

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

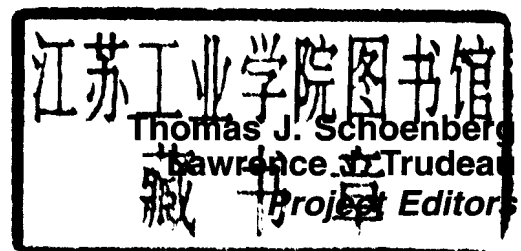
TCLC 178

TOPICS VOLUME

Volume 178

Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,
from the First Published Critical
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism, Vol. 178

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Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 120 nationalities and over 40,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

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TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author’s works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

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TCLC is designed as a companion series to Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

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A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

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- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
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Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

The Generation of 1927

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Representative Works</i>	1
<i>Overviews</i>	2
<i>Literary and Thematic Assessments</i>	17
<i>Major Authors</i>	59
<i>Further Reading</i>	108

The Stream-of-Consciousness Novel

<i>Introduction</i>	110
<i>Representative Works</i>	110
<i>Style and Development</i>	111
<i>Representative Authors</i>	143
<i>Further Reading</i>	195

Writers of the Lost Generation

<i>Introduction</i>	196
<i>Representative Works</i>	196
<i>Overviews</i>	197
<i>Major Figures</i>	225
<i>Women of the Lost Generation</i>	298
<i>Expatriate Writers and Paris</i>	341
<i>Further Reading</i>	368

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 373

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 479

TCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 493

The Generation of 1927

INTRODUCTION

Considered the most important group of Spanish poets since the Golden Age, the writers included in the Generation of 1927 were profoundly influenced by the legacy of Spanish baroque poet Luis de Góngora (1561-1627). Because some of their most important works appeared in or close to the year 1927, which also marked the tercentenary of Góngora's death, these writers—the best known of which were Federico García Lorca, Jorge Guillén, Pedro Salinas, Rafael Alberti, and Vicente Aleixandre—became known as the Generation of 1927. Early on, these poets were heavily influenced by Góngora's refined and complex poetic style as well as more contemporary European literary movements such as Symbolism, Futurism, Dadaism, Creationism, and Surrealism. They also utilized themes and forms borrowed from traditional Spanish lyric poetry and popular culture. As these poets matured, the violence and chaos in Europe—evident in World War I (1914-18), the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the growing unrest in Spain that culminated in the Spanish Civil War (1936-39)—increasingly affected their verse, which they imbued with historical, social, and political themes.

There has been increasing debate among recent critics on the use of the term Generation of 1927. Some scholars contend that the grouping as traditionally configured focuses too strongly on poets, often at the expense of writers in other genres, such as fiction, drama, or criticism. Such critics have, for instance, emphasized connections between the Generation of 1927 and the Generation of 1925, a group of Spanish novelists influenced by José Ortega y Gasset. Moreover, many Spanish writers of the period have been excluded from the grouping, despite sharing significant aesthetic affinities with authors traditionally included, while the authors routinely included often exhibit considerable thematic, stylistic, and personal variety. Additionally, commentators note that the established canon of the Generation of 1927 excludes works by women writers. Whether the Generation of 1927 is defined broadly or narrowly, critics believe that this diverse group of writers ushered in an extraordinary period in Spanish literature.

REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

Rafael Alberti

Marinero en tierra (poetry) 1925

Capital de la Gloria (poetry) 1936-39

Selected Poems (poetry) 1966

Vicente Aleixandre

Ambito (poetry) 1928

Pasión de la tierra (poetry) 1935

A Longing for the Light: Selected Poems (poetry) 1979

Dámaso Alonso

Poemas puros, poemillas de la ciudad (poetry) 1921

Hijos de la ira. Diario íntimo [*Children of Wrath*] (poetry) 1944

Poesía española. Ensayo de métodos y límites estilísticos (criticism) 1950

José Bergamín

El Pensamiento de un esqueleto: antología periodística (essays) 1984

Luis Cernuda

Perfil del aire (poetry) 1927

Estudios sobre poesía española contemporánea (criticism) 1957

Desolación de la quimera (criticism) 1962

**La realidad y el deseo* (poetry) 1964

The Poetry of Luis Cernuda (poetry) 1977

Gerardo Diego

Versos humanos (poetry) 1925

Jorge Guillén

Cántico [*Cantico*] (poetry) 1928

Federico García Lorca

Impresiones y paisajes (poetry) 1918

Canciones [*Songs*] (poetry) 1927

Poema del cante jonde [*Poem of the Deep Song*] (poetry) 1931

The Poetical Works of Federico Garcia Lorca. 2 vols. (poetry) 1988-91

Pedro Salinas

Presagios (poetry) 1923

†*Teatro completo* (plays) 1957

To Live in Pronouns: Selected Poetry (poetry) 1974

*This work contains Cernuda's four cemetery poems.

†This work includes Salinas's play *Le fuente del Arcángel*.

OVERVIEWS

C. Christopher Soufas (essay date 1992)

SOURCE: Soufas, C. Christopher. "Getting Personal: Luis Cernuda's Critique of the 'Generation of 1927.'" *Romance Languages Annual*, 1991 3 (1992): 589-93.

[In the following essay, Soufas elucidates Luis Cernuda's scathing evaluation of his fellow Generation of 1927 authors, which questions their achievements and challenges their accepted image.]

Of the many enhancing alternate names that have been used to describe the poetic "Generation of 1927," the warmest is provided by José Luis Cano, "La generación de la amistad." His opinions reaffirm the prevailing similarity paradigm around which critical discussions of these poets have focused for half a century—that is, an "afinidad de gustos estéticos" (14) which justifies a generational grouping. Like a number of literary critics, Cano takes the additional step of personalizing the conditions of poetic production. As important as a common poetics, therefore, is "la amistad que unía a todos los poetas del grupo" (14). Regarding Luis Cernuda's concept of this generation of poets, however, precisely the opposite is at work: enmity—professional and personal—fuels Cernuda's critique of those most responsible for bringing this generation into being under premises which he believed served to diminish his stature and that of his close associates within that circle.

During the last fifteen years of his life, in his poetry and his critical writing, Cernuda attacked fellow generationists and others prominent in the Spanish critical establishment regarding ungenerous attitudes toward literary history. The record of his public differences includes those with Dámaso Alonso and Jorge Guillén; his disappointments with his early mentor Pedro Salinas and his friend Vicente Aleixandre; and his defense of poetic comrades such as Federico García Lorca and Manuel Altolaguirre against domesticating and/or trivializing criticism. Such tensions offer a provocative, if nevertheless somewhat flawed, counterpoint to the generational model that fully establishes itself in the critical consciousness during the middle decades of this century. The contrast that Cernuda offers also serves to bring into greater focus the self-interestedness of a literary-historical model that has largely determined the conditions under which this poetry has been studied for forty years. Cernuda's polemical criticism and poetry challenge the image of a group of friends engaged in a similar aesthetic enterprise.

Although there is some preliminary practical and theoretical preparation for the naming of Spain's second literary generation of the century, there is remarkably

little intellectual substance, and no critical debate whatsoever, upon which to establish a generational model for contemporary literary history. Indeed, the principal legitimizing documents are Pedro Salinas's refinement of Azorín's ideas on a "Generation of 98" via his application of criteria developed by the German critic Julius Petersen, "El concepto de generación literaria aplicado a la del 98" in *Literatura española: Siglo XX*, and Pedro Laín Entralgo's *Las generaciones en la historia*. Both critics, but especially Laín Entralgo, take strong positions against Ortega y Gasset's more pluralistic ideas on generations and the mechanisms of their origin. For Laín Entralgo and Salinas, both decisively influenced by Petersen, generations emerge as a collective act of will of a group of writers who have been molded by a remarkably similar life experience (they are of the same age, have had similar personal and cultural experiences), who are acutely aware of the impotence of the previous dominant literary agenda, and who are further disciplined to affirm a common agenda by means of a strong leader within the group. In addition to the growing acceptance of the concept during the forties and thus favorable conditions for an imposition from above of the literary generation as a model for literary history, the desire to make an enhancing revisionist assessment of a now-dispersed group of poetic talents offers a strong personal motive for Dámaso Alonso's proclamation of the "Generation of 1927" in his 1948 evocation entitled "Una generación poética (1920-36)." It is this pivotal document which for practical purposes authorizes the concept and indeed establishes the practical conditions under which the poets have been approached critically (in line with the Petersen-Salinas model) that Cernuda responds to over the last years of his life.¹

Cernuda's criticism is directed primarily against well-connected poet-critics of his former circle responsible for producing a distorted image of the literary history of the twenties and thirties, especially Alonso. His is also an attack against Spanish literary criticism in general which he considers inadequate for many reasons, not the least of which is its failure to acknowledge the influence of internationally-oriented Modernist movements of the 20s and 30s that traversed national boundaries. There are three phases of Cernuda's response to the official image of a "Generation of 1927": 1) an initial defense of himself against marginalization in Alonso's official portrait of the group, in "Carta abierta a Dámaso Alonso," and his further marginalization and pigeon-holing by other Hispanic literary critics in "El crítico, el amigo y el poeta," both in 1948; 2) his presentation of an alternative generational concept, a "Generation of 1925," in *Estudios sobre poesía española contemporánea*, in 1957; and 3) a final defense of himself and his poetic comrades—Lorca and Altolaguirre—from false images and labels and a final attack against his enemies—Alonso, Salinas, and Aleixandre—in *Desolación de la Quimera*, in 1962.²

In "Una generación poética" Alonso loosely invokes Salinas and Laín Entralgo's ideas about literary generations as a basis to posit the legitimacy of what in 1948 was politically still a somewhat controversial group of poets. Indeed, Alonso's principal goal in the essay is to disassociate these poets from political and artistic controversy, to portray them as fully in consonance with a specifically Spanish tradition of poem-making. What also emerges from the essay is an unmistakable hierarchy within an already elite group that does not represent the diversity of Spanish poetry during the 20s and 30s, especially when compared to the much greater variety of figures and tendencies represented in the Gerardo Diego anthology of 1931. That Alonso's hierarchy bears a direct resemblance to the political fortunes of these poets after the Civil War is not a coincidence. Those who remained in Spain, Aleixandre and Alonso, and those who took no active part in the war, Guillén and Salinas, are prominently ranked while those who actively supported the losing side to one degree or another—Cernuda, Altolaguirre, and also to some extent Alberti—are ascribed a less prominent role. Lorca, who is emotionally invoked by Alonso as "mi príncipe muerto," becomes central in this poetic cosmology not as an avant-garde experimenter or homosexual who tended to identify with marginalized social groups but rather as a much more conservative folkloric poet who perhaps better than any of his contemporaries, in Alonso's view, was able to express the "Spanish essence" in his poetry.³ Equally objectionable to Cernuda, however, is what Alonso has to say about the poetic agenda of the generation.

Alonso's vision of these poets is one of aesthetic likemindedness which includes a profound awareness of their continuity with Spanish traditions. Alonso's criteria for the generational classification are directly borrowed from Petersen-Salinas: "esos escritores no formaban un mero grupo, sino que en ellos se daban las condiciones mínimas de lo que entiendo por generación: coetaneidad, compañerismo, intercambio, reacción similar ante excitantes externos" (667). Rather than distinctive talents who confront an historical reality, Alonso understands these poets as a "[m]ágnetico coro, donde cada voz tiene su timbre, pero que, conjunto, se ofrece ante el altar, con una pureza de intención como seguramente no ha conocido nunca la literatura española" (675). Unlike the Petersen-Salinas concept of likemindedness, which presupposed ideological as well as aesthetic unity of purpose, and further enhanced by the discipline imposed by the group leader or *Führer*, Alonso makes the poets ideologically neutral in both a political and artistic sense:

No, no hubo un sentido conjunto de protesta política, ni aun de preocupación política en esa generación. . . . Pero es el caso que tampoco literariamente se rompía con nada, se protestaba de nada . . . no hay ninguna discontinuidad, ningún rompimiento en la tradición

poética. Puedo decir más; no hay quiebra fundamental alguna . . . entre la revolución modernista y la poesía de hoy, de 1948.

(659)

Literary history produces conformity and continuity but not difference. Alonso takes pains to make his generation seem apolitical, like-minded continuers of a literary tradition "profundamente arraigada en la entraña nacional y española" and decidedly unlike "otros movimientos estéticos que pasan las fronteras por esos años inmediatamente anterior al cuajar de nuestra generación" (661), that is, a multi-dimensional European Modernism that he discounts as an important aspect of the evolution of these poets. An idea of a literary generation based on aesthetic likemindedness is supplemented with the corollary that it was also a particularly Spanish generation whose poetry was specifically oriented toward Spanish modes of literary expression. The generational concept as it evolved was quite compatible with the state ideology that emerged after the Civil War. The literary generation fitted well into the larger political agenda during the Franco years which was to uphold and defend a strong concept of national unity of purpose and to remain apart from a disapproving European mainstream. Since the literary generation referred specifically to a national grouping of writers, it reaffirmed at an artistic level a similar ideal of likemindedness of purpose and an orientation toward influences that stopped at the national borders.

As regards individual members of the group, there emerges a distinct hierarchy in the Alonso essay based on age and/or present country of residence. The older Guillén and Salinas emerge as benevolent mentors for younger members while Aleixandre and Alonso, who remain in Spain, attain relatively more prominence than the younger poets living abroad as a consequence of the Civil War. Age and connections to the critical establishment are clearly the issues in Cernuda's mind when he replies in "Carta abierta a Dámaso Alonso." Cernuda's specific objection is to Alonso's characterization of him as "todavía un muchacho, casi aislado en Sevilla, en ese año de nuestra excursión sevillana [1927], en el que en Málaga aparecerá su *Perfil del aire*, que tampoco representa su arte maduro" (665). Although the issue of age is perhaps more detrimental to the image of Manuel Altolaguirre (discussed below), Cernuda clearly understands from the outset that, whether intended or not, Alonso is establishing a hierarchy and value system based on personal relationships with poetic mentors rather than poetic content. The greater part of the letter is spent in refuting the notion that Cernuda was too poetically immature and too far removed from the poetic mainstream since the inference is that Cernuda owed his poetic formation to his older superiors, and espe-

cially Guillén. Since these opinions were in fact repetitions of a set of common beliefs circulating in critical circles at that time, Cernuda thus feels compelled to reply:

Hubo cosas, dichas por ciertas gentes y en cierto momento, acerca de mi primer libro, que yo, sincero conmigo mismo y esperanzado en cuanto a mi vocación, pude oír en silencio; pero en silencio ya no es posible, ni justo, cuando aquellas mismas cosas las oigo repetidas por una persona como usted, y al cabo de más de veinte años de tarea, que precisamente se inicia toda con aquel primer libro.

(1379)

What Cernuda fears is that his worth as a poet may be determined not by the historical record of his poetic achievement, which had indeed evolved remarkably since the appearance of *Perfil del aire* in 1927, but by image-makers like Alonso who "reiteran una opinión vulgar en ciertos medios literarios" (1378-79) without bothering to investigate carefully the validity of those assertions.

The companion piece to the "Carta abierta" is "El crítico, el amigo y el poeta" subtitled "Diálogo ejemplar" which in this case exemplarizes the type of critical practice necessary for a more objective evaluation of a poet's work. Here the subject is again *Perfil del aire* and the misconceptions surrounding it, foremost among them Guillén's alleged influence. Cernuda takes the reader through an elaborate maze of comparative statistics to make a case for the fact that some of the strongest influences on the work are French (Mallarmé and Reverdy) rather than Spanish in origin. The central message of Cernuda's dialog is that "[y]o no he negado que [los dos poetas] tuvieran algo en común . . . [l]o que sí he negado es que la causa de tal relación quedara expuesta con indicar que Guillén influyó en Cernuda" (888). Equally important, however, is his reiteration that the institution of Spanish criticism itself is ultimately to blame for the distorted image of his emergence as a poet: "Es verdad que siempre tratamos de reducir la realidad nueva a nuestros prejuicios, haciéndola aparecer como menos nueva y varia de lo que es" (894).⁴ Also significant is Cernuda's explicit disavowal of the implications of Alonso's similarity paradigm, at least as it applies to himself, since he considers that "[e]n realidad [Guillén y Cernuda] son poetas contrarios" (885). Some nine years later, these personal objections evolve into an alternative point of view regarding the evolution of Spanish poetry during the twenties and thirties, to which he gives the name "Generation of 1925."

Cernuda explicitly underscores the continuity between his ideas of a "Generation of 1925" and the earlier defense of his own poetic autonomy and originality in connection with *Perfil del aire* by making the appearance of the first book of poetry the primary criterion of

his alternative system of classification. As the initial sentence of the essay affirms: "Entre los años 1920 y 1930 aparecen los libros primeros de una nueva generación poética" (417). Date of publication of the first book of poetry rather than the date of birth of the poet, therefore, provides a different prism through which to assess originality. Although Cernuda's alternative model retains many of the disadvantages of the Petersen-Salinas model, and especially the selectivity features that tend to isolate the poets so named from their immediate predecessors and other important contemporaries, it nevertheless adopts a more pluralistic view of the individuals who comprise the literary generation. In this it tends to affirm a generational idea similar to that advocated by Ortega y Gasset in *El tema de nuestro tiempo* and elsewhere which recognized ideological/aesthetic diversity rather than likemindedness as the fundamental aspect of any new generation:

Una generación es una variedad humana. . . . Dentro de ese marco de identidad pueden ser los individuos del más diverso temple, hasta el punto de que, habiendo de vivir los unos junto a los otros, a fuer de contemporáneos, se sienten a veces como antagonistas.

(147-48)

Cernuda does not consider generationists to be guided by a strong leader or common ideology, thus making it possible to acknowledge diversity and originality of expression to a greater extent under this model.

By establishing date of publication of the first book as the principal criterion for classification, Cernuda also cleverly sidesteps the issue of personal influences, generational leadership, and the assumption of a common poetics so prominent in the earlier model. By implication, such a system also frees Cernuda from the burden of having to be understood in terms of his relationship to the older mentor/influence Guillén whose first book appears fully one year after Cernuda's *Perfil del aire*. Indeed, Cernuda makes clear that had it not been for the popularity of the Alonso model that he would not have included either Guillén or Salinas as members of this generation since they do not, in his opinion, participate in the Modernist movements that manifest themselves in Spain after 1927, foremost among which being surrealism, that Cernuda considers to be the most developed stage of the generation's evolution. Under Cernuda's model, Guillén and Salinas are marginalized because of aesthetic orientation. He considers them bourgeois poets with a limited agenda that prevents them from participating in the full evolution of the younger mainstream consisting of Aleixandre, García Lorca, Alberti, and Altolaguirre. Dámaso Alonso is not mentioned at all.

Cernuda's model, therefore, is ultimately quite different from the generational model that became the official critical model during this time in Spain and elsewhere.

It takes the question of artistic development out of the hands of literary mentors as it also aligns the most representative and original figures of this generation with literary movements outside of Spain. Thus while the Petersen-Salinas-Alonso model posits that literary history produces conformity to the discipline of a guiding literary will/aesthetic within the context of conformity to a national tradition, Cernuda affirms precisely the opposite. Literary works are produced in history and align themselves with aesthetic ideologies that transcend national boundaries. Although with the historical hindsight of over thirty years the Cernuda model certainly seems to offer a more generous, sophisticated, and compelling approach to the question of historical classification than does the Petersen-Salinas-Alonso model, it nevertheless partakes of many of the same contradictions. Almost identical to Alonso's approach in "Una generación poética," Cernuda uses alternate criteria to isolate and marginalize one subgroup (the older, less explicitly avant-guard poets) and to elevate to greater prominence another (the younger more experimentally inclined group), that is, to atomize further an already ungenerous idea of literary history in which only a small part of such history comes to epitomize the whole. The final and most bitter moment of Cernuda's critique (and likely with the awareness that deteriorating health meant that he was fast approaching the end of his life) takes place in the poetry in the final section of *La realidad y el deseo* entitled *La desolación de la Quimera*. Although some fifteen years had passed since the appearance of Alonso's "Una generación poética," Cernuda returns to it and to his critique of the image-makers of the Spanish critical establishment which this time are specifically identified as his fellow generationists: Alonso, Salinas, and Aleixandre. Although most of the complaints here are voiced in the earlier essays, Cernuda in the poetry personalizes the issues in order to intensify and unmask the processes at work. Personal evocations and opinions by powerfully connected literary figures and not objective literary history are responsible for the current state of literary affairs whose most salient features are the marginalization and/or reappropriation of original talents in order to maintain a generational image of homogeneity and unity that never actually existed.

Such ideas find their most forceful pronouncement in "Otra vez, con sentimiento" which deals with what Cernuda considers the creation of a false image of Federico García Lorca's work by Spanish critics in general and Dámaso Alonso in particular. The poem makes explicit reference to "Una generación poética" and to Alonso's having called Lorca "mi príncipe muerto." Although his complaints, addressed here to the dead poet, reside equally with the critical establishment ("Que de ti se adueñó una tribu / Extraña para mí y para ti no menos / Extraña acaso" [344-345], it is Alonso to whom Cernuda's accusations are directed:

... uno de esa tribu,
Profesor y, según pretenden él y otros
De por allá (cuánto ha caído nuestra tierra),
Poeta, te ha llamado "mi príncipe".
Y me pregunto qué hiciste tú para que ése
Pueda considerarte como príncipe suyo.

¿Vaciedad académica? La vaciedad común resulta
En sus escritos. Mas su rapto retórico
No aclara a nuestro entendimiento
Lo secreto en tu obra, aunque también le llamen
Crítico de la poesía nuestra contemporánea.

La apropiación de ti, que nada suyo
Fuiste o quisiste ser mientras vivías,
Es lo que ahí despierta mi extrañeza.
¿Príncipe tú de un sapo? ¿No les basta
A tus compatriotas haberte asesinando?

Ahora la estupidez sucede al crimen.

(345)

Although insulting, these accusations are also an invitation for literary critics to compare conflicting versions of personal and literary history. As in his critical discussion of Lorca in *Estudios sobre la poesía española contemporánea* which alluded to a previously unmentionable aspect of Lorca's inspiration, his homosexuality (see 446-47), here too Cernuda is subtly suggesting that Lorca's personal, aesthetic, and ideological affinities did not lie with Alonso or the mainstream as defined in "Una generación literaria." Rather they lie with those like Cernuda whose personal recollections of the facts of history are at great variance with the now-official story. Important aspects of Lorca's human and aesthetic make-up have been excised by the critical establishment in order to make literary history compatible with a situation that, at least in Cernuda's mind, never existed.

A very similar theme emerges in "Supervivencias tribales en el medio literario" written in defense of Manuel Altolaguirre in response to an evocation of him by Vicente Aleixandre in *Los encuentros* which Cernuda believes has served to trivialize his greatness as a poet. Aleixandre is not the first to emphasize Altolaguirre's youthfulness at the historical moment that the Generation of 1927 is taking shape since, indeed, Alonso in "Una generación poética" and others make reference to the boy-like qualities of "Manolito." Aleixandre's repetition of such a marginalizing portrait, however, is especially disappointing to Cernuda whose complaint is, again, the ungenerosity of Spanish literary criticism "[q]ue jamás admitiera cómo excelencia puede corresponder a varios: / Su fanatismo antes mejor prospera si se concentra en la de uno" (350). The one to whom Cernuda is referring is Aleixandre, the only prominent member of his generation to remain in residence in Spain after the Civil War and apparently the only poet for whom greatness has been reserved by the critical establishment: