopía, mi dulce miopía
me desdibuja el mundo: ¡delicioso!
Pasan lánguidamente las flexibles muchachas,
pasan perritos diminutos, que menean el rabo,
y espléndidas lechugas.
Todo se deshilacha, todo se difumina
en fina niebla.
¿El mundo se dispone para fiestas de Dios?
Ojos míos, bebed esta vaga hermosura.

(p. 13)

The images of the girls, the dogs, and the lettuce, encompassing through pleasant examples the human, the animal, and the vegetable, suggest that the myopic vision allows us to enjoy the different facets of the natural order. Yet the enjoyment offered is directed only at the senses; by describing the girls as “flexibles,” the poem limits them to the role of attractive sexual objects, while by choosing lettuce (rather than, for example, roses) he insures that the appeal offered will be limited to taste and will not evoke an impression of aesthetic beauty. The dogs, furthermore, offer only the attraction of a caricature or a toy. All in all, the reader is led to wonder at the importance of the value offered.

His doubts on this score are heightened when he observes the words used to describe the vision: “tierna,” “dulce,” “desdibuja,” “fina niebla,” “vaga hermosura.” Used in such profusion, they seem to signal the vagueness and the superficiality of the vision. (Our generally unfavorable attitude to myopia as such may make us pay even more attention to the negative characteristics hinted at here.) In addition, “delicioso” and “bebed” again stress the purely sensorial nature of the experience, and the title limits the scope of the benefits offered. While it extols the pleasures of the

simple vision, this poem at the same time strongly suggests its superficial and purely physical nature, and limits its efficacy as an outlook to be espoused by Man.

The two other poems of this group likewise give us hints of the limitations of the myopic view. The first one compares the God who gives this view to a father raising a child half-way before lifting him astraddle, in order not to scare him (see *Hombre y Dios*, p. 12); man becomes weak and helpless. And in the third poem, “La bondad de Dios,” the speaker is depicted as a lost being for whom God creates a “mundo de algodón” in contrast to the hard world of reality (pp. 14-15). There is little dignity in the man who accepts the myopic view.

The limitations hinted at in the first three poems are faced directly by the speaker in the next three. Their very title, “Palinodias,” indicates a reversal of outlook, which becomes clear as we study the first poem:

PRIMERA PALINODIA: LA INTELIGENCIA

Bien. Muchas gracias.
Sí. Bien. Gracias.
Pero, ahora, oh gran Dios,
¿qué me vas a decir si yo te pido
—atrevimiento humano—
que deshagas tu obra?
No me alejes lo duro
del mundo que has creado:
ojos de águila pido,
ojos-garras, de presa.

(p. 16)

The abrupt tone of the first verses, achieved by the separated one word phrases, dramatizes the speaker’s abashed drawing away from his earlier view; in addition, it signals a transition to a harsher, more pragmatic manner of looking at things. This manner is further illustrated by the colloquial tone of the question addressed to God, and by the everyday vocabulary used. In the light of this, the demand for the hard things of life in lines 7 and 8 clearly represents the speaker’s desire to transcend the superficial pleasures of the myopic. The image of the “ojos-garras” concretely presents the merciless precision with which this speaker wishes to understand his world.

The rest of the poem develops the image of God as the mathematician-creator of an exact, tough world, which the speaker now desires to possess in all its accuracy (see *Hombre y Dios*, pp. 16-17). Standing in clear contrast to the vague “myopic vision,” this image dramatizes the unsatisfactory nature of the former and accents the harshness of the insight required. The poem concludes as follows:

Mi inteligencia insomne
anhela parecérsete:
dame la maravilla,
la dura precisión
del mundo que has creado.

(p. 17)