

Chapter One

Unamuno and His Generation

1 THE GENERATION OF 1898

Miguel de Unamuno was born in Bilbao, the spiritual and industrial capital of the Spanish Basque country, on September 29, 1864. He spent his childhood and a part of his youth there, and it left an indelible mark on the whole of his life. Unamuno was always profoundly aware of his "Basqueness," even throughout his struggle against the political nationalism prevailing in that region. Far from believing that being Basque and Spanish at the same time were incompatible, he often urged that the Basques become the substance and, as it were, the salt of Spain. By so doing, he ranged himself with a large group of modern Spanish writers who, though born in the peripheral provinces of Spain, have done their best to revive the seemingly lethargic center—Castile.

Unamuno passionately adopted this center, but instead of quietly surrendering to its charm, he tried desperately to rekindle its fire. Whereas for Unamuno the Basque land was "the land of his love," Castile must be called "the land of his pain." The two regions were constantly at war in Unamuno's heart, or, as he saw it, in an unending embrace.

Since Unamuno was born in 1864, it has long been customary to include him in the Spanish literary Generation of 1898. In fact, he has often been considered one of its leaders, and even its most prominent figure. I shall follow here an already well-established usage, but I shall not attempt to explain Unamuno's personality and work entirely on the basis of a generational scheme. For one thing, there are other factors that must be taken into account—the psychological, social, and political, to mention only a few. For another, there are many points on which a writer and his generation are at

cross purposes. I would consider the generational approach useful, then, but with the proviso that some limits be placed upon it.

The existence of the Spanish literary Generation of 1898 raises a few questions, and at least two of them must be answered within the compass of this enquiry. The first concerns the members of the generation; the second, characteristics they reportedly had in common.

Answers to the first of these questions have been legion. Some critics have restricted the Generation of 1898 to a small group of writers whose literary achievements and ideological significance are assured—Unamuno, Antonio Machado (sometimes also his brother, Manuel Machado), Azorín, Pío Baroja, Jacinto Benavente, Ramiro de Maeztu, and Ramón del Valle-Inclán. Others have felt that although this restriction is qualitatively valid, it is not historically so. Azorín and Baroja have convincingly shown that several writers, once famous but now virtually forgotten (Ruiz Contreras, Ciro Bayo, and Silverio Lanza), contributed as much to the literary climate that allows critics to speak of a Generation of 1898 as those writers who have become a standard part of the history of Spanish literature. Vicente Blasco Ibáñez could also be added to those whom Azorín and Pío Baroja have mentioned. In principle there is no reason why a phenomenal literary success should be considered as sufficient reason for excluding an author from even the most sophisticated histories of literature.

As if this disagreement over the number of writers to be properly included in the Generation of 1898 were not enough, the question of whether or not there were subgroups within the generation has often been asked. Some critics maintain, for example, that very definite subgroups—shaped by personal, literary, or political attitudes—persisted for a long time. Other critics counter by saying that there was by no means any feeling of spiritual coordination among the members of the generation as a whole, or of any particular group within it. Connected with the above questions is another: whether, according to strict chronology, it is even legitimate to include Unamuno in a generation whose other important members were several years his junior—seven years for Valle-Inclán; ten, for Azorín and Baroja; and no less than thirteen, for Antonio Machado. Confronted with this last problem, some critics and historians of Spanish literature have suggested the following solution: to consider Unamuno and Angel Ganivet (his junior by one year) members of a generation or semigeneration immediately preceding that of 1898. This would make Unamuno a member of an influential intellectual dyarchy occupying an intermediate position between the leading representatives of the Generation of 1898, and that other group or, as it has sometimes been considered, generation of writers to which Joaquín Costa, Juan Valera, Francisco Giner de los Ríos, Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, and Benito Pérez Galdós belonged.

Answers to the question of common characteristics of the various members of the Generation of 1898 are equally numerous. According to some critics these characteristics were mainly political or, if one prefers, historicopolitical. To these critics the Generation of 1898 was symbolic of the so-called "Disaster" (the loss of the Spanish overseas colonies after the Spanish-American War) and of the desire to meet this political setback in new, or supposedly new, ways by an inner-directing of the entire nation and a rebellion against all the conventional interpretations of its history. Others thought it was a question of purely literary traits. They felt the Generation of 1898 represented one of the great revolutions in the history of Spanish literature. And lastly, others favored traits at once more personal and more general in nature. They spoke of a community of sentiment at first negatively oriented (a dislike of empty rhetoric, of the routinely official Spain, of spiritual narrowness); but gradually this orientation became more positive in intention and in the results achieved. The most positive aspects of this spiritual renewal consisted in a search for authenticity, a rediscovery of the "real country," and a new sensitivity to the beauty of the language. Such a community of sentiment becomes even more clearly defined when contrasted with the intellectual attitudes current in Spain up until this time. It is by no means certain that the members of the Generation of 1898 reacted in the same ways to all the views held by the leading representatives of preceding generations. But since they often considered themselves, for a time at least, as the sole promoters of the spiritual renewal of which I have spoken, it is reasonable to assume that they had at least one view in common: the conviction (soon shaken by Azorín's indefatigable reconstruction of the Spanish literary past) that what they were doing in the field of literature and literary sensibility was something that no one else had done in Spain since the end of the Golden Age.

Our task here is not to comment at length on the above opinions; it will suffice to point out that although all of them contain information of use to us, they also reveal an important shortcoming: their purely schematic character. Their proponents seem to overlook the fact that there is no such thing as an unchanging nucleus of ideas and attitudes in a literary generation. It would be more exact to surmise that for a time a cluster of ideas, attitudes, aspirations, and desires were condensed into a changing core. As a consequence, the relations between a writer and his generation display a great variety of forms. It is quite possible for a writer to be a member of a given generation while moving constantly in and out of it. It is possible for a writer to do his work in a direction that a generation will later adopt as its own. It is also possible for a writer to become a member of a generation that has almost completed its cycle. Under no circumstances can it be said, then, that a literary generation is a perfectly definable historical entity and that all the literary achievements of its

members exactly reflect the same pattern of spiritual ideals and aesthetic norms. The idea of a literary generation is, in short, not one that we can blindly accept, nor is it one that we can completely do without.

If we now apply this more flexible view to the problem of the Spanish literary Generation of 1898, and to the relationship between Unamuno and this generation, we will be able to conclude (1) that no characterization of the traits of the generation will ever be completely satisfactory, and (2) that Unamuno can be said to have been, and not to have been, one of its members. Thus, for example, although Unamuno and Ganivet were several years older than the other writers already mentioned, they were quite close to the cluster of ideas and attitudes usually associated with the Generation of 1898; indeed, they prepared the way for those ideas and attitudes. To be sure, Unamuno's contact with them was intimate, whereas Ganivet's was only peripheral. Because they both championed certain mental attitudes later developed by the other writers, and especially because Unamuno was hailed (according to Azorín) as a highly respected elder master of the group, they cannot be considered apart from the generation that they so decisively molded. On the other hand, with respect to the controversial issues that occupied the most famous Spanish writers of the time (Europeanism versus Hispanism, renovation versus tradition, activity versus stagnation), Unamuno assumed attitudes on occasion widely at variance with those of the other members of his generation. Therefore, whenever we accept the conventional picture of the Generation of 1898 and of Unamuno as one of its charter members, we do so with a number of reservations. And the more we consider Unamuno's activities *en bloc* instead of limiting ourselves to his early work, the more important these reservations seem likely to become. For example, there is something to be said in favor of the existence of an "intermediate generation" between that of 1868 (Joaquín Costa, Juan Valera, etc.) and that of 1898, and in favor of considering Unamuno, because of his date of birth, as one of its members. But in view of the philosophical character of Unamuno's work, and because a substantial part of it developed contemporaneously with the work of Ortega y Gasset and Eugenio d'Ors—who were born almost twenty years after Unamuno—we may even lump these three together in a special group connected with, but in no way dependent upon, the ideals promoted by the great majority of members of the Generation of 1898. So it seems that Unamuno was right, after all, when he claimed that he was "unclassifiable." All this helps to explain an apparently cryptic statement by the Spanish sociologist and novelist, Francisco Ayala: that Unamuno, far from being a continuation or a simple hiatus of Spanish tradition, was a true "period and new paragraph"—an abrupt end as well as a radical departure.

2 THE APPRENTICESHIP YEARS

With all the above in mind I will now trace Unamuno's biography—in particular, his intellectual biography. Above all, I will chart some sectors of his public life. Of course, insistence upon the public aspects does not necessarily mean that they alone are pertinent to an understanding of this philosopher's mind. Unamuno's public life was always deeply rooted in the silence of his inner life, so much so that most of the actions of his public existence emerge as eruptions of that deeper inmost silence. It is unfortunate, moreover, that the profound inner life of a thinker is often beyond the critic's grasp. It is even possible that, like any genuinely private life, Unamuno's will forever remain that famous "secret of the heart" which theologians tell us is revealed only in God's presence. Only by examining what is expressed in his writing—his thoughts, his contradictions, his doubts, his outbursts of joy, of anguish, and of anger—will we be able to catch a glimpse of his secret and his silence.

During the years succeeding Unamuno's birth, Spain gave herself up to such frenzied activity that it was difficult to tell whether the acceleration of her traditionally irregular pulse signaled a new vitality or a new decay. They were years of rebellion and crisis—1868, 1869, and 1870. The various upheavals suffered by the country had not yet coalesced into what would later be called the Second Civil War, fought with extreme fanaticism in the north, particularly when the Carlist siege of Bilbao began in December, 1873. By this time Unamuno, fatherless since his sixth year, was nine. The "first significant event" of his life, he often recalled, was "the explosion of a Carlist bomb" (February 21, 1874) on the roof of an adjacent house. The explosion left that characteristic "smell of powder" in the air around which many of Unamuno's ideas and feelings on Spain were to crystallize. From that moment Unamuno was able to recognize the existence of a tension that was to make itself felt again and again during his life. He realized that it was possible for Spaniards to talk about "the others"—the ones belonging to another faction—while acknowledging that these "others" were no less Spanish than themselves. He observed factions waging a cruel war against one another, and it puzzled him that each one of these factions was composed of true Spaniards in spite of the ideas (or, at times, lack of them) for which they tried to dismember and destroy their enemies. We are today inclined to suspect that underlying these struggles was a complex pattern of social and economic problems. But to Unamuno they presented themselves as a series of obsessions. It was the oppressive and at the same time vitalizing nature of these obsessions that Unamuno sensed during the monotonous days at school, and in the childish tussles he describes in his early autobiography, *Memories of Childhood and Youth (Recuerdos de niñez y de*

mocedad): angry voices blended with sane words; fierce cruelty linked with deep charity, all the confused shreds of the anarchist and absolutist temperament of Spain's immemorial soul.

The basic experience behind his first novel, *Peace in War* (*Paz en la guerra*), was that smell of powder experienced during the siege of Bilbao. Just as the *Iliad* had been the epic of the Trojan wars, Unamuno intended this novel to be an objective epic of Spain's civil struggles during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. But it is not only a historical moment that is narrated in *Peace in War*; it is, according to Unamuno's own confession, "the essence of his people." He does not confine himself to describing a chain of events; he means to develop all the implications of a collective experience. That is why this book remained for a long time the major source of Unamuno's later interpretations of the Spanish soul. It is also the first complete example of his search for peace in the midst of continual war. In fact, for Unamuno the explosion of the bomb in Bilbao was the first of a long series of Spanish explosions that he was to witness; and in the center of the last and most violent of them all—the 1936–1939 Civil War—he was to die.

A year after the explosion, his primary education finished, Unamuno entered the Instituto Vizcaíno of Bilbao. We know little about him during these "high-school" years (1875–1880), but it seems that the one experience that dwarfed all others was the discovery, in his fervid and random reading, of an entirely new world: the world of ideas. He began to love poetry—the poetry of poets and the poetry of philosophers. A detailed examination of the authors read by Unamuno in these years would be most enlightening; here I may only mention that he avidly read Jaime Balmes—one of the promoters of the nineteenth-century neoscholastic revival, and a writer whom he later attacked; Juan Donoso Cortés—the leading representative of a staunch traditionalism; Antonio Trueba, and a host of Spanish Romantic poets. I suspect that he spent a long time reading and rereading his own first poems, an activity he might have defended later by claiming that if they were not original (as most probably they were not at this age) from a literary point of view, they might be original from a personal point of view—originality being for him not a question of craftsmanship, but a question of strong feeling and sincere belief.

When the completion of his "high-school" years in 1880 ended his residence in Bilbao, he went on to Madrid for university studies, which occupied him until 1884. There he plunged feverishly into a turmoil of philosophical ideas and religious doubts; and there, like his hero, Pachico, in *Peace in War*; he passed his days "hatching dreams." It appears that Madrid was not much to his liking. Unamuno, the native son of a provincial town, at that time still more rural than urban, was probably ill at ease in a city like Madrid which, while already proud of her meager cosmopolitanism, was a thousand miles from that universality which Unamuno felt to be the exact opposite of cos-

mopolitanism. Nor was Unamuno as greatly influenced by university life as Spanish students were later to be when, with Ortega y Gasset and others, the universities and particularly the University of Madrid gained influence and prestige. Probably more significant and influential than Unamuno's university life was his own voracious and diverse reading and his contact with the writings and the personalities of some of the dominant intellectual figures in the Spanish capital. The intellectual personalities then in ascendancy, or long since firmly established, spanned several generations, from those who, like Francisco Pi y Margall—the highly respected left-wing historian and political writer—had been born in 1821, to men like Joaquín Costa—the versatile man of letters—born in 1846. The same time span also included a more compact generation, that is, one of men born about the year 1838. This so-called Generation of 1868 included those deans of Republicanism, Emilio Castelar and Nicolás Salmerón, the educators Francisco Giner de los Ríos and the writers Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, José María de Pereda, Juan Valera, and Benito Pérez Galdós. Most of these men shared a desire to rejuvenate Spain, a desire that was as apparent in the skeptical and somewhat snobbish accents of Valera as it was in the trenchant language of Costa. Numerous controversies took place in this connection. The “Krausists” and the “Catholics” opposed each other in the most important of these controversies, each side representing not only different ideological currents and worldviews, but also, and perhaps above all, different temperaments. Unamuno picked his way among the spiritual peaks of his day, now in sympathy with one, now with another. To be sure, some temperaments attracted him more than others. He chose at that time the liberal, europeanizing group, and sided with the enterprising renovators who, guided by Costa, meant to “locke the Cid's tomb with seven keys.” These renovators intended to put a stop to Spain's quixotic antics and to her unchecked “Cidismo.” All this was very far from Unamuno's later thoughts on Spain's past, but nevertheless it freed him from the conventional, shallow views held by the extreme “traditionalists.” At any rate, this was the intellectual climate of Madrid between 1880 and 1884 which influenced Unamuno more than the university ever could.

After four years of study, of silence, of solitary meditation, “wrapped in one's own thoughts,” of debates in student rooms, at the Círculo Vasconavarro and the Ateneo, of long walks (Unamuno was already, and remained until his death, an indefatigable stroller), he received his doctoral degree and returned to the Basque provinces and an outwardly uneventful life. With his return to Bilbao and his renewed residence in the Basque countryside between 1884 and 1891, past experiences began to arrange themselves meaningfully for him. He earned his living by giving private lessons, found time to read extensively, to participate in discussions at the Sociedad Bilbaína, and to walk for long hours through the streets. He soon became aware of a

historical horizon that would serve perfectly as the setting for a narrative. He focused his interest on the Second Carlist War as symbolic of a chronic phase of Spanish life. While he gave lessons, wrote unsigned articles for a Socialist newspaper, and prepared for his professional competitive examinations, he collected an enormous fund of anecdotal information about the war from the lips of survivors and by a continual reëxamination of his own childhood memories. With this information at hand, he tried to reconstruct the climate of the war as faithfully as possible. As I have said, he wanted to write a truly novelistic epic. Outlined as early as 1890, *Peace in War*, at first a short story, was not published in book form until 1897. In order to write the book, which was to become a long novel, Unamuno needed a spiritual and economic tranquility that Bilbao, for all its “charm,” could not offer. Unamuno’s literary labors needed new soil for their fruition; this was to be Salamanca, in the very heart of Old Castile.

3 THE CRITICAL YEARS

Unamuno went then to Madrid, and spent several months taking various competitive examinations for a teaching position. After several attempts at various positions, he won a chair of Greek language and literature in Salamanca. Valera and Menéndez y Pelayo, the defenders of two opposing points of view—the “modern” and the “traditional”—were among his examiners. These examinations took place in the spring of 1891, and it was then that Unamuno met Ganivet in whom he recognized a restless spirit akin to his own. Both were deeply involved in a quest for an authentically Spanish system of thought unaffected by external europeanizing influences and untarnished by Spanish “traditionalism.” If in Ganivet this concern was disguised beneath a mask of ironic bitterness, in Unamuno, a more positive and more vital person, the concern was readily visible, based as it was upon an aggressively polemical nature. Both, however, drew on similar experiences; both were convinced that a Spanish philosophy could be distilled from Spanish life, rather than culled from the books on library shelves; both felt that, as Ganivet had written, “the most important philosophy for any country is one native to it, even though inferior to the able imitations of foreign philosophies.”

Later in 1891 Unamuno moved to Salamanca, an event that marked for him the beginning of a new epoch. Salamanca came to mean more than an administrative position to Unamuno. His residence in this quiet city helped him to discover himself, his possibilities, and, in a sense, his limitations. There were few cities that could have provided a more perfect setting for his type of thinking than Salamanca, so heavy with silence and history, its *agora*

interlaced by fields, and its immense plains set under high mountains. Here was a city in which to discover immutable truths beneath the transitory anecdotes, the living bedrock of “eternal tradition” beneath the continual upheavals of history. In his life-long tenure at Salamanca there was, moreover, a decisive period for Unamuno; it came between the publication of *On Purism (En torno al casticismo)* in 1895 and *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho (Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho)* in 1905. The zenith of this period was the year 1897. He had experienced a great intellectual crisis in Madrid, but the one in Salamanca was to be more profound, more emotional, more intimate, and more religious. Even assuming that Unamuno’s religious crisis had been less profound or less sudden than Antonio Sánchez Barhudo has detailed it, there is little doubt that a profound experience, or series of experiences, gripped Unamuno’s soul. At any rate, there is a definite change in tone in his writing before and after 1897. Before 1897, and particularly between 1895 and 1897, we find Unamuno in a pitched battle with “purism” and traditionalism, which he declared to be empty and conventional. Local tradition, he argued, must be discarded in favor of universality. Repetition must give way to renovation; Spain must be prodded from the bog that held it fast. After 1897, however, and especially between 1897 and 1905, we find Unamuno absorbed in a tense and painful attempt at innerdirection. Here the *Three Essays (Tres ensayos)* of 1900, with their passionate inquiry into the problem—or rather, mystery—of personality, individual and collective, is a salient landmark. Unamuno’s “Inward!” replaces his cry of “Forward!” Don Quixote replaces Don Alonso Quijano; and the stuff of dreams, no longer a stumbling block, becomes the very substance of existence.

It is true that there seems to have been some preparation for these new views during the two or three years preceding the “great crisis.” After all, though Unamuno defended—before 1897—the importance of forms and symbols, and the stuff of which, he said at that time, the world was constructed, he also maintained that the former possessed “feelings” and the latter, “life.” Therefore, the name, the incarnation of a concept must “repossess itself in the permanent, eternal realm”; forms and symbols were no longer to be considered attributes of an intelligible world, but of a more substantial universe—a sensuous *and* an eternal one. That is why the universality, which Unamuno opposed to cosmopolitanism, belongs to the “eternal tradition” that exists beneath the surface of routine conventions. But his ideas on the same questions became much more trenchant, and in many ways more searching, after 1897. If Unamuno underwrote tradition at this time, it was as something quite unlike that seclusion-within-one’s-self practiced and preached by the traditionalists. For Unamuno, “seclusion within one’s self” (*encerrarse*) meant a definite “opening inward” (*abrirse hacia sí mismo*). Already in a small

way before 1897, but much more after this year, he felt the need to "accumulate continually in order continually to pour forth, to empty one's self," or, as he once described it, "draw in in order to expand" (*concentrarse para irradiar*).

In the light of this process we can understand how Unamuno moved from an eager receptivity to outside forces to a ceaseless pouring out from within, from the apparent "realistic objectivity" and accumulation of detail in *Peace in War* to the "critical subjectivity," the sparseness and whimsicality of the novel *Love and Pedagogy* (1902). This is an abrupt change in tone, but we must not forget that it is but a modulation of the same melody that permeated all of Unamuno's work and life.

4 UNIVERSITY AND POLITICS

During these years Unamuno's public life seemed a well-regulated routine of lectures at the university, conversations, discussions, and walks. These occupations were practice for the more resounding activities of the days and weeks he spent in Madrid, where he quickened the pulse of literary and political gatherings in cafés, in the newspaper and literary review offices, and at the Ateneo. Contact with the emotional atmosphere of Madrid soon drew him into politics, but from his first visits to Madrid as a respected writer until his death, his manner of participation in politics was ever characteristically his own. Unamuno never belonged to any one political party; he was too pleased and too proud of being a heretic to all parties—and all regimes. He felt the need continually to disagree, and he saw himself in the role of "spiritual agitator," for at that time he was convinced that what Spain, and Europe, needed most was a quickening of the pulse and a stirring of the soul.

He became still more of a political heretic in 1914, after his dismissal from the post of rector in the University of Salamanca. The government declared that politics and the teaching profession were incompatible. To this pronouncement Unamuno countered by saying that they were, in fact, the same thing; for whereas politics is teaching on a national level, teaching is talking politics on a personal level. And to those who thought that this was only a paradox, he replied that paradoxes could not be dispensed with when it was necessary to jolt an indolent nation awake.

It has often been said that Unamuno was an impassioned personalist in his philosophy as well as in his politics, and that whereas the first is acceptable, the second is intolerable. This view overlooks two points; first, that it is unfair to expect a complete divorce of thought and action in Unamuno; and second, that his concern with the personal element in politics had its strict counterpart in his philosophy. Both were manifestations of one and the same attitude. At all times this "personalistic" feeling pervaded Unamuno's political

life. When he expressed, as he was often to do, antimonarchist sentiments, it was never as an attack on the concept of monarchy and the royal prerogative as such. He attacked one monarchy and one king only, and he felt that this was proof of his predilection for concrete realities. This explains why Unamuno was always considered (and often angrily denounced) as an unstable political element: he was not a Monarchist, but this did not make of him, strictly speaking, a Republican. He was at all times what he wished to be: the dissenting element of all political parties, the troublemaker in all political rallies.

After Unamuno's dismissal as rector of Salamanca, his political activity increased, and he undertook two violent campaigns: one against King Alfonso XIII; the other, against the Central Powers and in defense of the Allied cause in World War I. It is imperative to remember, however, that politics never occupied Unamuno entirely, and that beneath it—often nourishing it—his literary and spiritual life continued as before. Between the publication of *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho* in 1905 and the publication of his profoundest work, *The Tragic Sense of Life*, in 1913, the channel of his personal inner life broadened and deepened. We have as proof the publication of *Poems* (1907), of *Memories of Childhood and Youth* (1911), of *Rosary of Lyric Sonnets (Rosario de Sonetos líricos)* (1911), and of the volume entitled *Through Portugal and Spain (Por tierras de Portugal y España)* (1911). This last book is characteristic of his manner of travel and observation, for he appears at once captivated by the circumstantial and seduced by the eternal. These trips through Portugal and Spain thrilled Unamuno to the point of ecstasy, and his myopic perusal of France, Italy, and Switzerland contrasts sharply with the penetration he leveled at his own country and that of his "Portuguese brothers." Baroja wrote that Unamuno saw little or nothing in his European travels because of his fierce intransigence and his intellectual blindness. Baroja's remark is true, but only in part. For Unamuno's blindness was largely fostered by a desire not to allow his observation of foreign lands to distract him from the passionate contemplation of his own. At any rate, although we may complain that Unamuno was not objective enough when he looked north of the Pyrenees, we must thank him for having discovered so much south of that mountain range.

By 1914, Unamuno had become the undisputed mentor of many young Spaniards. This does not mean that he was always listened to with reverence; indeed, he was often violently opposed. But his towering figure made itself felt in the arena of Spanish thought, and there vied for leadership with the other outstanding figures of his time. His chief competitors were Ortega y Gasset, who had been publishing in newspapers since 1902 and had sent his *Meditations on the "Quixote" (Meditaciones del Quijote)* to press by 1914; and Eugenio d'Ors, who began publishing his *Commentaries (Glosas)* in 1905. The writing of these two differed considerably from Unamuno's both in style and content. Ortega offered a continental manner that was more than a servile imitation of

Europe, and d'Ors a twentieth-century viewpoint that was infinitely more appealing than an irrational exaltation of our Age. Because of the order, lucidity, and harmony that they proffered, their work was more acceptable to many than Unamuno's. Small wonder that there were frequent displays of enmity among the three philosophers and their followers. But the enmity gradually subsided as it became apparent that where one was weak another was doubly strong and that, in all fairness, none of the three was expendable. If some signal issue had been overlooked by Unamuno it was certain to appear in an essay by Ortega or a commentary by d'Ors, or vice versa; thus, by supplementing his work with theirs, they exposed Unamuno's inevitable, yet fruitful, limitations.

5 THE EXILE

This routine of academic lectures, travels and domestic life, discussions and political sallies, continued until 1924 when Unamuno burst more loudly than ever upon the public's ear, acquiring a notoriety that enormously enlarged the number and variety of his readers. His opposition to Alfonso XIII reached new extremes as a result of the Primo de Rivera *coup d'état* in 1923. His audience with the king, interpreted by some as a desertion of the antimonarchist ranks, merely exemplified, as he pointed out in a tumultuous meeting at the Ateneo and in the *El Liberal* offices a few days after, his unswerving fixity of purpose. It had only served to reinforce an opposition that reached titanic proportions when the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera was sanctioned by royal decree. Since the physical annihilation of famous opponents was not yet customary in European politics, Primo de Rivera's reaction to this ideological insurrection was at first fumbling and in the end rather mild. For some time after the advent of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship, Unamuno continued to voice his protests, and after his exile to Fuerteventura, one of the Canary Islands, they reached an ever larger public. He came to feel that this exile was the most important event in the political life of twentieth-century Spain, and he swore to do his best to destroy his now deadly enemy—a personal and, therefore, according to one of his paradoxes, a universal one.

Unamuno's contrariness during his transfer to the place of exile would provide a book of anecdotes. The anecdotes, unimportant in themselves, are nevertheless a measure of his warlike attitude toward the dictatorship, and above all toward the dictator. He continued to write and speak against the king and Primo de Rivera from Fuerteventura, and when the editor of the French newspaper *Le Quotidien*, to which Unamuno had contributed, arranged his escape from the island, he went to France in voluntary exile, to continue there his implacable opposition. A pardon arrived, by coincidence or political calculation, on June 25, 1924, the same day that Unamuno left for

Paris after less than a year of residence in Fuerteventura. On his arrival in Cherbourg, his private war with the dictatorship assumed worldwide proportions for the first time; Max Scheler mentioned it as one event that helped blacken the spiritual countenance of Europe in the twenties. Unamuno's antagonism had several motives, but the foremost of these was the personal—and, again, according to his much-used formula, the universal—recuperation of Spain. He raised a persistent voice, speaking and writing in Spain's behalf and in his own.

Given certain inevitable differences, Number 2, rue de la Pérouse, in Paris, was not unlike the pension where Unamuno lived during his student days in Madrid. The occupant was a student of supreme caliber, receiving visits from noted or dull celebrities. But there was little satisfaction in it all. To Unamuno the Paris of the twenties seemed to be a curtain that blocked his view of the Sierra de Gredos, which towered over Salamanca. Neither the spirited gatherings at La Rotonde—the famous Montparnasse café recently demolished to provide room for a moving-picture theatre—nor the interminable walks through streets teeming with beauty and history lessened the feeling that Paris was an obstacle in his path. He continued to publish in the European and South American press, his fight against the dictatorship never wavered, but his displeasure with the Spanish political situation inhibited any full cultivation of his religious and poetic spirit for a number of years. But his true vocation returned when he moved south to Hendaye within sight of the Spanish countryside across the border. No doubt this authentic vocation was more central than his political outbursts and manifestoes, or the *Free Pages* (*Hojas libres*) he published in collaboration with Eduardo Ortega y Gasset and Vicente Blasco Ibáñez. To him his arrival in Hendaye was like the end of an exile. In *The Agony of Christianity* (*La agonía del cristianismo*) (1925) and in *How a Novel Is Made* (*Cómo se hace una novela*) (1927) there were cries of desperation; in Hendaye the desperation mingled with hope, and their union produced the experiences that with the advent of the Republic, were manifested in *Saint Emmanuel the Good, Martyr* (*San Manuel Bueno, mártir*) (1933) and *Brother Juan or The World Is a Stage* (*El hermano Juan o el mundo es teatro*) (1934). The stay in Hendaye was a genuine spiritual resurrection.

6 THE RETURN OF THE EXILE

Externally Unamuno's life in Hendaye was much like the one he had led in Paris. There were informal gatherings at the Grand Café, interviews, and many long walks. With the fall of the dictatorship, in 1930, Unamuno was finally at liberty to direct his steps toward Spain, and on the 9th of February he crossed the border and entered Irún. The nation was wild with jubilation now. Beside

themselves, the vast majority of the Spaniards cheered the oncoming Republic, but not all with the same purity of intention. As often happens, many lay in ambush, intent upon its quick destruction and the proclamation of any of the politically extreme ideologies that must mean the eventual death of any truly democratic regime. In this period of exaltation and easy optimism, a bloodless revolution seemed possible. But not even the welcoming speeches on his arrival at Irún, the happiness and enthusiasm of the people, nor the whole pages dedicated in all the newspapers to the return of Spain's most famous exile, could make the hero of all their rejoicing forget the two points that had been his trademark: his concern with "eternal Spain" and his fundamentally heterodox approach to each idea and each person. The motto "God, Country, and Law" (*Dios, Patria y Ley*)* which Unamuno uttered, once across the frontier, may have expressed antimonarchist feelings, but it was not yet, as many had expected, an assertion of Republican faith. Even before the Republic was proclaimed on April 14, 1931, Unamuno, who had done more than most to help realize that day, had begun his opposition, as much the political heretic as ever.

The return to Salamanca on February 11, 1930, was quite another matter. His home was there where the silence, which in the final analysis had nourished the best things of his existence, awaited his return. Any biography of Unamuno which presumes to investigate the core of his personality would do well to devote more space to his return to Salamanca than to either his entrance into Irún or the political demonstrations in Madrid in early May, 1930, on the occasion of his arrival in the capital and his famous address there to the Ateneo. In this speech he called the collaborators of the dictatorship to account, coined sharp phrases such as the well-known "Not *up* to the king, but from the king on down,"† and struggled to outline the political future. The cheers with which young members of other generations than his acclaimed him, and the homage of the press, gave the impression that Unamuno had become a full-fledged political leader. He seemed drawn along by the rapid, almost feverish succession of events. But in his heart he remained a poet and a thinker, an indefatigable seeker of the eternal. He raised his voice in Madrid, but only in the silence of Salamanca was he spiritually at home.

7 THE LAST YEARS

The proclamation of the Republic one year later found Unamuno unchanged: longing for the eternal and still a victim of the moment. As rector, Unamuno

* Trans. note: which echoed, unfaithfully, the traditional phrase: "God, Country, and King" (*Dios, Patria y Rey*).

† Trans. note: "No *hasta*, sino *desde* . . ."

opened the academic year of 1931–1932 at the University of Salamanca in the name of “Her Imperial and Catholic Majesty, Spain,” thereby seeming to announce his opposition to the Republic, even if we take “Catholic” to mean here “universal” rather than a definite politico-religious attribute. What he really attacked, however, was the Republic’s haggling over trivialities. The Republic was so absorbed with internecine struggles that it had neither the time nor the disposition for an examination of its own conscience. According to Unamuno this was the first, most important challenge of all—the key to all other problems. He felt it was even a key to the solution and management of what today has become the greatest single preoccupation of all governments, regardless of ideology: the national economy. From 1932 until his death, Unamuno’s major preoccupations were the misgivings awakened by a growing willfulness in the masses, and the fear of a rapid spiritual and geographical disintegration of Spain. His articles in *El Sol* and *Ahora* became tinged with bitterness because now no one listened to him, or rather, because he thought that just when his work was beginning to bear fruit in the spirit of a new generation, his words fell on deaf ears. But in spite of deep concern and bitterness he did not lose hope. Repeatedly he exercised those same tactics that had served him well against the dictatorship. Times, however, had changed. He was accused by some of “selling out” to the enemy, he was curtly asked by almost all to define his position—the only thing he could not do. He had always felt it his mission to maintain an undefined—which by no means meant an eclectic—position, and to erase the boundaries between himself and his enemies. People who asked Unamuno to clarify his political position forgot that, as he had often said, he counted his own votes and they were never unanimous.

Finally Unamuno’s merit was officially recognized. In 1934, at a magnificent celebration in his honor, he was formally retired from his chair and made “Perpetual Rector” of Salamanca. In 1935, he was made an honorary citizen of the Spanish Republic. These festivities marked the close of an animated era that had included his speeches, edged with grave injunctions and filled with incisive attack, before the Constitutional Congress. The tone of his farewell speech as university professor was more subdued. By now Unamuno realized that the agitation he had fostered, and the pain and strife he had decreed, had reached a danger point and needed modulation. At a time when all over Spain there were ominous signs of the impending Civil War and waves of violent disagreement, the renowned sower of fruitful discord began to preach harmony. In the first pages of *The Agony of Christianity* he had written: “My Spain, now mortally wounded, is perhaps destined to die a bloody death on a cross of swords.” In *Life of Don Quixote and Sancho* he had written: “Yes, what we need is a civil war.” But now Spain was threatened not by a civil war, a mere bloodletting, but by what Unamuno with great foresight

had once called an “uncivil war”; one in which, unlike those he had imagined, there would never be peace in the combatants’ hearts.

The life remaining to Unamuno, a towering solitary figure, will always be dwarfed by the magnitude of the war that had begun in July 1936. On the last day of this same year, Unamuno died amid communiqués of war, as did two of his great European contemporaries, Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud, three years later.

For a time after his death he was called variously, traitor, weakling, and turncoat. He had hailed the military rebellion, then he had courageously challenged it; the most ardent supporters of the two factions had reasons to speak in anger against him. But those who have taken counsel with the man and his works will realize that he was always true to himself. To be sure, the little we know of his words and deeds during the last six months of his life is both baffling and distressing. But the question is whether it could be otherwise, for everything is baffling and distressing when it comes from the center of a maelstrom of cataclysmic violence. As if destroyed by lightning, Unamuno disappeared in the midst of this historical whirlwind. For a time, his voice was submerged. Some expected that it would remain so forever. They did not realize just how serious Unamuno had been in his intention to make each line he wrote vibrant with the life that was his own.