

THE EARLY RECEPTION OF MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO IN ENGLAND, 1907–1939

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the name of Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936) was well known not only in Spain but in England and the rest of Europe as well. None the less, he never managed to cross the divide from being a name to being an active presence in the English literary world, one who was used and learnt from by English writers. In part this was due to his being Spanish and thus pertaining to a literary culture whose contemporary productions did not have a recent tradition of being actively responded to.¹ As a country of which J. B. Trend observed in 1921 that ‘the idea of Spain still possessed by many people might be compared with that of a Spaniard who knew Great Britain only through the novels of Walter Scott’,² Spain was not for most of this period perceived by many British people as a source of stimulating and worthwhile contemporary literary endeavour. This effacement of contemporary Spanish culture takes its place in a longer history of Protestant triumphalism and English disavowal of the claims of the Other. The earlier Romantic enthusiasm for Spain may even be considered to be an appropriation of certain aspects of the country to satisfy contemporary cultural appetites, rather than a committed attempt to appreciate or understand its culture. Unamuno provides an interesting case study of the negotiation of contemporary Spanish cultural material at this time: how this blockage operated, how a Spanish author almost overcame this lack of interest, but how he was never adequately discussed.

Although poet, dramatist, and novelist as well as a writer of discursive prose, it was largely as the last that Unamuno gained a reputation in England. Contributing towards this were his other extra-literary activities, which gave him repute as a spokesman for social justice and intellectual freedom. He was dismissed in 1914 from his post as Rector of the University of Salamanca on political grounds and in 1924 the dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera had him exiled to the Canary Islands. National and international protests saw this restriction lifted, yet instead of returning to the Spanish mainland he went to Hendaye, in France, just across the Spanish border, where he remained for six years, further enhancing his European status as a martyr. In 1931, after a triumphant return to Spain, Unamuno was elected to the newly constituted Spanish parliament, where he proceeded to lambast some of the features of the Second Republic as vigorously as he had those of the régime of Primo de Rivera. This high public profile played a large part in the dissemination of Unamuno’s name, so that it was not as an obscure foreigner that he came to England in 1936 to be awarded honorary degrees by the Universities of London, Oxford, and Cambridge.

In one of Unamuno’s first literary appearances in England, the terms in which he was to be appropriated to a discourse of ethics rather than to that of wider literary

¹ For further evidence of this, see my articles ‘The Early Reception of Ortega y Gasset in England, 1920–1940’, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 26 (1990), 75–88; ‘Harley Granville-Barker and the Response to Spanish Theater, 1920–1932’, *Comparative Drama*, 25 (1991), 129–46; ‘Material Conditions for Reception: Spanish Literature in England, 1920–1940’, *New Comparison*, 15 (1993), 100–09; ‘Negotiating Spanish Poets in England: 1920–1940’, *Dedalus: Revista Portuguesa de Literatura Comparada*, 3–4 (1993–94), 155–68.

² J. B. Trend, ‘Pérez de Ayala and the Spanish Novel’, *Nation and Athenaeum*, 9 July 1921, p. 550.

issues can already be seen. In an anonymous booklet put out by the Spanish and Portuguese Church Aid Society, entitled *A Spanish Scholar and a Working Man* (1907), Unamuno was presented as one of the principal proofs of this evangelical Protestant group's conviction that religious change was possible in arch-Catholic Spain. He appeared to be a type of 'Protestant' Catholic, one who taught the importance of faith and a personal relationship with God in place of a relationship mediated through the Church hierarchy, a conclusion encouraged by his support for an active rather than a passive approach to faith, well expressed in, for example, his later novel *La tía Tula* (1921), where it is stated that:

La oración no es tanto algo que haya de cumplirse a tales y cuales horas, en sitio apartado y recogido y en postura compuesta, cuanto es un modo de hacerlo todo votivamente, con todo el alma y viviendo en Dios. Oración ha de ser el comer, y el beber, y el pasearse, y el jugar.³

Havelock Ellis was also to write briefly of Unamuno at this time in his *The Soul of Spain* (1908), perhaps the most widely read of all books on Spain in this period (it was reprinted in 1908, 1909, 1911, 1915, 1920, 1923, 1926 (twice), 1927, 1929, and again in 1937). Towards the end of what is a lengthy book, whose attractiveness to the reading public may be supposed to lie not only in Ellis's reputation as a sexologist but in the earlier, more general chapters, there is a chapter on Spanish literature, in which he mentions 'a writer who to-day occupies a more distinguished place in Spanish letters than any', whom he goes on to call 'one of the most brilliant of Spanish writers and a penetrative critic'. The one book of Unamuno's which Ellis mentions is *La vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* (1905), which he indicates 'is a curious attempt to present an essay of Spanish philosophy expressed in terms of the two figures who together sum up the whole attitude of the Spanish mind towards life'.⁴

However, although a brief review of a volume of Angel Ganivet's and Unamuno's open letters to each other, *El porvenir de España*, appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 1913,⁵ the English literary world did not begin to notice the members of the so-called Generation of 1898 in any detail until after the First World War. In this it followed more general post-war tendencies, for the period was more receptive to foreign writing as a whole than it had been before. The reasons for this, in brief, have to do with the exposure to continental Europe the war had brought, as well as the determination on the part of many people to understand the continent better so that the jingoism and ignorance that had fuelled the war might be lessened. With respect to the specific case of Spanish writers, the usual procedure was for British Hispanists to introduce them in the literary organs of the period, then for translations to appear, accompanied by assessments of them by general reviewers or writers knowledgeable about Spain for some reason or another. Where a writer's work was assessed only by Hispanists, however positively, penetration was limited: where a writer's work came to be assessed by non-Hispanists, by general reviewers, or reviewers of areas such as fiction, philosophy, poetry, and so forth, this was a sign that greater penetration was taking place. Recourse to expertise in literary journals becomes a sign of marginalization, so that, paradoxically, the further away from the text a reviewer's position becomes, the more positively may be viewed the reception taking place. The knowledgeable authoritative of the expert becomes less

³ Miguel de Unamuno, *La tía Tula* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1985), p. 63.

⁴ Havelock Ellis, *The Soul of Spain* (London: Constable, 1908), p. 401.

⁵ Anon., 'El porvenir de España', *TLS*, 7 August 1913, p. 332.

significant than the generalist's response and the speculation of the interested observer.

This post-war awareness of Unamuno began in 1919 when the Hispanist Aubrey Bell published an article in the *Spectator* in which what were to become familiar comments were made on Unamuno's methods: 'He agrees with no one but himself, and not with himself for very long.' Despite this disarming observation Bell was extremely positive towards Unamuno's restless vigour: 'He is a modern Don Quixote, tilting against the windmills of every rigid and stilted system [. . .] laughing down tyranny or intolerance wherever he finds it.'⁶

From this date, references to Unamuno begin to proliferate in the more open literary atmosphere of post-war Britain. In 1921 Trend reviewed the novel *La tía Tula* and *Tres novelas ejemplares y un prólogo* (1920) in the *Nation and Athenaeum*, the latter book also being handled knowledgeably by Salvador de Madariaga (at the time resident in Britain) in the *TLS*. Although generally favourable towards Unamuno, Trend was unable to find much enthusiasm for the books he was examining, for he was out of sympathy with Unamuno's procedure as a novelist. While Unamuno's may have been 'the only strong voice raised in protest, the only man who writes unflinchingly what everyone is thinking', this was apparently insufficient in a novel where the author 'despises what might be called "tactile values"'.⁷ Just as voices were shortly to be raised against Aldous Huxley, so here Trend found Unamuno's characters to inhabit a world of ideas and abstractions, rather than one which he felt should be the proper domain of fiction, a world of sensation and material or social experience.

For Madariaga, however, it was precisely this aspect of Unamuno's work that was interesting, in large measure because it was so distinct from other contemporary writing: 'Modern novels tend to spread out in surface; his develop in depth.' The weighting of the spatial metaphor here is calculated, for 'depth' is also more serious, more profound, more meaningful. The constant verbosity and bandying about of ideas by the characters suggested not paucity of lived reality but rather the reverse: 'Their speech is no explanation of their actions but rather action itself.'⁸ Although inserted into literary life in Britain, Madariaga was the only critic who appreciated Unamuno as a novelist, which does indicate that his own 'horizon of expectations' was substantially different from those of the people with whom he came into contact. He was more able to appreciate in Unamuno the forceful attempt to penetrate the material surface in order to render knowledge of, and to undergo an encounter with, the processes played out in language by which that surface is refracted and reshaped. Madariaga did not question the idealist assumptions of such a method, but accepted that certain interiorized concepts and values preceded the material, cited as 'local colour'. More importantly, the fact that Madariaga should posit a distinction between Unamuno's novels and the majority of those then being published suggests that Unamuno was out of step with the fictional customs and taste of the day. And so it proves; Unamuno's novels never made much headway in Britain at all.

⁶ Anon. [A. F. G. Bell], 'A Spanish Essayist', *Spectator*, 24 May 1919, p. 667.

⁷ J. B. Trend, 'Unamuno as Novelist', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 19 November 1921, pp. 316, 318.

⁸ Anon. [S. de Madariaga], 'A Spanish Novelist', *TLS*, 28 July 1921, p. 483.

Only one was translated into English in this period (*Mist* (1929), first published in Spain in 1914 as *Niebla*), and it had a mixed reception. V. S. Pritchett reviewed it for the *Spectator* and called it ‘a very bad novel’, going on to note that ‘its characters are all lay figures. Its plot runs along fitfully like an ingenious but underwound clockwork engine’. According to Pritchett, it was redeemed only by the fact that ‘Unamuno’s humour and irony are as good as his metaphysics are exciting’.⁹ For the popular novelist and historian Edgar Holt, writing in the *Bookman*, the novel was not the best choice of book to be turned into English, and it was damned with the faint praise of ‘witty and clever and pleasantly different from the usual conventions of fiction it is not to be compared with some of his other novels’. Although Holt suggests that he is familiar with the Spaniard’s work (and many years later he demonstrated his knowledge of Spain in his book *The Carlist Wars in Spain* (London: Putnam, 1967)), he did not mention what these ‘other novels’ might be. What Holt sees as worthwhile in the novel under discussion is that for Unamuno ‘life is not the mean and sordid business that so many other writers have found it [. . .] something to make one feel that human nature, for all its faults and follies, is worthwhile’.¹⁰

Here Holt was gathering together Unamuno’s fictional works with his non-fiction, thus revealing the danger to which the Spaniard’s work was exposed. Writers who were enthusiastic about his discursive prose (already known at this time in England) became either irritated with his fiction or subsumed it into the entire body of his work, so that the novels became yet more texts of Unamunian philosophical speculation and meditation upon life. Accordingly, for Trend in the *TLS* in 1925, Unamuno’s ‘novels and short stories are full of beautiful thoughts, like *La tía Tula*’. This scarcely edifying observation was followed by a sentence that is of interest not only for what it tells us of the vagueness of Trend’s ideas on Unamuno but also for what it says about the very uneven standards of critical reviewing in the 1920s: ‘And there was that other novel of his in which the hero came to ask the author what was to happen to him, much as in Pirandello’s play or the earlier German play, in which the same thing happens.’¹¹ Nowhere in the long review does the name of ‘that other novel’, *Niebla*, appear. Neither does Trend offer an opinion about ‘that other novel’, and nor is it made clear that Pirandello’s (well known in England) *Sei personaggi in cerca d’autore* (1921) post-dated Unamuno’s novel by seven years. Trend’s usual care and enthusiasm for his material is shown to have been somewhat nonplussed by Unamuno’s fiction: it was not enough to be a Hispanist or to have contextual knowledge of Unamuno for his novels to appeal to a British reader.

The socialist politician and journalist Mary Hamilton was another who approached the novel with a due awareness of Unamuno’s ‘distinction, in other fields’, only to find herself put off when he began to play with the nature of authorial control. Despite enjoying three-quarters of the book, once ‘the fatal idea that this is somehow not a novel, but a nivola, takes possession; when Unamuno begins to elaborate on the string of Pirandello, I find myself bored’. It was this, in the final analysis, that irritated her even more than the ‘passages of [. . .] vague generalising talk about “women”’,¹² which none of the other (masculine) critics objected to.

⁹ Anon. [V. S. Pritchett], ‘Two Petulant Basques’, *Spectator*, 4 May 1929, pp. 703–04.

¹⁰ Edgar Holt, ‘Miguel de Unamuno’, *Bookman*, 80 (1931), 158–59 (p. 159).

¹¹ Anon. [J. B. Trend], ‘Unamuno’, *TLS*, 10 December 1925, p. 859.

¹² Mary Hamilton, ‘New Fiction’, *Time and Tide*, 10 May 1929, p. 558.

The only really favourable handling of *Mist* was that of Orlo Williams, a regular reviewer of fiction for the *TLS*, although once again one can see a tendency to slip from a consideration of questions relating to the book's status as a work of fiction, which is touched on, to a consideration of the novel as something 'to be read not for its episodes, but for its dialogues and its reflections'. Once again it became subsumed into Unamuno's other work: 'There develops a complete sceptical philosophy of existence, with many entertaining digressions.'¹³

Disembowelled in this way and not adequately faced up to by its critics, Unamuno's output as a generator of self-conscious artefacts that played with literary genres went largely unappreciated in England. In part, the sheer verve and sparkle of his novels was to prove a hindrance inasmuch as the questions he was posing were taken as stimulating in a way that divorced them from their fictional matrix and turned them into lapidary utterances: the books, accordingly, became reduced to 'entertaining digressions'.

It was with the publication in 1921 of *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and in Peoples* (the Spanish original was published in 1913) that Unamuno had first come within reach of the English reader and it was this book that determined the perception in England of the Spanish author. Significantly, it is not a novel but a work of discursive reflection, felt to be his metier by British critics. Unamuno, however, poses certain problems for the reader. This book satisfies none of the conventional expectations of rigour, consistency, or the fiction of the urbane distance of the philosophizing subject, and it is not meant to. Like many other works from the period of modernistic experimentation it confuses genres and brings its own workings up to the surface. In large measure this self-consciousness about its own processes becomes the subject of the book in contradistinction to the displaying of arrived-at positions. The book's narrator (and Unamuno was highly conscious of the interplay between the author and the 'author') plunges into his material, asserts himself vigorously, backtracks, repeats himself, contradicts himself, and commits every outrage against the expectations aroused by such a book, so that it is scarcely surprising that some readers were caught off their guard.¹⁴

In the *London Mercury* the genteel journeyman journalist H. C. Harwood, unprepared for the self-conscious tensions of Unamuno's writing, was accordingly appalled: 'These confused and self contradictory essays are not easily recognisable as the product of a well-trained or well-informed intelligence', he pronounced. The book was said to be full of 'bad jokes, crude metaphysics, perverse theology and crazy conceit', a catalogue that any self-respecting post-modernist would be proud to have applied to his or her work, yet in 1922 such things were not expected of 'philosophy'. Harwood concluded that the book was suffused with scepticism, a stance that had 'never been observed to produce admirable lives'.¹⁵ He completely missed the point wherein the putative scepticism was the necessary ground for the heroic act of will that produces the belief in immortality and the Christian faith so important to Unamuno. The (anonymous) reviewer for the *Nation and Athenaeum* shared Harwood's difficulties, for although initially more flexible he or she drew back aghast at the fact that Unamuno's mind was 'all passion and is nowhere lucid'.

¹³ Anon. [O. Williams], 'Mist', *TLS*, 16 May 1929, p. 398.

¹⁴ For a good recent summary of Unamuno's literary strategies, see Thomas Mermall, 'The Chiasmus: Unamuno's Master Trope', *PMLA*, 105 (1990), 245–55.

¹⁵ H. C. Harwood, 'Philosophy', *London Mercury*, 5 (1922), 667–68 (p. 667).

While it was felt that this contained an attraction and a force that would gain him readers, the reviewer saw the book not so much as bad philosophy as evidence of dangerously relativistic moral tendencies, 'one more force leading men back and down to the abyss'.¹⁶

From both of these critics Unamuno brought forth strong reactions, implicitly challenging them to define their positions before the world. That they should have taken umbrage against him is, in some ways, precisely the point of his writings: all relations are troublesome in his world, and necessarily so. Yet he was not content with merely elaborating in controlled prose such a conflict-theory, for the conflict extends to the relation of the author with his material: there is no conflict-free zone to which one can retreat. This establishes a disconcerting ontological vertigo in which the direction of the supposed argument is extremely difficult to perceive. Despite this, every page contains forceful statements, as though what was being said were the definitive statement on the point under discussion, even if the page before had said something different. The 'author' does battle with himself in a seemingly repetitive, inconclusive, frenzied whirlwind of propositions that open out and become more complex as the book proceeds. Even Trend, handling the book for the *TLS*, had difficulties with it, resorting to an extended comparison of Unamuno with Charles Kingsley (hardly calculated to appeal to readers in 1922), and eliding again the relationship of the 'author' with his medium. He did, however, move towards an appreciation of Unamuno's voluntaristic stance when he perceived that 'in fact, winning or losing to him is a matter of indifference'.¹⁷ Trend finished the review by grumbling that Unamuno was not the only Spanish thinker to deserve translation, mentioning Ortega y Gasset and Eugenio d'Ors. The only thing he could muster unattenuated praise for was the translation, by gentleman and Fellow of the Royal Academy, J. E. Crawford Fritch.

Shortly after this translation, V. S. Pritchett wrote of the book in his first work, *Marching Spain* (1928). He spoke with all the assertiveness of youth about *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*, as though everyone were familiar with it: 'Who can forget the beating of his heart when he first heard the opening peal of Unamuno's *Del sentimiento trágico*?'¹⁸ Pritchett contemplated the offerings of philosophers and scientists but found that 'in the end I come back to Unamuno's "hombre de carne y hueso"' (p. 175). For Pritchett, Unamuno was a spokesman for the concrete, material life of ordinary people. Unamuno appeared to point to the fact that the primary reality we are faced with is that of our existence as physical, appetitive beings with a voracious capacity for centring the universe on ourselves. It was a selective reading of Unamuno, yet it was one which did take something positive from him, and one which relates directly to Pritchett's own insistence, in his books and stories, on the individually specific and the daily struggle for physical and emotional survival among ordinary people, his versions of Unamuno's people of 'carne y hueso'.

In 1925, undeterred by the puzzled reception of *The Tragic Sense of Life*, Crawford Fritch translated a selection of Unamuno's work under the title *Essays and Soliloquies*. Trend, in the *TLS*, had sufficiently digested Unamuno to be able to say that his

¹⁶ Anon., 'The Will to be Immortal', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 14 January 1922, p. 593.

¹⁷ Anon. [J. B. Trend], 'Unamuno and the Tragic Sense', *TLS*, 5 January 1922, p. 6.

¹⁸ V. S. Pritchett, *Marching Spain* (London: Benn, 1928), p. 147.

'strength is in his absence of form and his disregard of logic [. . .] the form at which Unamuno is at his best is certainly the essay'. At the same time, Trend touched on the existence of certain barriers not only to the appreciation of Unamuno but to that of other Spanish material when he indicated that the jumbled, unplanned nature of *The Tragic Sense of Life* confirmed 'one's worst suspicions of the man and [made] his country appear more than ever remote and impossible to understand'.¹⁹ This remark indicates that Trend was not writing of Unamuno in a critical vacuum; already he was an author about whom one could have suspicions or whom one would have to defend. More pertinently, his country was acknowledgedly intractable when it came to having its cultural material assessed in England. It required special explanation and goodwill if it was to be viewed positively.

There are, however, contradictory messages with regard to the dissemination of Unamuno's name. On the one hand the poet and Adlerian psychologist, Alan Porter, at this time literary editor of the *Spectator*, could say in 1926 that 'such names as Unamuno [. . .] mean very little to the uninitiated',²⁰ while in the *TLS* another critic cited him in the same year as 'the first of Spanish philosophers now living'. The latter reviewer cannot be regarded as one of the 'initiated', for he had to have recourse to reading Unamuno's *Lagonie du Christianisme* in French as he dealt with a brace of books on theology and Christianity. Not a Hispanist, he may have been an initiate in other areas where Unamuno could be encountered, in the area of contemporary Christian and moral thought, for example. This is already to widen the category of 'initiated' and is a reminder that a reader may be led to a book for a number of reasons. Interest groups are so numerous and varied that to speak without qualification of the 'initiated' is to clarify little and already to demonstrate the sort of assumption that lies behind the solidification of literary hierarchies. In the *TLS* review Unamuno was linked to Donne and the Metaphysical poets, a positive reference for the time, when the work of seventeenth-century poets was being rediscovered in England. Indeed, something of their freshness may be gauged when the reviewer observes that Unamuno has 'an ingenuity worthy of the mind of Donne [. . .] when English poets were most paradoxical, they were called the metaphysicals'.²¹ Instead of perceiving Unamuno simply as a muddled philosopher, he was thus able to be seen in terms of the contending yet interlocking planes of the Metaphysicals' exploration of the relation of the divine to the mundane.

The brief burst of translations came to an end in 1927 with *The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho*, rendered into English by the American, Homer P. Earle. Edwin Muir joined the nonplussed when he dealt with the book for the *Nation and Athenaeum*: 'It is difficult to see anything more than a disappointed effort to achieve power through violence.' While Muir was not mistaken in his bracketing of Unamuno with Carlyle, for the Spaniard was an admirer of the Victorian writer, for Muir it was clearly an unflattering conjunction of what he saw as two dyspeptic windbags, and he was another who believed Unamuno's effect in England would be attenuated, in this case not only because he addressed himself to Spanish problems but because 'Unamuno's rhetoric is so different from ours that we cannot imagine he is using it with a serious political intention'.²² This cavilling on the part of members of the

¹⁹ Anon. [J. B. Trend], 'Unamuno and the Tragic Sense', p. 6.

²⁰ Anon. [Alan Porter], 'Alfonso the Sage', *Spectator*, 7 August 1926, p. 219.

²¹ Anon., 'Orthodoxy and Modernism', *TLS*, 1 April 1926, pp. 241-42.

²² Edwin Muir, 'Don Quixote Interpreted', *Nation and Athenaeum*, 14 January 1928, p. 570.

English literary world with regard to Unamuno, and the subsequent linking of his failings to his being Spanish, elide the fact that he was very definitely something of a maverick in the Spanish literary scene as well. This had been pointed out to English readers in the *Criterion*, in a 1923 article entitled 'Contemporary Spanish Literature' by the Spaniard Antonio Marichalar.²³ It had also been said by Salvador de Madariaga in the same year, in his book *The Genius of Spain*, Unamuno's inspirational exuberance being compared with that of the bards at an Eisteddfod, scarcely a central reference-point for the contemporary literary world.²⁴

Trend in the *TLS* was more positive than Muir, albeit vaguer: 'The book is full of striking thoughts and phrases [. . .] a great and noble book.'²⁵ This generous praise was not supported by any penetrating analysis (although at least this time Trend managed to remember the title of Pirandello's play), and Trend spent most of the time discussing Unamuno's life and the volume *De Fuerteventura a Paris*, which deals with the dictator Primo de Rivera's exiling of Unamuno to the Canary Islands, his release, and self-imposed exile in France. Something of a *cause célèbre* at the time, Unamuno had become a name, a political figure, and a symbol of intellectual freedom (although not to the reactionary Sir Charles Petrie, who evaluated Unamuno snidely in the *Outlook* in 1928 by suggesting: 'Has it never occurred to [Unamuno] that Spain may prefer a general who acts to a college professor who merely criticises?'),²⁶ while his writings enjoyed a less noteworthy profile. In 1926 T. S. Eliot wrote in an editorial in the *New Criterion* of 'one of the noblest and most honest of men, Unamuno, banished',²⁷ although there is no other indication in his writings of this time that Eliot was familiar with Unamuno's work.

Throughout the 1930s Unamuno continued to be mentioned in England, even though no more of his books were translated. One of his essays did, however, appear in two anthologies.²⁸ When the Spanish Republic was inaugurated in April 1931 there were several articles devoted to Spain in a special issue of the *Bookman*, including the previously mentioned essay on Unamuno by Edgar Holt. He began by testily berating his readers: 'One of the oddest points in English appreciation of contemporary European letters is the comparatively small honour paid to Miguel de Unamuno' (p. 158). This aggressive buttonholing of the reader obeys certain conventions of article or review writing as much as anything else, in which the author being handled is first placed in a position which needs to be defended, thus giving the writer a certain oppositional motivation. Also in 1931, V. S. Pritchett was to write that 'we see Unamuno becoming a citizen of the world if ever there was one',²⁹ although this does not necessarily contradict Holt's assertion, for Holt had

²³ Antonio Marichalar, 'Contemporary Spanish Literature', trans. by M. de S. A. Middleton, *Criterion*, 1 (1923), 278–80.

²⁴ Salvador de Madariaga, *The Genius of Spain and Other Essays on Spanish Contemporary Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923), pp. 87–88.

²⁵ Anon. [J. B. Trend], 'Unamuno and Don Quixote', *TLS*, 23 February 1928, p. 123.

²⁶ Sir Charles Petrie, 'Low Life in Spain', *Outlook*, 11 February 1928, p. 183.

²⁷ T. S. Eliot, 'A Commentary', *New Criterion*, 4 (1926), 221–23 (p. 223). This public status led in the same year to Unamuno's presiding over one of the tables at a high-powered meeting of the P.E.N. club in Paris, over the other tables of which presided Joyce, Pirandello, Heinrich Mann, and Galsworthy: see Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 591n.

²⁸ Miguel de Unamuno, 'Solitude', trans. by J. E. C. Fritch, in *Great Essays of all Nations*, ed. by F. H. Pritchard (London: Harrap, 1929), pp. 516–19; 'Solitude', in *The Spanish Omnibus*, ed. and trans. by Warre B. Wells (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1932), pp. 33–45.

²⁹ V. S. Pritchett, 'Authors of Spain', *New Statesman and Nation*, 27 June 1931, p. 666.

been referring to the appreciation of Unamuno as a writer, not as a public figure. In 1934 Pritchett referred to him again as ‘the only [Spanish] writer to attain an assured European reputation’,³⁰ which, given the spread of references to him in the English literary milieu, appears possible: it is the exact nature of the reputation, however, that is not so encouraging.

As Holt continued, he noted the restless and challenging nature of Unamuno’s prose and indicated that the best approach to his work would be through the ‘very remarkable *Life of Don Quixote and Sancho* [. . .] one of the most invigorating works that contemporary literature has produced’ (p. 158). For Holt there was little to censure in the Spaniard; all the quirky, unclassifiable features of his work could be accommodated within a critical viewpoint that saw Unamuno as an invigorating optimist dedicated to ceaseless self-examination as a means of self-actualization before the fact of death. He could thus be seen as ‘always a man with a passionate interest in human nature, and a passionate desire that men and women should realise the best that is in them’ (p. 159). Although once again Holt was conflating Unamuno’s discursive prose with his fiction, at least he was working within a more legitimately existentialist view of Unamuno’s enterprise than those writers who had been disappointed that he was not either Kant or George Eliot, or both. This was also the Unamuno whom Christian social theorist V. A. Demant, an occasional contributor to T. S. Eliot’s *Criterion*, picked up in *The Religious Prospect* (1939). Here he uses the Spaniard as one of the linking points in his argument for the need for people to become convinced again of the existence of an essential being that transcends the existential situation of temporal life, yet temporal life is the only situation in which this being can be searched for and experienced. At one point Demant uses a quotation from Unamuno to state the problem:

‘And man, this thing, is he a thing?’ So asked the author of *The Tragic Sense of Life*. [. . .] Man lives on the brink of tragedy because he is always threatened with a negative answer. Seeking repeatedly to find the ground of his being in himself or in his temporal relations, he then discovers that this attempt does not reach being but can only schematise the process of becoming; so he comes to disbelieve in his own being.³¹

This was the Unamuno who seemed to John Cowper Powys to contain and sum up the feeling he got from his ‘pilgrimage to Spain’, which, despite preparation, left him feeling when he arrived that he was ‘totally in the dark about her [. . .] from the point of view of Unamuno, or of “The Catholic”’.³² Nevertheless, when it came to explaining what it was that he felt in Spain, Powys points to ‘a gathered-up intensity of feeling that amounted to the sort of heroic desperation which so often appears in Miguel Unamuno’ [*sic*] (p. 417). Powys tended to be drawn to quirky, eccentric figures on the margins of respectable thought, all the more so if they demonstrated a mixture of wild-eyed enthusiasm for lost causes and self-regarding canniness similar to his own. In this respect, it is not surprising that Unamuno’s quixotic cussedness should have appealed to him, although these few comments in Powys’s *Autobiography* are the only evidence there is of this. The absence of the esoteric in the Spaniard’s work may have been crucial to his never becoming an important reference for Powys.

³⁰ Pritchett, ‘Tendencies of the Modern Novel: v: Spain’, *Fortnightly Review*, 135 (1934), 203–11 (p. 203).

³¹ V. D. Demant, *The Religious Prospect* (London: Muller, 1939), p. 223.

³² John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (London: John Lane, 1934), p. 420; typically, Powys does not say exactly when this trip took place. Neither does any other source.

For V. S. Pritchett, it was Unamuno's stimulating presence, rather than the precise details of his metaphysics, that above all excited him, inasmuch as the Spaniard was a writer who forced one to think and to react, a generator of ideas about the human situation. Pritchett consistently praised Unamuno in a clutch of articles written in the mid-1930s. In 1934 he published a survey of current Spanish fiction in the *Fortnightly Review*; in 1936 he wrote a tributary article on Unamuno for the *Spectator* in the week the Spaniard received honorary degrees from three English universities; in 1937 he wrote in the *New Statesman and Nation* on the occasion of Unamuno's death. Apart from seeming to Pritchett the most striking writer in Spain of his time he seemed also to be 'one of the very few Spanish writers who broke through the provincialism of Spanish thought and had an audience in Europe'.³³ Whenever Pritchett wrote on Unamuno it was always to concentrate on *The Tragic Sense of Life*, 'a great book'.³⁴ Despite his admiration, there was always a certain ambivalence about his response to Unamuno, for while it was clear that some of Unamuno's perceptions seemed valuable to him he was also aware that it was in part not so much the substance of what Unamuno was saying as its enactment in his prose that provided what was worthwhile about his work: 'One is engrossed rather with a very vital and idiosyncratic personality than with his ideas for their own sake'.³⁵ This is an encounter, above all, with a valuable person: it is not the literary tactics that are used to present those ideas either, but rather the personality that generates them. Unamuno's books thus become screens through which to apprehend the ultimate book in which the ideas are inscribed, or enacted, the life of the author, and so it is that 'it is rather as a Spaniard than as a thinker that he impresses us, as a man who reawakens in us, as Spaniards do, the capacity to feel the unity of our physical and spiritual natures'.³⁶

The Irish Hispanist and eccentric, Walter Starkie, also wrote an obituary of Unamuno in 1937, in the *Fortnightly* (the renamed *Fortnightly Review*), in which the Spaniard was again seen as a maieutic presence, irritating people into an awareness and a deeper analysis of their positions. Starkie held up Unamuno as 'the most important Spaniard that has ever lived since Goya'. This was on account of his continued insistence on a conservative catalogue of putatively Spanish qualities, a traditional image of Spain for which the validation was being fought for by Francoist forces as Starkie was writing, containing 'the significance of faith, of blood, of the tragic, of Don Quixote as the highest symbol of man'³⁷ (the latter being something Starkie took to heart in his wanderings around Europe as an itinerant player of the violin). Starkie sifted out certain themes from Unamuno's prose and presented them as though they were what had been holding and infuriating readers for forty years; yet Pritchett's insistence on the subsidiary position of the themes with respect to their presentation was more apt, and his criticism the best on Unamuno that can be found in England at this time. Pritchett's comments were not, however, without their limitations. The two which appear to be the most important, and they are two which were common at the time, involve his inability to appreciate the self-conscious

³³ Pritchett, 'Miguel de Unamuno', *New Statesman and Nation*, 19 January 1937, pp. 46–47 (p. 46).

³⁴ Pritchett, 'Tendencies of the Modern Novel: v: Spain', p. 204.

³⁵ Pritchett, 'Miguel de Unamuno', *New Statesman and Nation*, p. 46.

³⁶ V. S. Pritchett, 'Miguel de Unamuno', *Spectator*, 28 February 1936, p. 350.

³⁷ Walter Starkie, 'A Modern Don Quixote: Miguel de Unamuno, 1864–1936', *Fortnightly*, 141 (1937), 217–23 (p. 218).

literary strategies employed by Unamuno, and the use of national psychologism to explain aspects of the Spaniard's work. It is somewhat far-fetched, for example, to claim that any people as a whole, Spaniards included, are capable of making us feel 'the unity of our physical and spiritual natures'.

Unamuno, then, after rapidly becoming known in post-war England, was to remain a figure with whom the literary world was conversant to a certain extent despite there being no further translation of his work in this period after 1927. He could be extensively used, for example, in a long article by Herbert Read,³⁸ in which the figure of Don Quixote, as elaborated by Unamuno, became an important reference point. None the less, Unamuno never became of any deep significance in England, although he was referred to by a wide variety of writers in different contexts. Furthermore, when he was appreciated it was as a writer of non-fictional prose who forced one to reflect on issues of faith and existence and not as someone who could be read and learnt from as a novelist or literary example.

UNIVERSITY OF AVEIRO

DAVID CALLAHAN

³⁸ Anon. [Herbert Read], 'Sir Thomas Malory and the Sentiment of Glory', *TLS*, 21 June 1928, pp. 457–58. This essay was also published as the chapter entitled 'Malory', in Read's *The Sense of Glory: Essays in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), pp. 34–56.