Cernuda, Luis (1902-1963), Spanish poet. Cernuda was an unhappy man, his only major and enduring pleasure the writing of poetry, the focus of his intellectual life. He scorned careers, and supported himself by working in a bookstore and by commissioned translations. During the Spanish Civil War Cernuda moved to England, later to the United States, in both of which countries he held university teaching posts, which were for him nothing more than a source of income. His last years were spent in Mexico, where he died.

Cernuda was a twentieth-century Romantic; he admired and wrote on the English and German romantic poets, and translated Hölderlin into Spanish. Timid, introspective, misogynistic, easily offended, in an isolation at least somewhat self-imposed, he permitted few to be his friends, and never had an enduring love relationship. He was obsessed with the loss of his youth and with the fugacity of sexual pleasure. His anger was expressed in withdrawal and in poetry, rather than activity in support of social change; Cernuda felt the world unworthy of efforts on its behalf.

Secure in his own gay identity, confident that he was correct and puritanical society wrong, Cernuda’s primarily autobiographical poetry explores his own isolation and suffering. He sought to recapture his lost youth in that of young sexual partners, and his Forbidden Pleasures and Where Oblivion Dwells are openly pederastic; he was the first to publish on such
topics in Spain. In addition to his verse, which was well received in literary circles, Cernuda was a frequent contributor of critical essays to literary magazines. He published a lengthy essay on Gide, from whose writings he learned that others felt as he did and that suffering could be expressed and alleviated through literary creation.

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