

Language and Consciousness in the Poetry
of the "Novísimos":
Guillermo Carnero's Latest Poetry

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Guillermo Carnero's latest book of poetry, *Divisibilidad indefinida*, has just been published in Seville by Editorial Renacimiento (1990). A series of circumstances puts this immediately in context so as to confer on the mere appearance of this book, in the reader's mind, the category of an event. In the first place, given the importance of the author to the generation of 1970 (and, more specifically within said generation, to the group of poets that Castellet designated as the "novísimos"), this new book is important because Carnero has maintained a long decade of silence while other authors of this group were successively accumulating new titles or else, in other cases, having definitively abandoned poetry, were exploring alternative modes of expression in other literary genres. With respect to the aforesaid silence it is necessary to bear in mind moreover that, unlike the case of the poems of *Ensayo*, most of which had been previously published in separate books, only a third of the texts contained in *Divisibilidad* were known to us: the author had previously published only two sonnets, in a recent issue of *Insula*, plus two other poems. *Divisibilidad* contains a total of fifteen poems, three of which also formed an edition published last year by Hiperión with the title *Música para fuegos de artificio* (Music for Fire-works).

In the second place, and now I am referring to the orientation of the book, *Divisibilidad indefinida* implies a reaffirmation of the "novísimo" aesthetic at a moment when the poetry of the youngest authors (i.e., those born in the second half of the decade of the fifties

and the first half of the sixties) seems to be moving in a different direction, if not in some cases a diametrically opposite one, to the lines suggested by the aforementioned aesthetic. This fact was pointed out at the time by Miguel García Posada when, in his review of *Divisibilidad*, he wrote that the latest tendencies of Spanish lyric poetry “do not seem to be heading in the direction of this book, they [these latest tendencies] being fraught with an insistent vitalism and a poetic diction characterized by deliberate nakedness” (iv).

In corroboration of this different tendency to which García Posada alludes, we might cite the words with which, in 1988, the poet José Lupiáñez defined his own poetic project in the introduction to his anthology *Laurel de la costumbre*. There, Lupiáñez wrote:

The surest approach [to my poetry] is clearly the sensorial dimension, the exaltation of the senses. This desire to construct through sensory imperatives dictates my preference for accumulative, geometric modes. . . . My verses demand festive attire, emotional cargo, luxury and risk as the only dimension in which the sensitive ceremony of the poem is workable, and through which the poem can communicate to us its impossibility. I do not believe, however, that this vocation has led me to a poetics of radical hermeticism to the point where accumulation turns against me excessively. (13)

Still, there can be found, among the members of the generation to which Lupiáñez belongs, manifestations that are analogous or complementary to those formulated above. But the undoubted advantage of the words cited lies precisely in that, by emphasizing his interest in sensory representation as the very center of the comprehension of the poetry, they reveal a poetics which must inevitably conflict with that which Carnero defends. Not by chance did the latter, on celebrating the work of his generational ally Jaime Siles, speak of “an abstract language, strongly intellectualized and difficult of visualization, which requires an effort which will not go unrewarded for those capable of perceiving the emotions of the intellect” (84).

In the above-mentioned review, García Posada defines *Divisibilidad indefinida* as an example of the “persistence of a poetics.” He is referring, of course, to the persistence of the “novísimo” poetics. In light of this, bearing in mind the difference described between the orientation of Carnero and the literary activity

of the younger generations, we must undertake a change of perspective in the usual critical understanding of such a poetics. One is accustomed to speaking, for example, of the importance of the generation of the 70s, and in particular of the "novísimo" group, because of their renovation of language and their post-war poetic sensibility. Statements by these authors have for some time encouraged this understanding of their own poetry as being in opposition to the prevailing tradition. Carnero, for example, in the introduction to the selection of his poems in Moral and Pereda's anthology, had this to say about this opposition:

The generation of poets to which I belong erupted some ten or twelve years ago onto the wasteland of our literature like a horse in a crockery shop. It appeared with some of the external features usually regarded as symptoms of a "generational" changing of the guard: rejection of the past, collective declarations, common formal characteristics. I think that the first of these features was fully justified: as my professional obligations have over time compelled me to immerse myself in the history of Castilian poetry after the Civil War, I have become ever more convinced that this is so. Except for some isolated cases . . . the poetic legacy which was offered to us in 1965 seemed to me then and seems to me now discardable in general terms (307).

The rejection of the immediate poetic legacy leaves a clearly visible trace in the poetry written by the "novísimos" during the decade of the 70s. An obvious example of this would be, in the specific case of Carnero, the second part of "VARIATION IV," which is entitled "Give Alms to Belisario," and which in fact illustrates the awareness the poet had, already in 1974, of the moment of negation or rejection through which his poetry was passing. In this poem we read:

Hemos puesto en cuestión numerosas gramáticas
leído hasta la saciedad la experiencia de otros
y en fotografías borrosas perseguido su imagen
inquiriendo un volumen para sus gestos planos,
codiciosos de aquello de que era razonable
esperar sabiduría, para obtener al fin
un pobre patrimonio de terrenos baldíos.

(*Ensayo*, 174.)

We've called into question numerous grammars,
read to the point of satiety the experience of others
and pursued their image in faded photographs
asking some volume for their flat gestures,
covetous of what it was reasonable
to expect some knowledge of, in order to obtain at last
a poor patrimony of barren fields.

(tr. F. H. F.)

Nonetheless, as Carnero remarked in the poetics to the anthology by Moral and Pereda cited earlier, after the first moment of generational rupture and of renovation of the available poetic language it was inevitable that a second moment would emerge, which we might call here the foundational moment to distinguish it from the previous. In this second moment, once the initial attitudes of reaction were abandoned ("because there's no longer an enemy," Carnero was to add immediately), there are restored to the poetic act some of the principles of the earlier poetry, including the very idea of commitment, always bearing in mind that the interest in language must remain as the indisputable center of the poem. And Carnero concluded, alluding to Tristan Tzara, whose example he used as an analogy to explain the new poetic orientation of his generation:

I think that at this time our poetry finds itself in an optimal moment. The expectations of the reader of poetry have been considerably broadened; he's been forced to admit that verse can be the natural site of infinite expressive possibilities; the curse, which ten or fifteen years ago codified the expressible within narrow channels, has been broken. As a corollary, language has been enormously enriched. The poets, the initial combative attitude forgotten, can now (because there's no longer an enemy) confront the task of synthesizing all the elements necessary to a poetry of great significance. Among these elements are some of those which distinguished the previous generations: a more direct and immediate humanization of the poem, a renewed sense of "commitment" at a level that does not negate expression. Making an analogy with the evolution of one of the greatest poets of this century, Tristan Tzara, the negating period of the Dada demonstrations has passed; the moment has come to write *L'homme approximatif*.

(“Poética,” 308)

This transition or passage from the initial negating epoch to a later moment in which "there's no longer an enemy," and which I have previously termed—with a precision that is probably no more than approximate—the foundational moment of the new poetry of Carnero, may help us understand the differences that exist between the book of 1979, *Ensayo de una teoría de la visión*, and the new book, *Divisibilidad indefinida*. And, once these differences have been delineated, it will be possible to observe what the new book still owes to that initial moment from which it undoubtedly embarks, so as to project it finally into a new dimension in which—once the space is established where, so to speak, the poetic language of the generation of '70 situates itself—the values making up said language assert themselves.

Divisibilidad begins with a long quotation from Fernando de Herrera's *Annotations on Garcilaso*. The text of this quotation is worth our attention:

My tears. This is how they're formed: the warm, burning vapor which at sorrow's prompting rises from the heart to the brain, dissolves and releases the brain's moisture, easily producing tears. In this way the principle or substance of shame and fear pours forth from the heart for tears and for venereal pleasures and for anger's violent impetus. For when man is overwhelmed by sadness, which presses and contracts the soul, that concussion or shaking and pounding which promotes and effects a similar narrowing and shrinking tightens and constricts the entrails, whence a copious exhalation of humours is directed to the brain. And when all of its concave parts are filled with this exhalation prompted by sadness, that humour flung into the uveal tunica pours forth and, expelled as a demonstration of that involuntary movement, the heaviness of the humour makes it flow downward; and in this way it happens that those swollen vapours are manifested as tears.

(Herrera, in *Divisibilidad*, 7)

Here we have, before anything else, the learned quotation which has always accompanied the "novísimos," though in this case considerable caution is necessary since Carnero surely has little or no interest in Herrera's pedantic scientific display, so that it becomes necessary to understand this quotation as an ironic wink at the reader. In fact, the poet acknowledges, by placing this text at the front of his

book, a new interest in sentimentalism. But it is a question of a sentimentalism—i.e., the tears shed by Garcilaso—converted here into a literary code and, therefore, susceptible of being treated as linguistic material. The proper distancing having thus been achieved, this material can be offered to the reader as something purely aesthetic.

Thus, in the same way that Carnero looked ahead in the poetics that appeared in the anthology of Morales and Pereda, cited above, where he indicated that in the future it would be possible to return to a poetry of commitment as long as one did not lose sight of the essential question of language, here sentimentalism is rescued—and, by extension, it could be said, the personal emotions of the author as well—and reintegrated into the poem. Or, to put it another way, by means of Herrera's commentary the sentimentalism to which it aspires is recovered, not after a supposed approach to life (approach, or intention to approach, which at this moment could only be an act of inadmissible ingenuity), but restoring it to its appropriate aesthetic position by understanding it as a result of the elaboration or consciousness of an art.

In light of this, it is necessary to emphasize now that there is in this new book by Carnero a greater interest in life than we might expect after reading earlier statements by the author. In fact, Carnero seems more disposed than in earlier books to speak of himself or of his own experience, although this self-expression continues to be subject to the imperatives of indirection that characterized his previous production. Therefore, it is important to emend at once the previously cited declarations by García Posada, according to which Carnero, with this book, departs from the most recent currents of Spanish poetry which “do not seem to be heading in the direction of this book,” because of the “insistent vitalism” and the nakedness they flaunt, in contrast to the culturalist and innovative fidelity of Carnero. In effect, the new currents of poetry do not follow the line sought in *Divisibilidad*. But it should also be noted that in this new book there is a conjugation of literary refinement (unlike some of the poets of the latest generation, who have little interest in form, Carnero is an impeccable craftsman) and the preoccupation with the relation between literature and life. In fact, the inadequacy of the poem, and of literature in general, with respect to life is the central theme of the fifteen poems of the book.

So Guillermo Carnero, one of the protagonists of the most impor-

tant poetic change wrought on Spanish poetry in the last seventy years, is still faithful to that renewal. But that does not prevent him from seeking to approach as well (to the degree possible and respecting the aesthetic imperatives outlined previously) these new currents in order to show that this supposed nakedness in poetry, apparently so prized today by some representatives of the latest generations, is not attained by naively disregarding form, but through work and art: to illustrate, in short, that nakedness is not the fruit of ignorance, but is rather the subtlest of literary artifices.

Life (I don't mean anecdote, which is life's least significant accident) intrudes on this new book by Carnero, but is meticulously subjected to the imperative of poetic expression, which was so important to the "novisimos." And so, since life can only be expressed through language, language seems inadequate to apprehend it because the poem is not capable of including all of life.

The inadequacy of art to convey life was already a predominant motif in the first poems of the "novisimos." The trace of that aesthetic in *Divisibilidad* is clearly visible in the poem "Ducal Theater of Parma," for instance, which echoes the most famous poetry of its author, although here, due to the sonnet form, there is a heightened splendor to the verbal richness characterizing some of the poems of *Dibujo de la muerte* (e. g., "Capricho en Aranjuez") wedded to the almost epigrammatic precision of some of the "figures" from *Variaciones y figuras sobre un tema de La Bruyère* (e. g., "Santa Maria della Salute"; "Mira el breve minuto de la rosa"). It should be understood that the word "trace" here does not imply dependence or reiteration, but rather origin opening out towards a new development. For in this new book the sonnet serves to express a knowledge (the fruit of cultural accumulation) which proceeds from the poetry of the first years, certainly, but a knowledge which, having been interiorized, is manifested as personal knowing (remember, in this regard, the notional distinction that Carnero makes between "knowledge" and "knowing" in the poetry of Aleixandre). This explains, in the first place, the two initial "lessons": the sonnets "Lección del páramo" (Lesson of the Wasteland) and "Segunda lección del páramo."

It is absolutely essential, in my opinion, to connect these two sonnets with the poem "Castilla" from *Dibujo de la muerte* (*Outline of Death*). In "Castilla" the space was a kind of wasteland or steppe which served the poet to illustrate metaphorically the dissemination of language. The poem began by betraying an ignorance of the very

dimensions of that language, an ignorance which had its origin precisely in that dissemination:

No sé hasta dónde se extiende mi cuerpo.
No sé hasta cuándo cayera el más lejano cuerpo de muralla; no sé
hasta que alturé yacen los sillares entre las serpientes o lenguas
de sol,
entre la alucinada tierra, bajo ese cráter polvoriento y callado,
bajo los cuarteados terrones de ese cielo de arcilla.
Tampoco sé hasta dónde se extiende la tierra; quizás
un horizonte redondo.

(*Ensayo*, 80.)

I don't know how wide my body stretches.
I don't know how far the farthest piece of wall would fall; I don't
know
how high the square hewn stones reach amid the serpents
or tongues of the sun, in the dazed earth, beneath that dusty
silent crater, under the split clumps of that clay sky.
And I don't know how far the earth extends; perhaps
a round horizon.

(tr. F.H.F.)

And the poem concluded by symbolizing the destructive and restorative function of poetic language, since it destroys and constructs simultaneously in its quest for a new expressive space; in its quest, that is, for a space in which to situate itself before the apparent seamlessness presented by tradition, what's already been said. This is what the poem says:¹

Sobre estos muros lisos como una tumba, una
y otra vez, he buscado, sobre este cuerpo, una
y otra vez, he buscado una poterna, el vago
clarear de unas luces sobre las impasibles
murallas.

Y otra vez al galope, matando,
descuartizando telas y andamiajes y máscaras
y levantando muros y andamiajes y telas
y máscaras.

Mi cuerpo es ancho como un río.

(*Ensayo*, 81.)

Upon these walls smooth as tombs, once
and again, I have looked, over this body, once
and again, I have looked for a postern, the vague
dawning of lights upon impassive
walls.

And once again off galloping, killing,
slashing curtains and scaffolds and masks
and raising up walls and scaffolds and curtains
and masks.

My body is wide as a river.

(tr. F.H.F.)

The perspective has changed, as I said, in *Divisibilidad*, where once again the double activity of language is enunciated. But in this case the restoring function is tinged by a note of pessimism in the emphasis on the systematic mode whereby language assimilates every rupture or, in the enunciation of the poem, every “division” or transgressive image ends up being immediately assimilated—“fused” is the expression used in the text—to the horizon of what’s already been said:

Veo cruzar el pájaro pausado
por el aire que apenas dividido
se suelda sin estela de sonido
en su cristal ardiente y deslumbrado

y un arroyo que mudo y ignorado
en el valle perdido
minimiza el caudal de su latido
y lo conduce al arenal quemado.

(*Divisibilidad* 9.)

I see the paused bird move
through the air which scarcely rent,
without a wake of sound is fused again
onto its burning, dazzling crystal

and a stream which, lost in the valley,
mute, unnoticed,
reduces the flow of its pulse

and bends it toward the parched desert floor.

(tr. F. H. F.)

The result of this new perspective is, then, a skepticism which had already been announced in the final poems of *Ensayo de una teoría de la visión* (*Towards a Theory of Vision*) and, concretely, in “Ostende.” In the initial sonnet of *Divisibilidad*, this skepticism, which results from the aforementioned transformation according to which knowledge turns into knowing, seems to be enunciated in the two final tercets, where the poet evokes the moment of silence which substitutes—and must be understood as an alternative—for all poetic activity.² The poem says:

Ave y arroyo son mi compañía
y su vuelo y fluir faltos de historia,
nunca pensado ni jamás oído,

escriben que es bastante melodía
el cofre sin abrir de la memoria
y el laberinto ciego del sentido.

(9)

Bird and stream are my company
and their flight and flow, exempt from history,
never imagined, never heard,

instruct that the sealed chest of memory
and the blind labyrinth of meaning
are sufficient melody.

(tr. F. H. F.)

Here “bird” should be understood as a metaphorical image for the poet—a conventional image ever since the “nightingale” of medieval poetry—and “river,” as had already been indicated in the poem “Castilla” from *Dibujo*, as an emblem of literature and, more concretely, of its function which, like the river, is fed by its own course, pounding its limits against a beyond with no apparent direction.

In the second of the sonnets mentioned, entitled “Segunda lección del páramo,” a skepticism rooted in Quevedo is fused with some of the preoccupations that had already surfaced in the poem

"Ostende," with which *Ensayo de una teoría de la visión* closed. On that occasion the poet spoke of the process whereby he derived images (i.e., "piedra preciosa" [precious stone]) starting from a fleeting inspiration (i.e., "cervatillo" [fawn]), and how these images, conveniently elaborated, went on to form part of the poem:

Un cervatillo salta
impasible: lo sigo.

En un claro del bosque
está sentada al borde de la fuente,
con blanquísima túnica que no ofrece materia
que desgarrar a la rama del espino.
Corro tras ella sin saber su rostro,
pero no escapa sino que conduce
hasta lo más espeso de la fronda,
donde juntos rodamos entre las hojas muertas.
Cuando la estrecho su rostro se ha borrado,
la carne hierve y se diluye; el hueso
se convierte en un requero de ceniza
y en medio de la forma que levemente humea
brilla nítida y pura una piedra preciosa.
La recojo y me arreglo la corbata:
de vuelta, silencioso en el vagón del tren,
temo que me delate su fulgor
que resplandece y quema aún bajo el abrigo.
Tengo una colección considerable
y en el silencio de mi biblioteca
las acaricio, las pulo, las ordeno
y a veces las imprimo.

(*Ensayo*, 206–07)

A fawn leaps out
impassively: I follow it.

In a clearing in the woods
she's seated beside the fountain,
her snow-white tunic offering no substance
for the hawthorn branch to snag.
I chase after her without knowing her face,
but she doesn't escape, she leads me
to where the foliage is thickest

and we roll about together in the dead leaves.
When I press her close her face has vanished,
her flesh boils and disperses; the bone
becomes a rivulet of ash
and amid the form faintly smoking
a precious stone shines pure and bright.
I pick it up and straighten my tie;
on the way back, quiet in the train coach,
I'm afraid its brightness will give me away
still shining and burning beneath my overcoat.
I have a large collection
and in the silence of my library
I caress them, polish them, order them
and sometimes print them.

(tr. F. H. F.)

Note, in this fragment, how the poet is aware of the distance mediating between experience, or inspiration, and poem. This distance is expressed, metaphorically, through a fable whose remote origin may well be Espronceda (don't forget that Carnero is a specialist in the Romantic period): it is about the lover who, like Espronceda's don Félix de Montemar, pursues a mysterious woman only to find himself at last, on uncovering her face, with a cadaver:

Y a su despecho y maldiciendo al cielo,
De ella apartó su mano Montemar.
Y temerario alzándola su velo,
Tirando de él la descubrió la faz

....

Y ella entonces gritó: "¡Mi esposo!" Y era
(¡Desengaño fatal!, ¡triste verdad!)
Una sórdida, horrible calavera
La blanca dama del gallardo andar! . . .

(*Ensayo*, 249)

And reluctantly and cursing Heaven
Montemar removed his hand from hers,
And fearfully raising her veil,
Pulling it away he uncovered her face.

....

And then she cried out: "My husband!" And it was
(Fatal disillusion!, Sad verity!)
A sordid, horrible skull,
This white lady of the graceful walk! . . .

(tr. F.H.F.)

From this cadaver from experience the image eventually emerges—"and amid the form faintly smoking / a precious stone shines pure and bright"—that goes on to form part of the poem. The poem has for its object sorrow over lost experience, recuperated as language: "Consciousness is engendered in pain."

The point of departure is analogous in "Segunda lección del páramo," where the same image reappears, though here the poet, as I indicated already in commenting on the first sonnet, manifests his skepticism about the value of such knowledge. To the reverberation of the images already discussed from "Ostende" is added now a Quevedesque note, all of this serving to illustrate precisely the insufficiency of literature to convey adequately life and, by extension, as Bousoño indicated in the prologue to *Ensayo*, the failure of reason (16–22; 66–7). The poem is, therefore, a fiction which outlines "espacios de serena gloria / y un firmamento plácido y fingido" (spaces of serene glory / and a placid, feigned firmament) ("Teatro ducal de Parma," *Divisibilidad*, 11). But it is also the result of a strange cult, defined by the poet as "un fervor erosionado / en la noche total definitiva" (an eroded fervor / in the definitive and total night) ("Música para fuegos de artificio," *Divisibilidad*, 15). To the extent that it is a product of this fervor, the poem is an act of personal affirmation which, despite all, gives way to reflection on the void that underlies its own existence. An example of this is to be found in the two final tercets of the poem "Segunda lección del páramo":

Sólo para regalo de mis ojos
brillan y aroman y por un momento
chisporrotean en la llama huidiza;

después, con otros restos y despojos
de voluntad y de conocimiento,
perecen hechas brasas y ceniza.

(*Divisibilidad*, 17)

To regale my eyes alone
they shine and scent and sputter
briefly in the elusive flame;

then, with other shards and remnants
of will and knowledge,
they perish, coals and ash at last.

(tr. F.H.F.)

Skepticism, as we know, is almost always the sign of an intellectual attitude which, closing the reflexive circle, turns in upon itself to discover the void which is characteristic of all discourse. Such seems to occur in Carnero's case, as the poem "Catedral de Avila" would illustrate. Here is the text:

Catedral de Avila

Como al umbral de la capilla oscura
una reja detiene la mirada
y la dispersa luego, confinada
en los fraudes que finge la negrura

confundiendo volumen y figura
de la estatua yacente allí olvidada,
cuando mi mano se detenga helada
un anaquel será mi sepultura.

Será delgada losa la cubierta
y el tejuelo epitafio más piadoso
y menor la esperanza de otra vida,

y en el silencio la palabra muerta
gozará del olvido y el reposo
en figura y volumen confundida.

(*Divisibilidad*, 17)

Avila Cathedral

As at the threshold of the dark chapel
an iron grating deflects your gaze

and then disperses it, confined
in the illusions blackness feigns

confusing volumen and figure
of the statue lying forgotten there,
when my hand stops frozen
a shelf will be my sepulchre.

The cover will be a slender tombstone,
kind epitaph the title on the spine,
hope of another life minimal,

and in the silence the dead word
will enjoy oblivion and bask supine
in figure and volume confused still.

(tr. F.H.F.)

This poem has to be read in connection with the one that opens *Ensayo de una teoría de la visión*, entitled precisely "Avila." At the beginning of *Ensayo*, "Avila" revealed the author's preoccupation with the silence surrounding the limits of the poem. Then it was a question of an intellectual problem by means of which the author abstracted the poem and considered it isolated in space or, what is the same thing, flanked by the silence that results from the reception of the earlier tradition on the one hand and from the subsequent silence to which the poem itself will be condemned on the other. In "Avila" this consideration of the poem between two silences takes as a point of departure the metaphor of rebirth, a metaphor represented by the beautiful tomb of the prince D. Juan, located in Santo Tomás de Avila, which is the work of Domenico Fancelli de Setignano. Through this metaphor it became clear, finally, that the experience from which the poem is to emerge must die in order to be reborn in consciousness, in language, as such a poem (López, "Silencio y la piedra," 47–49).

In *Divisibilidad*, on the other hand, this intellectual problem is interiorized, becoming converted into experience. Hence the use of the first person: "cuando mi mano se detenga helada / un anaquel será mi sepultura." But the intertextual relation with the first poem of *Dibujo*, already mentioned, allows for the creation of a distance to fracture any immediacy that might result from such interiorization. In fact, the simile with which the poem begins serves to recommend that

distance from the very beginning of the text, and the Renaissance sepulchre sculpted by the Italian artist in the poem from *Dibujo* gives way to the poet's book as the focus of interest. The book appears, thus, proffered to oblivion, abandoned on a shelf. This image substitutes now for the previous sepulchre and becomes a metaphorical index for the silence that threatens the poem and, in the last instance, the author himself. Alluding to the distance which we have observed, and to the distanced consideration of life in art, García-Posada already noted the frequency of comparisons in *Divisibilidad indefinida*.

It is important to insist that all the poems of *Divisibilidad* are characterized by a tone of moderate skepticism which, as the "lessons" of the wasteland in the poems cited above illustrate, reminds us of the visions of disillusionment expressed by way of the knowledge derived from life experience that are so abundant in Spanish Baroque poetry. The tone of skepticism described results, undoubtedly, from that interiorization of knowledge of which I spoke earlier, and from the subsequent transformation of said knowledge into personal knowing, in short, into experience. Here it is a question of a knowing that constantly reflects on its own limitation and, more concretely, on its insufficiency to adequately convey life, an insufficiency to which the following verses from the magnificent sonnet "Razón de amor" allude: "deseo embellecido y abreviado / sin la presencia mas con la figura" (embellished, abbreviated longing / without the presence, but not formless). Like "Avila," this sonnet takes as its point of departure another funereal representation: in this case, it is a sepulchre in Lombardy (*Divisibilidad*, 43). But here the text turns in upon itself to reveal its own limitations: the poem, as this sonnet concludes, is a perpetually remembered present—"el presente en especies de memoria"—which proves insufficient to apprehend, not only life, but even the conscious representation of it (i.e., that which we "call" life):

el presente en especies de memoria
anticipa su paz y su nobleza
y el término es el punto de partida

en que se omite la mezclada gloria
de vacuidad, de encanto y de vileza
que por imprecisión llamamos vida.

(*Divisibilidad*, 43.)

the present in species of memory
anticipates its peace and nobility
and the end is the point of departure

where what's omitted is the mixed glory
of vacuousness, charm, and depravity
which we call life, for lack of a better word.

(tr. F.H.F.)

And life's capacity to recede and always exceed our conscious representations or our conceptualizations of it is the motive that occupies the last text in the book, entitled "La hacedora de lluvia" (The Rainmaker) and quite possibly the best poem in the whole volume.³ In it reverberate images that already appeared in the three final poems of *Ensayo de una teoría de la visión*, and only an intertextual reading that takes that previous poetry into account will allow for an adequate comprehension of this poem from *Divisibilidad*. Thus, in "La hacedora de lluvia" we have the figure of the burned man:

Al borde del camino yace el hombre quemado
bajo una tenue túnica de polvo
que el viento agita, deshilacha y teje
como la mano lenta que sosiega al dormido.

(*Divisibilidad*, 45)

At the edge of the road there's a man lying
burned beneath a delicate tunic of dust
stirred, frayed and woven by the wind
like the slow hand that soothes one who sleeps.

(tr. F.H.F.)

and in the poem "Ostende," from 1979, the image "la carne hierve," (her flesh boils) which is later transformed into "un reguero de ceniza" (a rivulet of ash). As I noted earlier, in "Ostende" the poet makes use of this image—which may derive from Espronceda—to convey the distance that mediates between experience—or inspiration—and poem. So the poem can be described in "Ostende," the final text of *Ensayo de una teoría de la visión*, with the same metaphor that "Ávila" had enunciated initially: as a rebirth resulting

from the death of lived experience, which is then reborn as consciousness, that is, as poem.

What has changed in the last poem of *Divisibilidad*, with respect to *Ensayo*, is the center of attention of the poem. In 1979 it had been the poetic process that occupied that center, while in this case the subject of the image is this “burned man” who lies empty and consumed at the edge of the road, and who can be interpreted as a probable metaphorical representation of the poet himself. García-Posada, in the review of this book which I cited earlier, describes this poem adequately in the following observation:

In effect, only nature “saves” man, as the final poem of the book, “La hacedora de lluvia,” illustrates. In it, against the traditional motif of the road, Carnero outlines two contrasting figures: that of the weary, broken traveler, and that of the splendid and fruitful maiden, capable of abundantly nourishing the pilgrim. (iv.)

Note, however, that the same motif of the maiden nourishing the fallen traveler had already appeared in another of the final poems from *Ensayo*, the one entitled “Discurso de la servidumbre voluntaria” (Discourse on Voluntary Servitude), where we read:

Me concedes el barro
en que reside el don de la palabra.
Tu me donnes ta boue,
jeune fille qui apporte le miroir

(*Ensayo*, 201)

You grant me the clay
where the gift of language dwells.
You give me your clay,
young girl bearing the mirror.

(tr. F.H.F.)

This motif appeared precisely in conjunction with the awareness that the poem was insufficient with respect to life, incapable of restoring experience. Thus, a few verses earlier: “Este poema / carece incluso de ese heroísmo placido” (This poem / lacks even that placid heroism); and a few verses further on:

Es un discurso muerto,
el esqueleto ritual que ironiza la fe
en la virtud de la ironía,
embadurnado de sangre para indicar resurrección.

(*Ensayo*, 200)

It's a dead discourse,
the ritual skeleton that ironizes our faith
in the virtue of irony,
smeared with blood to indicate resurrection.

(tr. F.H.F.)

Nonetheless, in spite of these coincidences, this negative vision seems to have been attenuated in the last poem of *Divisibilidad*. Here, there's no "indication" of resurrection. Rather, the feminine image seems to be a sign of the life which is capable of resuscitating the inert body of the traveler:

Y se tiende desnuda como un río
ovillado y redondo, cuyas aguas oscuras
ungen los huesos yertos, la sima de la boca,
y humedecen los ojos apagados.

(*Divisibilidad*, 46)

And she stretches out naked as a round,
coiled river whose dark waters
anoint the rigid bones, the abyss of the mouth,
and moisten the blank eyes.

(tr. F.H.F.)

With this we return to the point of departure. The quotation from Herrera with which *Divisibilidad indefinida* opens has already prepared us for the new interest of the poet, an interest already anticipated by the statements by Carnero collected in Moral and Pereda's anthology: in future developments of the "novísimo" poetics, the author wrote, it will be necessary to achieve the assimilation of the themes of the previous poetry, including the commitment. But this assimilation must always preserve the essential aesthetic imperative of the poetic language. *Ensayo de una teoría de la visión* can thus be considered a voyage of initiation toward language, in which the

objective is the affirmation of that aesthetic imperative. Poetic discourse is conceived as being totally separate from life:

Producir un discurso
ya no es signo de vida, es la prueba mejor
de su terminación.

(*Ensayo*, 208)

To produce a discourse
is no longer a sign of life, it's the clearest proof
of its termination.

(tr. F.H.F.)

Said discourse is, moreover, the exclusive object of the poem:

Mas no perecerá
quien sabe que no hay más que la palabra
al final del viaje.

(207).

But whoever knows
there's only the word at journey's end
will not perish.

(tr. F.H.F.)

But ten years later, now that the reaction against the former poetic forms has become pointless "because there's no longer an enemy," the poetic discourse approaches life, never forgetting of course the aesthetic imperative of language previously noted. In this approach, the discourse no longer simulates the resurrection of experience—"smeared with blood to indicate resurrection"—but rather, in the quietude of experience (that interiorized knowledge of which I have been speaking), it expresses the desire to encompass it.

Notes

1. "Everything's been said; one comes too late," says La Bruyère in the seventeenth century, and Carnero repeats it at the beginning of *Variaciones y figuras*. The preoccupation with finding an additional space in which to situate the new writing is

systematic in literature (Said, 21). Concerning this preoccupation in the first poems by Carnero, see López, pp. 43–56.

2. To perceive a poetic language necessarily implies imagining, in the same space, or in the same instant, a silence or another language (Gerente, 12–13). Hence it is said that to understand the language of a poem, it is necessary to have first heard its silence (Valente, 67).

3. Ortega had manifested great concern for this dramaticity of life which always surpasses our conceptualizations. Thus, after expressing the idea that “every cultural work is an interpretation . . . of life,” he warned of the necessity, nonetheless, of “extirpating from the word ‘Erleben’ (experience) every vestige of intellectualist, ‘idealist’ signification, of mental immanence or consciousness, and to restore to it its terrible original meaning: *something absolutely happens to man*, to wit, being—being and not merely thinking that one is—, existing outside of thought” (45 and 52).

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