The Tragic Sense of Life: The Philosophy of Miguel de Unamuno

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THE TRAGIC SENSE OF LIFE

The Philosophy of Miguel de Unamuno

by

John C. Morgan

A THESIS

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To Dr. J. William Lee, a teacher, who helped me to understand and to feel the meaning of these words from Kierkegaard's *Journals*:

"The important thing is to be honest towards God, not try to escape from something, but to force oneself through until he himself gives the explanation." ¹

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Introduction: A Concise Statement of the Problem

Many introductions have the strange tendency to become flowery statements concerning the vital importance of the thesis, the universality of the topic studied, or the unique creativity of the methodology employed in the approach to the thesis material. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the reader of a thesis with such an embellished introduction is often dismayed to find that the main body of research does not justify the proud optimism of the introduction. It is a sad fact that a Master's thesis is hardly a "magnum opus," which opens up new directions for scholarly pursuits. At its best, a Master's thesis is a personal "working-through" of a certain fundamental problem; and rather than shaking the foundations of Western civilization, it should only enable the researcher to learn more adequately the art of scholarship—and, if the student is honest with himself and with his subject, by some strange alchemy he may also learn something about the art of living.

But the stage where a researcher becomes self-edified in the pursuit of his research is indeed a limited one, open only to those who constantly ask themselves in the process of their scholarship, "What does all this mean for my life?" In the long run, therefore, a thesis should be the rare combination of objective scholarship and personal edification. Empires will rise and collapse, new theologies will appear on the horizon, men will live and die for the most absurd or noble reasons: and still the thesis will endure in the dusty corner of some small
library in Ohio! All of which says to the student that if the research is not meaningful to his own life, it will surely not be valuable to Western scholarship, or even to the librarian.

Since an introduction must be clear and precise, it would seem best to state as simply as possible both the methodology and the hypothesis of this thesis, and then to indicate the reasons for the selection of the topic.

The major thesis of this research work has been that Unamuno's life and writings can best be seen in terms of a philosophy of tragedy. Tragedy, in the Unamunian sense, means an agonizing struggle between opposing forces so well matched that no final victory of one over the other is possible. Unamuno wrote about and lived within this "tragic sense of life," which consists of this agonizing struggle; and it is the centrality of this fact which can be demonstrated in his writings. Unamuno's own life and the life of the so-called "Generation of 1898" serves as an introduction to the meaning of the tragic sense of life in human existence and in the Christian faith. Moreover, it has also been the concern of this thesis to show that the tragic sense of life, far from being the occasion for resignation, is a source of creativity for Christian existence. In short, I have attempted to demonstrate how conflicting modes of being—heart and head, faith and reason, peace and conflict, life and logic—struggled with each other in the Unamunian universe, and how they could lead to creative courage and meaning.
The methodology under which the writing of this paper was formulated is the same methodology that Unamuno himself used in his studies of Kierkegaard and Pascal. For sake of clarity, this methodology might be called "emotional comprehension," or better yet, "imaginative participation." Those who employ this approach begin by sympathizing with the author studied. Sympathizing with the author essentially means getting inside his work, bringing his attitudes to light, and above all understanding his intentions. Though I have utilized erudite and critical tools in my analysis of Unamuno's literature, these two modes of study do not seem to do justice to the paradoxical nature of the literature. To amass dates, facts, documents; or to edit texts, translate obscure works, track down influences, or sort out epochs does not mean that one has entered Unamuno's world. Nor have I attempted to approach Unamuno from some previous critical stance, say the existentialist position, and then determined the existential categories of his thought. At all times I have attempted, however, to imaginatively participate in the Unamunian universe.

Because I have no pretension as to my scholarly prowess, and receive no joy from the compilation of objective facts, the development of this thesis has only been possible because it has meant something for my own existence. Unamuno's world has also been my world: This has been the major stimulus for my work. Although I cannot claim the same depth of thought and passion as this Spaniard, I can say that the contradictions he found in human existence between the heart and the head, faith
and reason, imagination and intellect are also the contradictions I feel within myself. That Unamuno utilized these conflicting forces creatively and turned the despair of his life into a source of strength has been a source of hope to me.

It will also be wise for the future development of this thesis to call the reader's attention to the fact that those Spanish works which have not been translated into English have been important to the work. Any quotations from untranslated sources have been done by the author of this thesis.
Chapter II

Unamuno and His Generation

Part I:

Miguel de Unamuno: The Man of Flesh and Bone

(1) Setting the Stage:

Unamuno once remarked of himself,

"I do not wish to be pigeonholed because I, Miguel de Unamuno, like any other man who claims a free conscience, am unique." 

Whether or not a biographical approach can ever get behind the mystery of Unamuno's unique existence remains to be seen; but it is clear that no biographical methodology can hope to remove the essential contradictions of his life without sacrificing the deep and hidden source of his life-giving wisdom. Unamuno, as the Spanish sociologist and novelist Francisco Ayala remarked, was more than a simple hiatus of Spanish tradition or a neat result of his own experience; he was, rather, a "period and new paragraph," an abrupt end as well as a radical departure.

The essential contradictory dimension of his life, therefore, must be accepted, for it is out of these very contradictions that Unamuno is able to affirm that spiritual anguish, doubt, and uncertainty are sources of creative energy. The life of this strange Spanish figure is as paradoxical as his writings.


Unamuno cannot be pigeonholed; unless one respects the hidden sources of his life there can be no complete understanding of his outward existence, for the outward events of his life can only be given meaning when they are related to the inward, creative vision which motivated his action.

From the external biographical data concerning Unamuno there seems to be little hope in overcoming the paradoxical nature of his life. He was a thinker, essayist, novelist, poet, playwright, and journalist. At the same time he was a professor of Greek, a deputy to the Spanish ruling body (the Cortes), and a prophet. Can Unamuno be classified as an artist or philosopher? a professor or a politician? a product of Spanish culture or a man for all times and seasons? Not one of his literary productions can be called a work of art, in the classical sense in which art has been defined. He was not interested in art for art's sake, but always for the message he hoped to create through the artistic medium. A philosopher of ideas? None of his essays express a consistent traditional viewpoint of philosophical work; and the interpretations he gave to the main writings of philosophy were unique. Instead of the philosophy of Kant, for example, Unamuno wished to discuss the man behind the Critique of Pure Reason, the man of flesh and bone who feared death. A professor of Greek? In 1911 Unamuno wrote: "It has never occurred to me to publish any work which claimed to be scientific or a work of scholarship."

Perhaps, then, he was a politician? But in politics he was an outsider. When conservative politicians were in power Unamuno was a liberal; when liberals came into power he expressed a desire to return to a form of monarchy. Twice he was removed from his chair of Greek at the University of Salamanca for political reasons. In short, the biographer of this Spaniard is faced with the same contradictions in his life as those which exist in his writings. José Ferrater Mora, who has acted as an interpreter of many of Unamuno’s writings, is willing to let the essential mystery of Unamuno’s life remain:

"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 innermost 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." 

The mystery of Unamuno’s personality should remain in any biography of his life, since a mere enumeration of the outward events of this Spaniard’s existence could never overcome the hidden quality of his struggle. Unamuno’s life was a paradox, and any attempt to negate this fact must fall short of its mark.

(2) The Life of Miguel de Unamuno

Nevertheless, some attempt must be made to confront the outward events of Unamuno’s life, if only to serve as a prolegomena to the study of his writings. While it does not seem

that a biographical approach is adequate by itself, it can begin the task of interpreting the literature.

During the years prior to Unamuno's birth Spain was in the midst of cultural transformation, which would eventually lead to the Second Civil War. These were the years of crisis and change.

Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo was born of Basque ancestry on September 29, 1864, in Bilbao, a seaport town at the mouth of the Nervion River. This Basque ancestry was later to concern Unamuno, to haunt him with the memory of the tragic sense of life, which was so much a part of the Basque character. The city of Bilbao at this time, although surrounded by rural society, was cosmopolitan in nature, a rising industrial city with a liberal bourgeoisie and a powerful working class. The cargo-laden ships from foreign ports also kept the people in touch with the outside world. Nevertheless, there were still some inhabitants of the city who stood within the ancient Basque tradition, who spoke Basque instead of Spanish, and whose ties were bound up with their own sense of Basque identity. The Spanish scholar and novelist Arturo Barea has said of Unamuno's heritage:

"He was born and bred in a town where civic and spiritual conflicts were endemic.... What in most other Spanish provinces was merely regionalism—attachment to the 'patria chica,' the 'little country,' combined with indifference to the abstract idea of Spain and with distrust for the Madrid government, had in the Basque country grown into a nationalistic creed at once religious and political." 1

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It was within the city of Bilbao that Unamuno says that he began to acquire a social conscience. In his ninth year a series of battles was taking place in Spain between traditional, Catholic forces and the liberals. These battles were part of what is now called the Carlist Wars. In his recollections of childhood, which were collected together in a book called Recuerdos de Niñez y Mocedad, Unamuno said that one of the most significant events of his life took place during a siege of Bilbao: a Carlist bomb exploded on the roof of an adjacent house on February 21, 1874. To a sensitive boy, who was given to recurrent "religious seizures" and who spent hours alone reading from Spanish Romantic poetry, the explosion of the bomb was a terrible reminder of the tragic deaths in life. In the events of the war Unamuno came face to face with the tension in his own country between conservatives and progressives, orthodox and liberals, isolationists and European Spaniards. From this moment on, Unamuno would often cry out in agony: "Me duele España!" (Spain hurts me!) Later in his life he was to use the siege of Bilbao as the background for his novel Paz en La Guerra, in which he saw the tragic tension in Spain between different peoples as the collective essence of Spanish culture.

For the next five years, after the siege of Bilbao, Unamuno studied at the Instituto Vizcaíno of Bilbao, which

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might be thought of as his "high-school" years. Very little
is known of his experiences during this time, except that he
read widely, particularly in the area of Spanish Romantic poetry.

In 1880, at the age of sixteen, Unamuno left his Basque
homeland to attend the University of Madrid. At the university
he studied philosophy and ancient languages, and was confronted
by the doctrines of Kant, Hegel, and Krause. As far as it can
be determined from his writings, Unamuno's own private excursions into the world of ideas were more influential than his
university education. Nevertheless, the intellectual climate
of the university, which consisted of arguments between orthodox Catholics and liberals, profoundly influenced him. The
confrontations between these groups, which took place at the
Club Ateneo, finally caused Unamuno to side with the liberal,
europeanizing group, against the Roman Church and for the new
socialistic and rationalistic doctrines. Later in his life he
was to refute liberalism. At the same time as these religious
confrontations were taking place, Unamuno was reading on his
own. He was particularly impressed with the law of contradiction
which he found in the Hegelian system, though he also learned
to read Danish so that he might study Kierkegaard, whom he
later called his "spiritual brother." 1

After four years at the university Unamuno received his
doctoral degree and returned to the Basque countryside. There
he married his childhood sweetheart, Concepción Lizarraga, gave

1. Miguel de Unamuno, Perplexities and Paradoxes, trans.
private lessons, contributed anonymous articles to a local newspaper, took part in public discussions, wrote poetry, and learned foreign languages so that he would be able to read authors in their own tongues. But Unamuno could not be satisfied with himself in this environment, for as Arturo Barea has pointed out,

"His correspondence, as far as it has been published, indicates a sense of insecurity, and exasperation at the absence of any response in the stifling atmosphere of prosperous provincial philistinism." 1

Unamuno felt a stranger in his own countryside, and the surroundings of his city seemed hostile to his direction in life. Perhaps the city was too quiet, and Unamuno felt that the agony which gave meaning to his existence could not be found. This lack of agony could have been due to the fact that Unamuno found himself isolated from the Basque community, and more in contact with the businessmen and working class. In any case, Unamuno's self-definition of himself, in a letter to Leopoldo Alas, gives some clue to the unrest which he experienced:

"Unamuno is a self-torturer. He spends his life struggling to be what he is not, and failing." 2 In this sense, then, it was the presence of peace in his homeland which led to the search for struggle elsewhere; Unamuno could never rest in peace.

Unamuno then left for Madrid, where he took various examinations for a teaching position. After several attempts failed,

2. Ibid., p. 13.
he won a chair of Greek language and literature at Salamanca. He moved to Salamanca in 1891, and his residence in this city helped him to discover the possibilities and limitations of his life. Augustín Esclasans tells us that it was during his stay in Salamanca that he experienced a severe religious crisis in 1897. The exact content of this crisis is still unknown, but in 1957 Dr. Armando Zubizarreta, a young Peruvian scholar, discovered four small notebooks in Unamuno's handwriting describing in detail the record of this religious crisis. The contents of these notebooks are as yet unpublished and the record of the crisis remains known to only a few people, including Unamuno's eldest son and García Blanco of the University of Salamanca. It is known, however, that the day after the crisis Unamuno went to a monastery in Salamanca and remained there for three days. Esclasans describes Unamuno's experience in these words:

"The first hours of his retreat he spent on his knees, in fervent and anguished supplication. While in the Dominican cloister, the only books he perused were the Bible and the Confessions of St. Augustine.... And it might be well for us to remember that Unamuno was a Basque, that is, a man of the racial timber of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who himself was no stranger to existential crises!" 2

At any rate, despite the ignorance surrounding this experience, we might agree with the analysis of José Ferrater Mora when he states that this crisis-experience profoundly


influenced Unamuno's later philosophical and literary direction.

"There is a definite change in tone of his writings before and after 1897. Before 1897...we find Unamuno in a pitched battle with 'purism' and traditionalism, which he declared to be empty and conventional.... After 1897, however, and especially between 1897 and 1905, we find Unamuno absorbed in a tense and painful attempt at inner direction...Unamuno's 'Inward!' replaces his cry of 'Forward!'" 

Mora's analysis helps to explain the difference between Unamuno's early novels with their concentration on outward details from his later novels with their treatment of inner realities. To Unamuno, "seclusion within oneself" (encerrarse) meant an "opening inward" (abrirse hacia sí mismo).

During his years at Salamanca Unamuno became a kind of spiritual agitator in his country. For political reasons, therefore, he was released from his university position. After this dismissal his political activity increased; he undertook two campaigns: one against King Alfonso XIII, and the other against the Central Powers and in defense of the Allied cause in World War I. All during these adventures Unamuno continued to lecture and write, at various times opposing such men as Ortega y Gasset and Eugenio d'Ors. This routine was broken in 1924 as a result of Primo de Rivera's coup d'état.

Primo de Rivera's dictatorship had been sanctioned by the previous king, Alfonso XIII. But Unamuno's protests against Rivera were so loud that he was forced into exile at Fuerteventura, one of the Canary Islands. On the island, Unamuno

continued to voice his opposition to Rivera's government, and finally managed to escape to Paris with the help of the French newspaper, *Le Quotidien*. A pardon from the Spanish government arrived on June 25, 1924, the same day that Unamuno left for Paris. 1

In Paris, Unamuno's protests against his government reached world-wide proportions; Max Scheler mentioned Unamuno's war with the dictatorship in Spain as one event that "helped blacken the spiritual countenance of Europe in the twenties." 2 All during his stay in Paris Unamuno mingled with the people, but he felt strangely out of place in the sophisticated city.

With the fall of the dictatorship in 1930, however, Unamuno returned to his native land. A Republic was declared in Spain shortly thereafter, on April 14, 1931; and Unamuno was named to be rector at the University of Salamanca. The new Republican government tried to claim Unamuno as one of their own leaders, but he grew disillusioned with the state leadership because he felt it had not examined its own conscience.

At the beginning of a new dictator's rise in the person of General Franco, Unamuno seemed to welcome his strong hand. But he could not keep still in the face of the atrocities which the new dictatorship promulgated. While presiding over a celebration of the Spanish fiesta of the race (Día de la Raza), in spite of repeated warnings to the contrary, Unamuno

Margaret T. Rudd, who participated in the recent centenary tribute to Unamuno held at Vanderbilt University, said that this attack upon the new Spanish government ended Unamuno's activities:

"Franco's guard, stationed before Unamuno's house that night, remained until he died three months later. The order to shoot if he should try to escape was known only to a few." 1

The historical crisis of the times covered his death with frantic forgetfulness, but this loss could not remain forever with a man whose intention was to live in the life of his people. There is no objective way in which one can say that this Spaniard's hunger for immortality found its final home in the presence of God; but, in true Unamunian fashion, it is historically correct to say that in his death he began to live in the hearts of contemporary Spaniards. An incident which took place some years after his death illustrates this strange power he continues to exert on the young Spanish mind.

In October, 1953, the University of Salamanca was making plans to celebrate its seven hundredth anniversary. It was part of these plans to include a tribute to Unamuno's memory, given by Spanish scholars. But both the government and the church denounced him as a heretic, who was not worthy of a celebration. For the first three days of the celebration no mention was made of his name. Then one of Unamuno's former colleagues, Gregorio Marañon, violated the order of the government and church by

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delivering his famous eulogy to Unamuno. "There are persons," he said, "who dare dream of transforming the very sanctuaries of peace into arenas of discord." 1 Other scholars then joined in praise of Unamuno. Some of the Spanish press reported the story of the speeches at the university, but it wasn't until Jean Creach gave the story to his paper in Paris that the European world heard of the event. The Spanish government reacted by throwing Creach out of the country. But the essential condemnation of his report became known around the world: "Today the Spanish clergy, fortified by their concordat with the state, no longer tolerates free-minded men." 2 One can only imagine Unamuno's reaction to this event; but it is not too absurd to suggest that he would have been glad the peace had been destroyed, if only for a day.

Part II

The Historical Background: The Generation of 1898:

(1) Literary Development of the Generation:

During the last ten years of the nineteenth century, several young writers began their literary work in Spain. They did not consider themselves part of any organized school, nor did they consciously formulate any systematic doctrines. They cultivated different literary forms and wrote about diverse situations. Nevertheless, they all felt negatively toward

2. Ibid., p. 270.
the literature of the Spanish tradition in the more recent past; they were concerned with developing new literary forms; and they were preoccupied with the regeneration of Spanish culture, which had fallen into decay after the defeats of the Spanish-American War of 1898.

The whole notion of a "Generation of 1898" is one that is open to criticism. Some Spanish scholars deny that the Generation has any unique historical existence. Pío Baroja, for example, who has been called one of the Generation's leaders, denied the existence of such a group of writers; while another Spaniard, Ramiro de Maeztu, stated that the Generation was the invention of literary historians. Nevertheless, there are also respected Spanish historians who claim that the existence of this group of writers is a historical fact. The particular term, the "Generation of 1898" was first used by the historian, Gabriel Maura y Gamaza; but it was Azorín, the famous Spanish writer, who popularized the term and who affirmed the reality of this Generation as a corporate group reacting against the dismal situation of Spanish culture after the War of 1898. Salvador de Madariaga, one of the most capable historians of Spanish life, also argued for the reality of the Generation, numbering among its writers Ganivet, Costa, Unamuno, and Ortega y Gasset. What should be noted in this brief account is that there remains confusion as to its existence.

2. Ibid., p. 9.
From all the historical accounts of the Generation and the interpretations which have been given to its work, there does seem to be three central pre-suppositions which scholars bring to their work:

1. The characteristics of the Generation were mainly political. In this viewpoint the existence of the Generation was determined by the loss of Spanish forces in the War of 1898.

2. The characteristics of the Generation were literary, and their literary productions represented a new revolution in Spanish letters.

3. The Generation's characteristics were more personal and general, existing within a community of sentiment.

The first of these options is best represented by the Spanish scholar Salvador de Madariaga, who understands the work of the Generation in relation to the political situation in Spain. The times around 1898 were hard times, particularly with respect to the War. The young men living at these times were to observe at close quarters the insincerity of their own government. The nation had been kept in the dark about the Cuban revolt and the war with the United States. Only when the defeated soldiers returned did the people begin to realize the implications of the war: "The yellow ghosts landing from the ships, the Islands gone, the warships lost, the men given over to yellow fever." 1 The Generation of 1898, Madariaga believes, reacted against this political

situation. Such men as Joaquin Costa, Angel Canivet, Miguel de Unamuno, and Ortega y Gasset started to ask their ultimate questions in relation to the political decay after the war:

"What are we? What have we done? What are the Spanish values which circulate in the world? What is the trace which Spain has left in history, in thought, in European civilisation? What is all this disorder at home? Why this sham and pretense?"

The four main writers of this time posed different answers to the problem of Spain's destiny. Costa and Ortega wanted to make Spain a European people, while Unamuno and Canivet hesitated to accept all that European culture stood for. Unamuno, for example, could not accept what he considered to be the economic, scientific, and mechanistic forces in European culture, and yet he knew that some new direction had to be given to a Spanish culture which had fallen into spiritual misery, uniformity, and political waste. For these reasons, Unamuno could not believe that the Europeanization of Spain would eliminate Spanish problems; what was needed, he believed, was a deeper searching into the Quixote-like soul of the Spanish people, an intense investigation into the power of those Spanish mystics who were individualistic, heterodox God-seekers. He trusted in the capacities of the new youth of Spain to find for themselves their own unique Spanish identity, and to incorporate European qualities into this Quixote-like spirit. In his essays in *En Torno al Casticismo*, written three years before

1. Ibid., pp.'s 139-140.
the War of 1898, Unamuno had already given his answer to the problem of Spain's regeneration: "Spain has yet to be discovered, and only europeanised Spaniards will discover her." 1 Despite these differences in the approach given to the problem of a new Spain, Madariaga feels that they were all stimulated by the war, and that the members of the Generation accomplished a unified purpose: "an increasingly intimate contact with the outside world." 2

One can also develop literary characteristics of the Generation with only a slight reference to political events. Some scholars have given the title "the movement of good writing" (movimiento de bien escribir) to the whole Generation, viewing its purpose in terms of its literary achievements. 3 As a literary group, moreover, the Generation falls into the traditions of Spanish literature. The beginnings of the literature of the Generation reach far back into Spanish history, but the immediate precursors to its work were three influential authors and educators: Ángel Ganivet, Joaquín Costa, and Francisco Giner de los Ríos. Ganivet (1865-1898) is best known for his work, Idearium Español, in which he criticized the Spanish character for its weak national will. From Ganivet comes the doctrine of "la voluntad" (the will) which, together with the impetus of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, was to play such an important role in the novels of the Generation. Joaquín Costa (1846-1911), the philosopher and student of law,


is also said to be one of the precursors of the Generation, particularly when he called for the "deafricazation" of Spain so that it could assimilate European ideas. And lastly, Francisco Giner de los Ríos (1840-1915), the reformer of Spanish education, is considered to be one of the Generation's fathers. In 1870 he founded the Institución libre de enseñanza (the Free Institute of Teaching), from which a group of writers and scholars was to come. From these three men the writings of such philosophers and poets as Unamuno, Ortega y Gasset, Machado, and others are said to have been given their past. 

Since the writings of the members of the Generation are so diversified, it is difficult to say what exactly were their common purposes and programs. But it is meaningful to say, taking into consideration all the various literary styles and messages, that when Unamuno voiced a concern for new literary forms, and for a re-interpretation of Spanish literature in the light of the present moment, he was speaking of a common preoccupation of the Generation. It was a conviction of the Generation's members in their writings to stay as close as possible to the actual lives of real human beings, and to avoid the careless rhetoric which they felt had characterized Spanish literature in the past. In this sense, then, the common theme which tied them together was simply their conviction that what they were doing was unique in the literature of Spain, except perhaps what had been done before in the literature of the Golden Ages.

1. Ibid., pp.'s 418-421.
The third option with regard to any interpretation of the Generation, in which the sense of a community of sentiment is central, tries to take into account the wide variety of literary forms present in the writings, and at the same time to stress the essential oneness of their purpose. Katherine P. Reding, of Smith College, has attempted to make this option a real one by studying the nature of the Generation as it is seen through its fictional heroes. She seeks to approach the subject from the source materials (novels) of the major writers of this period—Unamuno, Azorín, Baroja—to see whether this gives any clue as to their common preoccupation. Her results are as follows:

I. Essential Characteristics of the Protagonists:
   a. Preoccupation with the ego
   b. Emergence of inner tension between intellect and emotion
   c. Lack of balance in the characters
   d. Characters are directed by their passions
   e. Stress on love as a unifier of personality

II. Relation to Society:
   a. Eccentricity and inadaptation to environment; the protagonist is so engrossed in the workings of his soul that he stands aloof from society.
   b. The character's attitude toward the low spiritual condition of Spain produces a tragic conflict in character, in which the hero must either elect reform or stagnate in placid acceptance.

III. Philosophical Attitudes:
   a. The faith of the hero of the Generation is that of scepticism, in which he seeks solutions to problems which cannot be solved. A lack of faith in God and immortality causes despair.
   b. A denial of external reality; the hero thinks of life as a dream.
   c. Action becomes the problem of life.

From this analysis of the source materials of the Generation, Reding is able to conclude:

"We have found in this study that their characters of fiction, offspring of their mind and imagination, are kindred spirits, moved by similar preoccupations, alike in their attitude toward society as in their conception of life.... We can but believe, therefore, that their likeness proceeds from the spiritual affinity of the writers who created them.... And it is precisely this fundamental community of problems, beliefs, and reactions to society which constitutes the spirit of a generation."  

What, then, can be concluded from these three options? Is the Generation to be considered the invention of literary historians, or does it have unique historical existence?

If one believes the Generation to be a political category, there still remains the problem of non-political activity. Why were the writers of this time so concerned with problems of the soul, with the relation between God and man, with immortality, with the spiritual destiny of their people? Was not the War of 1898 simply the occasion for deeper questions? Moreover, if one thinks that the Generation was simply a new literary group in Spain, equally contradictory problems remain. What is to be done with the members of the Generation whose primary concern was not in literature but in politics or education? Why was it that the writers in this group never thought of themselves as artists united by a common purpose? And lastly, have we solved the problem if it is said that these writers were united in "spiritual kinship?" Was not Unamuno, for example, closer to Kierkegaard and Pascal than to the members of his

1. Ibid., p. 120.
own time?

Are we to conclude, then, that no such group as the
Generation of 1898 existed, that it was the creation of literary
historians? It seems to me that the answer to this problem
depends on the way in which one poses the question. If the
Generation is to be thought of as a group of writers who took
up the same themes, who were consciously aware of themselves
as belonging to a distinct literary culture, then it would
have to be said that such a group did not exist. On the other
hand, if we realize that no literary generation ever has an
unchanging core of ideas and attitudes, and that it is quite
common for a writer to move in and out of his literary tradition,
then it might be said that the Generation of 1898 has full
historical existence. And more than this, it is possible to
locate some of the main characteristics of the group as a
whole, as Ángel del Río has done:

"The urge to penetrate the hidden depths of the Span-
ish soul, to illuminate its past and to scrutinize
its future; a preoccupation with the general problems
of the individual, seen through the intimate thoughts
and feelings of the writer; and the desire to create
a new style are almost inextricably joined in all
the authors of this period. They were at once emo-
tional (lyrical), thoughtful (of philosophic tempera-
ment), and critical (examining life and culture and
refusing to accept established standards). They
are disciples of Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Carlyle,
who exalt force and the human will, but who are,
at the same time, endowed with an exasperated and
pessimistic sensibility which makes them incapable
of an active life.... They are propagandists of Euro-
pean culture, but they also have a deep feeling for
everything Spanish. Their personalities express a
series of contradictions...."

1. Miguel de Unamuno, Abel Sanchez, trans., by Ángel del
What, then, is the relationship of the Generation of 1898 to Miguel de Unamuno? At many points there seems to be a close kinship between his writings and the spirit of the Generation. Like the Generation he reacted negatively to the situation of Spain after the War of 1898; he wished to give new directions to the problem of Spain's destiny. Moreover, he also shared the Generation's hope for new literary forms, free from the pomp and careless language of the past. And, more importantly, the characters in his novels share a common identity with those heroes portrayed in the other novels of his time. He was concerned with the individual in his novels who is torn by an inner conflict between the intellect and the emotions; he does deal with the problem of the will; and he frequently portrays characters who search for God. But once these common bonds are established, it becomes mandatory to see that Unamuno also differed with the other writers in his Generation at vital points. His understanding of the purpose of literature was different; his new direction for Spanish culture was unique. Moreover, Unamuno's constant emphasis upon the hunger for immortality and the agony of Christianity were strangely out of place in the Generation's work. In short, we confront the essential contradiction of the flesh and bone man and his relationship to a Generation; and we can only conclude with José Ferrater Mora,

"that no characterization of the traits of the generation will be ever completely satisfactory, and that Unamuno can be said to have been, and not to have been, one of its members.... Unamuno assumed attitudes at times widely at variance with those of the other
members of his generation... So it seems that Unamuno was right, after all, when he claimed that he was 'unclassifiable.'

(2) A Brief Historical Synopsis of Spain 1868-1936: The Years of Unamuno and the Generation of 1898.

Over a hundred years ago, Karl Marx observed that European circles knew little or nothing about Spain. "There is perhaps," he wrote, "no country except Turkey so little known to and falsely judged by Europe as Spain." 2 And Marx went on to explain that he felt this historical ignorance was due to the fact that scholars "instead of viewing the strength and resources of these peoples in their provincial and local organization, have drawn at the source of their court histories." 3

Marx's critique of European ignorance concerning Spain is meaningful, provided that it is understood that he did not go far enough in his analysis. It was not merely the fact that scholars judged Spain by its court histories which led to false interpretations, but that Spain herself was a mystery to European minds.

Spain is the least Western country in Europe. This fact is due, in part, to geographical conditions. The country is cut off from France by mountains, while at the same time has open gates to African culture. But, more importantly, the historical factors which were to lead to the development of


3. Ibid., p. vii
modern Spain were different from those experienced by the rest of Europe. France, for example, developed under the unity of one culture, language, and religion. But Spain had no such unifying forces. In the early period of her history there were invasions by various groups: Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, and Visigoths. Because of the Visigoths Spain became part of the Arian Christian group; but at the same time there was a strong Jewish influence in the cities, since the Jews had to flee to Spain when Jerusalem fell in 72 A.D. But it was in the Arab invasion of 711 A.D. that Spain found herself open to both Eastern and Western religious structures. From 711 until 1492 Spain was caught in the conflict between Moors and Christians. The epic poem of Spanish literature, The Cid, portrays this conflict, showing the series of battles which took place between Moors and Christians. The religious, social, and political tensions which arose from the struggle between Christian and Moslem gave Spanish culture a distinct atmosphere, being both a mixture of African and Western traditions.

There are other cultural factors, however, which led to Spain's unique position in European culture.

The first of these unique cultural factors to note is the strength of provincial and municipal feeling in Spain. Every village and town has an independent social and political life. This situation is not totally unlike that of classical Greek culture, where a man's existence is first determined by his native home, his family, or social group, and only secondly

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by his country or government. Gerald Brenan, a Spanish literary historian, says that "Spain is a collection of small, mutually hostile or indifferent republics held together in a loose federation." 1 Unlike American culture which grew out of rural situations, Spanish culture arose from the provincial feeling of sub-groups in city environments. This cultural factor should be kept in mind with regard to Unamuno's intense love of his Basque tradition, for it is a love of provincial culture.

Because of the independent existence of these local regions the political problem in Spain has always been to find a balance between central government and local autonomy. The early history of Spain was characterized by the struggles between local regions for central control. The epic poem of The Cid, for example, written about 1140 A.D, portrays the conflict between Seville and Saragossa for some kind of central control. 2 But even when central authority is established, there has been a tendency for the local regions to maintain their own sub-cultural values.

Nevertheless, this concentration of social forces in local groups has not been without its advantages. Spanish culture has been able to maintain a kind of life which was common in the Middle Ages, in which the rule of the small provinces predominated. But, as Unamuno often pointed out, this single fact conflicted with the rise of modern nationalism, and forced


2. Adams, op. cit., p. 43.
Spain into isolation from contemporary life.

Due to the diverse nature of Spanish culture, moreover, the influence of religion played an important role in the development of the nation. For hundreds of years the Christians in Spain were engaged in a crusade against the Moslems. Even when the Christians had accomplished this task, the crusading impulse had become part of the national character. For this reason, the Catholic Church was extremely powerful in the country, because it was Catholicism which sanctioned and strengthened the crusades. With the decay of religious belief in the beginning of this century, however, when Catholicism began to lose its power over the minds of the people, the same crusading spirit found itself allied with the political doctrines of socialism or anarchism, "with the same crusading ardour and singleness of mind with which in previous ages they (the Spanish people) had adopted Catholicism." 1

From these diverse origins and struggles, Spain has come to occupy a unique place in European history. Gerald Brenan believes that this place has produced a strange Spanish identity:

"The long and bitter experience which Spaniards have had of the workings of bureaucracy has led them to stress the superiority of society to government, of custom to law, of the judgement of neighbors to legal forms of justice, and to insist on the need for an inner faith or ideology, since this alone will enable men to act as they should, in mutual harmony, without the need for compulsion. It is a religious ideal, and if it has struck so much deeper roots in Spain than in other European countries, that is no doubt due largely to the influence of Moslem ideas upon a Christian community."

2. Ibid., p. xvi.
The writings of Unamuno and the Generation of 1898 emerged out of a particular historical period which was both varied and chaotic. It is generally accepted that the central impetus for the work of this group of writers was the Spanish-American War of 1898. From the date of this war onward, Spain followed a road leading to tragedy: the loss of her colonies, a devastating civil war, and finally a Fascist government under Francisco Franco. It is impossible to portray the dynamic sweeping events which broke into the arena of modern Spain; but it is necessary to understand the nature of the times in which Unamuno lived, for they were years of agony and expectation.

Isabel II came to the Spanish throne at the age of thirteen, after her mother, Cristina, was forced to resign in 1840. During the twenty-five years of her rule Spain was governed by a succession of generals, so that the army came to occupy the strongest position in the land. An anecdote is related of one of the generals, Narváez, which points to the state of political life at the time. As he was dying, his confessor asked him if he forgiven all his enemies. He replied, "I have no enemies. I have had them all shot." 1

The instability of the times merely gave rise to confusion and disorder in Isabel's reign. In September of 1868, four years after Unamuno's birth, Queen Isabel was dethroned. According to the report of one prejudiced court historian, "the Spain which accepted the banishment of Doña Isabel was indeed

a raving shipload of lunatics." 1 Isabel's fall merely gave fire to the despair which Spaniards felt over their past history. The immediate history before Isabel had certainly not been a glorious one:

"The glorious national uprising against Napoleon had been followed by twenty-six years of savage reaction and civil war: this had been succeeded by the anarchic rule of the generals which, under a delightful but scandalously unchaste queen, in a Ruritanian atmosphere of railway speculation and uniforms, had lasted for another twenty-eight. Then there had come a revolution and Isabella was turned out." 2

Isabel had been dethroned by an army group under General Prim; but the responsibility for a new form of government was left up to the Spanish ruling body, the Cortes. In the true spirit of Spanish contradictions, the Cortes voted to return to a monarchy. For some time no ruler could be found, but Don Antonio Canovas del Castillo assumed control of the provisional government. A new ruler was soon found, however, in Amadeo of Savoy, Duke of Aosta. But with the assassination of General Prim, Amadeo's support weakened; in 1873 he left the country. Nicholas Adams describes what happened after Amadeo's departure in a few words:

"A Republic was proclaimed. No one of the four presidents was able to govern successfully, and the Republic quickly fell. The son of Isabel, Alfonso, was invited to come back." 3

Alfonso's reign was comparatively peaceful. A constitution was signed in 1876, under which Spain operated until 1931.

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This constitution provided for a Cortes of two houses, much like the British Parliament. Catholicism became the state religion, although other faiths were tolerated. Alfonso died in 1885; but his wife, Cristina, was pregnant with a son who was to be the next ruler: Alfonso XIII.

Alfonso XIII was declared of age in 1902, shortly after the Spanish-American War. He came to power in a time of discord and historical crisis. The War of 1898 had taken from Spain her last territorial possessions in Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. It had also deprived her of many young men; and it had drained economic production for the war effort. It was no wonder that historians could say, "This in fact was the lowest moment and end of an era." 1 But there were other factors which helped to bring Spain closer to the brink of chaos. The rise of smaller political parties in Spain, such as the Catalan or Labor Parties, made a majority vote on any question difficult to obtain. Moreover, there were no major land reforms established to meet the problems of the great estates (latifundios) owned by absentee landlords. Later during Alfonso's reign, Spain's neutrality in the First World War only helped to bury her economically. National restlessness and popular discontent grew. As Nicholas B. Adams has said, "The season was just right for a dictator." 2

The dictator came in the person of Miguel Primo de Rivera.

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2. Ibid., p. 252.
On September 13, 1923, he initiated a military uprising in Barcelona and was successful. Alfonso accepted the establishment of the dictatorship, which involved the suspension of the constitution and of individual rights. "Primo de Rivera's government," as Adams says, "was first a Military Directory, then a so-called Civilian Government,...but in reality there was but one authority: the dictator himself." 1 But Rivera failed to solved the problems of Spain; and the country began to show signs of desiring a constitutional government. Rivera was forced out of rule in 1930, but the chaos which followed was tragic:

"Disorders of all sorts multiplied: strikes, five hundred and four of them in 1930 and even more the next year, student uprisings, military revolts. Anti-monarchical, anti-clerical, pro-Republican sentiment was growing rapidly." 2

A coalition cabinet managed to call for elections in 1931, at which time large Republican majorities were recorded. The monarchy in Spain was at its end, and in April of the same year Alfonso XIII fled Spain. 3

A Second Spanish Republic was declared, which was to last from 1931-1936. A constitutional government was set up, which consisted mainly of the so-called "intellectuals" in Spain: sixty-five professors, forty-one lawyers, and twenty-four working men. 4 Despite the liberal, socialistic character of

2. Ibid., p. 253.
3. Ibid., p. 254.
4. Ibid., p. 254.
the government, however, strikes and rebellions continued. One month after the government had formed, bloodshed broke out between the Monarchists and the Republicans. Later, in 1934, a strike assumed the proportions of a rebellion: thirteen hundred people were killed. 1

New elections were called for in January, 1936, which took place at the time of Unamuno's death. A leftist coalition was victorious, but their victory was followed by violence: "murders, strikes, burning of churches, attacks on priests and nuns." 2 This atmosphere gave strength to the rise of Fascist groups, who, together with their backing by Hitler and Mussolini, found their cause for rebellion in 1936 under General Franco. The Republicans (Loyalists) found bitterly; but their troops had no official support from the American government, while Franco had supplies from Hitler and Mussolini. As early as 1937 the Republican troops were without adequate supplies, while Franco's army continued to use the armament supplied by Germany and Italy. Who can ever forget Arthur Koestler's description of the Republican situation in 1937?

"The Republican Militiamen had neither uniforms nor blankets and their hospitals had no chloroform; their frozen fingers and feet had to be amputated without their being put to sleep. At the Anarchist hospital in Malaga a boy sang the Marseillaise while they sawed away two of his toes; this expedient gained a certain popularity." 3

1. Ibid., p. 255.
2. Ibid., p. 255.
What followed Franco's victory in 1939 were the fruits of Fascist power and Republican fury:

"About a million Spaniards lay dead as war casualties, and there were some six hundred thousand prisoners. The latter number was reduced by Franco's firing squads." 1

One can only imagine what Miguel de Unamuno's reaction might have been to the terrors of 1939. In all probability he would have seen the blood of Spaniards in the light of the agony of Spain, the Spain of the bleeding African Christ. He might also have voiced the same tragic sense of life which Arthur Koestler voiced when he wrote about the character of the Republican troops:

"They believed that it was good and necessary to live, and even to fight in order to live, and even to die so that others might live. They believed in all this, and because they believed truly in it, because their lives depended on this belief, they were not afraid of death. But they were terribly afraid of dying. For they were civilians, soldiers of the people, soldiers of life and not of death. "I was there when they died. They died in tears, crying vainly for help, and in great weakness, as men must die. For dying is a confoundedly serious thing, one shouldn't make a melodrama of it. Pilate did not say 'Ecce heros'; he said 'Ecce homo....' "Those who survived are now pursuing their dialogues with death in the midst of the European Apocalypse, to which Spain has been the prelude." 2

No man escapes the historical situation, or is able to isolate his selfhood from the dramas of history. But where some men march in unison to the hymns of history, others are strangely out of tune with the rhythms of their time. Unamuno

was such a lone marcher. It is evident that he was a child of Spanish culture in many ways, that he lived fully in his own historical environment. Indeed, the passionate contradictions of Spain from 1868-1936 formed an immense stage upon which Unamuno acted out his own private drama. His search for a new direction in Spanish literature and philosophy was due, in part, to the historical tragedy of the Spanish-American War, or a ruthless dictator, or the cultural lag of a people who had lost contact with modern European systems. And even his tragic sense of life was given new meaning in the agony he witnessed taking place in Spain between orthodox and liberals, europeanizers and conservative Spaniards, Republicans and Fascists. And yet, in addition to his participation in the historical events of his time, Unamuno stood in another dimension of historical existence, open only to those who have struggled with the mystery of life. Throughout the historical events which took place during his life, Unamuno strove toward that final vision, the spiritual vision which is revealed only in the relationship of the individual to God. Along with his existence in a particular time in history, Unamuno stood in the presence of eternity. In this sense, then, perhaps the judgment of Gerald Brenan is not so far from the truth: "Unamuno is one of those granite figures who seem to live in their own right, very much in space but out of time." 1

Chapter II:
The Meaning of Unamuno's Tragic Sense of Life

Part I:
The Framework of the Tragic Sense of Life

(1) Introduction:

In an article that appeared in the review Caras y Caras of Buenos Aires on September 23, 1923, Unamuno remarked that

"the greatest writers have spent their lives reiterating a few points, always the same ones; polishing and re-polishing them, seeking the most perfect, the definitive expression of them." 1

Never has a writer followed his own dictum more readily than Unamuno, and yet never has the same writer been able to return to the same basic themes in so many mysterious ways. For this reason, there are few of his writings which do not contain some reference to one of his central themes, although these themes are often disguised under new approaches. It is precisely when one believes he has produced a systematic outline of Unamuno's philosophy that he is most distant from the literary productions of this contradictory prophet. In speaking of his own writings, Unamuno attempted to voice a protest against those scholars who wanted to overcome the contradictory character of his works through rationalistic, systematic means:

"I know there will always be some dissatisfied reader, educated in some dogmatism or other, who will say: 'This man comes to no conclusion, he vacillates—now he seems to affirm one thing and then its contrary—"

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he is full of contradictions--I can't label him. What is he? Just this--one who affirms contraries, a man of contradiction and strife, as Jeremiah said of himself; one who says one thing with his heart and the contrary with his head, and for whom this conflict is the very stuff of life." 1

Since Unamuno's theme of the perpetual tension between opposites was also the form in which he expressed himself in his literature, there will be times when he seems to dance on the brink of absolute contradiction. Unamuno has said this of his own writings:

"All my books, good or bad, are literary or imaginative; poetic, if you like. I don't like deception. I fish without bait; anyone who likes can bite." 2

Because the literature of Unamuno is imaginative, therefore, and expressed itself in terms of existential paradoxes and contradictions, his writings have been open to the problem of misinterpretations. As one of his interpreters, Carlos Blanco Aguinaga, has said:

"In the long history of Spanish letters few names as that of Unamuno's will have brought upon themselves such possibilities and almost complete contradictory and subjective reactions." 3

Unamuno has been called a Protestant, Catholic, atheist, nihilist, existentialist, pragmatist, and mystic; his writings have been characterized as philosophical works on existentialism, vitalism, or naturalism, or as literary productions of a new kind. But the essential problem of placing Unamuno in any

philosophical or literary school is that he will contradict the themes of any school as many times as he will follow in its tradition. Professor J.B Trend of Cambridge University has called attention to this basic problem:

"How can an introducer do justice to the zig-zags of Unamuno's thought: to a prose-writer whom such a master of verse as Ruben Dario could describe as being before all things a poet, to a prophet, who 'believed that he believed, but did not really believe,' to a philosopher who took up the most contradictory positions one after the other?" 1

If it is evident, then, that Unamuno's philosophy is not a system, in the sense that this term carries a metaphysical statement about reality as a whole, then it becomes necessary to seek some common ground, some central motif, in which to begin any interpretation of the literature. Nietzsche once said of his philosophy that it did not spring from detached, isolated thoughts, but "from a common root, from a primary desire for knowledge, legislating from deep down...." 2 The same statement might be made of Unamuno's philosophy: that is, it sprang from a common root and a primary desire. This common root is the tragic sense of life, expressed in terms of contradiction and struggle.

All the literature of Unamuno revolves around the meaning of the tragic sense of life, and the dialectical language he used dramatized this tragic sense in contradictory terms. This tragic sense of life is the common root of his philosophy.


and literature; this fact explains why any attempt to systematize Unamuno's thought and overcome the contradictory elements of his philosophy is doomed to failure. A static interpretation of Unamuno's writings overcomes the creative source of his philosophy: that being is essentially "in-struggle," and that the tragic sense of life is maintained in this struggle and expressed in contradictory ways. Thus, his philosophy is not a system, nor an eschatology, nor a rational explanation of the world-process, but a dynamic surging of the tragic contradictions of human existence maintained in a "being-in-struggle." Salvador de Madariaga, one of Spain's most respected historians, seems to have understood this essential root of Unamuno's philosophy:

"Truth, for him, is in the struggle ever alive in men's hearts. Truth, in fact, is that struggle." 1

(2) What is the Tragic Sense of Life?

Unamuno's authentic man is one who lives tragically and in agony, torn by a series of warring provocations: the will to be, and the lingering doubt that one will cease to be; feeling and thought; faith and doubt; hope and desperation; heart and head; life and logic. The existential situation in which a man is caught in the midst of these warring provocations that cannot be resolved in any identity of opposites is the primary source of the tragic sense of life.

Since in the depths of the abyss of man's existence the

warring categories must continually wrestle with each other, there can be no hope for any static interpretation of Unamuno's philosophy. Unamuno never revolted against reason in the name of life nor did he rebel against the creative imagination in the name of reason. The human universe which he describes depends upon the continual struggle between the world of the heart and the world of the head; the victory of feeling, faith, or hope over thought, doubt, or desperation would mean the abolition of all that makes human life creative. The man of flesh and bone is the authentic man who lives in the tragic dimension of life; he is not a man who turns from the chaos of the imagination to the steady light of the reason, nor is he the man who escapes from the threat of using his rational qualities into the effortless, comforting realm of faith. Rather, the authentic man lives within the continual struggles between reason and faith, feeling and thought, heart and head because the universe itself offers no final resting place, no peace or quietude. Angel del Río believes that the tragic contradictions of human existence were at the root of Unamuno's life and writings:

"Unamuno lived, as few men and writers have lived, in conflict and contradiction, and it is precisely this living in inner strife which constitutes the core of his thought, of his literary work, of his significance." 1

Although the tragic contradiction of life was at the very foundation of Unamuno's own personality, there is also a sense

in which this same tragic sense existed in Spain.

The history of Spanish culture during Unamuno's lifetime was one of agony, tension, and contradiction. "Spanish existence consists of a polemic," Américo Castro had once written; and this internal struggle in Spain was seen by Unamuno in the light of his tragic sense of life. During all of Unamuno's years at Bilbao or Salamanca, conflicts were taking place between europeanizers and those who sought to find the "soul of Spain"; between Catholics and liberals. Spain was a land engaged in a vital dialectic. And Unamuno saw in this dialectic the same pulsating force which gave meaning to the tragic sense of life. If Spain became European, and thus incorporated into itself doctrines of rationalism and science, it would lose the essential feeling qualities of the Spanish soul. For this reason, Unamuno called Spaniards to an understanding of their history; he utilized the symbol of Don Quixote to stand for the soul of a Spain which opposed the European rationality. Moreover, Unamuno also saw that his country had retreated from reason; for this reason he could also call for the integration of European ideas into Spanish culture. In short, Unamuno would not remove the struggle of his land between the heart and the head, for he saw in this battle the pragmatic application of his tragic sense of life.

If Unamuno could see the tragic sense of life in his own people, moreover, there is a sense in which he could see it

operating in the history of thought. John MacQuarrie has attempted to show that Unamuno stood within a tradition of Western thought, which included such men as Martin Buber, Ortega y Gasset, Nicholas Berdyaev, and Sergei Bulgakov. MacQuarrie believes that the Unamunian tradition, which he calls a "philosophy of personal being," has at its root the irreducible fact of fragmentariness and tension.

Whether or not Unamuno can be systematically placed in any "school" is highly problematic. But MacQuarrie has the honesty to admit that that the men he lists in this school of personal being are more prophets than systematic philosophers. In many respects, Unamuno and Berdyaev are poets, and proclaimers of visions rather than systems. With this fact in mind, it may be possible to arrive at a certain creative content which is common to all the writers MacQuarrie groups together. This creative content might include the centrality of the human person in the world, and the dynamic, tragic dimension of existence in the light of human freedom. But more important to any understanding of the tradition in which Unamuno stands is to be aware of the influence such men as Pascal, Augustine, Dostoevsky, and Kierkegaard had upon his thought. In particular, Kierkegaard's books, which Unamuno read long before such a term as "existentialism" was made popular, profoundly affected his life and thought. In Kierkegaard's revolt against Hegel, his attack on the self-sufficiency of reason, his category of

the paradox, and his stress on the radical decision of faith in the face of the God-man paradox, Unamuno discovered a spiritual brother. But, in the last analysis, as Kierkegaard stressed the category of the "single one," Unamuno stressed the nature of the individual; and it is as an individual that he must be evaluated. Though there may be some ontological structures in the tragic sense of life, since the endless war of opposites is at the ground of being, and though there may be an existentialist concern for the pathos of human existence, Unamuno's position in Western thought cannot be judged solely on the basis of the contemporary status of existentialism or ontology. It would be absurd to judge a man on the basis of his identity with any system of thought if he spent his life struggling with the mystery of personal, individual existence.

(3) The Meaning of Tragedy:

It has been shown that the deepest dimension of the tragic sense of life is grounded in the perpetual battle between the heart and the head, so that all identity or harmony of opposites entails the loss of this dimension. But why is this perpetual battle a tragic dimension of existence?

When Unamuno speaks of "tragedia," he has a certain mode of tragedy in mind. Tragedy essentially means "a conflict or collision between two forces so well matched that neither can decisively win over the other." 1 No external event, which by eliminating either of these two contending forces, can

terminate the conflict. And these two forces in the Unamunian philosophy were thought of as a differentiation of individual consciousness into reason (thought, logic, intellect) and feeling (imagination, creativity, faith). Because these two forces were engaged in a continual struggle, agony becomes the substance of human existence. Men must live in the midst of agony, because the ontological structure of human life implies that hope and belief can never triumph over doubt and desperation.

Unamuno never attempted to gather any systematic formula around this tragic dimension, tracing its meaning and origins in traditionally scholarly ways. He did accept the fact, however, that this tragic sense of life was a part of his own existence. The question he asked concerning the struggle of existence was: where is the tragic sense of life taking place? It was only on infrequent occasions that he asked the more speculative question: why is this struggle a fact of experience? In both his greatest philosophical work, The Tragic Sense of Life, and in his most respected literary production, Mist, Unamuno seemed to accept the dimension of tragedy as a real fact of human existence.

In the Tragic Sense of Life Unamuno began his philosophy with the insistence that the authentic man, the man of flesh and bone, contained within himself the conflict between the heart and the head. And because this struggle took place in a conflict where one force could never hope to gain victory over the other power, existential agony became the tragic situation of man. Tragedy was thus conceived as the condition
of human beings caught in a struggle which could never be resolved, in a struggle between values of the heart and reasons of the intellect. Philosophy, then, was ground in tragedy, for "the most tragic problem of philosophy is to reconcile intellectual necessities with the necessities of the heart and will." 1

(4) Tragedy and Creativity:

Tragedy is not merely the occasion for the stenic acceptance of the universe. Tragedy can also be the arena in which the courage to create emerges, in which reason and feeling find their common battleground. At the foundation of Unamuno's tragic sense of life is the belief that out of the abyss of tragedy there can arise creativity and joy. In the Tragic Sense of Life, for example, Unamuno attempted to show how the uncertainty which lies at the abyss between reason and vital feeling can be the basis of a "vigorouse life, of an efficacious activity, of an ethic, of an esthetic, of a religion and even of a logic." 2

The way in which creativity arises out of the abyss of tragedy cannot be dealt with abstractly or in a speculative fashion, as if a philosophical treatise could develop the theme in conceptual structures. The way in which creativity is possible from a tragic framework can be seen only in its operations in existence, as it moves within the life of the man of flesh and bone.


2. Ibid., p. 124.
Without developing the theme of tragedy and creativity in any kind of systematic structure, it is possible to see the major emphasis of Unamuno in the light of Nietzsche's analysis of the birth of tragedy.

Nietzsche asked the question: How is it possible for the Greeks, whose noble and strong character persist to this day, to be in need of tragedy? And he answered: Is it not possible for there to be a creative pessimism, a "penchant of the mind for what is hard, terrible, evil, dubious in existence, arising from a plethora of health, plenitude of being." 1 Might it not be that optimism is a sign of decay, that when one seeks to deaden the tragic sense of life there is degeneration? Witness, says Nietzsche, the effect of Socratic ethics, dialectics, the temperance of the Greek hero; could not these be symptoms of decline and dissolution? In opposition to Schopenhauer's feelings in his World as Will and Idea that tragedy guides us to resignation, Nietzsche believed that the tragic sense of life was a sign of creativity, of life-giving values. 2

Unamuno would hold, with Nietzsche, that the tragic sense of life gives the possibility for creativity. As he said in one of his essays, which shows how he turned tragedy into creation and doubt into saving scepticism:

"I shall spend my life struggling with the mystery, even without any hope of penetrating it, because


2. Ibid., p. 12.
this struggle is my hope and my consolation. Yes, my consolation. I have become accustomed to finding hope in desperation itself." 1

Part II:

The Sphere of Activity:

The Tragic Sense of Life in the Man of Flesh and Bone--

(1) The Point of Departure:
The Man of Flesh and Bone

Unamuno's starting-point is the concrete man of living flesh and bone (el hombre concreto, de carne y hueso). This man of flesh and bone is

"the man who is born, suffers, and dies--above all, who dies; the man who eats and drinks and plays and sleeps and thinks and wills; the man who is seen and heard; the brother, the real brother." 2

This concrete man is the man who lives on earth, who participates in the dimensions of historical existence, and whose life is a curious mixture of reality and dreams.

This point of departure is, first of all, in reaction to all philosophies of man which speak of man's "spiritual existence," or which reduce man to a abstract idea in some anthropological system, or which speak of man's soul apart from his historical existence. Man is more than the idea of man; his existence is more primary than his essence; he has a body as well as a soul. Man, apart from his unique historical existence, is a no-man:

"the legendary featherless biped,... the social contractor of Rousseau, the 'homo economicus' of


the Manchester school, the 'homo sapiens' of Linnaeus, or, if you like, the vertical mammal."

It is this man of the flesh and bone, moreover, who is the object of all philosophy, since philosophy is the inner biography of the philosopher and his inner spiritual yearning. Philosophy must concern itself with man as he exists in the world, with human beings who struggle, suffer, love, and die. Unamuno thoroughly criticized the methods of those philosophers who made the flesh and bone human being into a creature of their systems. He felt that philosophers who attempted to reduce human reality into a single system might account for the existence of men in rational terms, but they turned concrete lives into sheer abstractions. He felt that these philosophers might discuss the existence, the life of men, but they could not succeed in reaching my existence, my life. Philosophers, Unamuno felt, should begin with the realization that they are real men speaking to other living men; and before attempting to know the Truth they ought to inquire about their own truth.

Nevertheless, in even the most abstract systems of philosophy Unamuno found the man of flesh and bone behind the system, the man clinging to existence. Behind the philosopher of the Critique of Pure Reason, for example, Unamuno found Immanuel Kant, the author of the Critique of Practical Reason, who went from the abstract God to the God of the moral order. Kant, Unamuno said, "reconstructed with the heart that which with the head he had overthrown." 2 Or in the philosophy of

1. Ibid., p. 1.
2. Ibid., p. 4.
Benedict Spinoza, Unamuno found the flesh and bone man who yearned to persist in his own being. Even Hegel's system, disguised by its use of technical philosophical language, came to be understood in the light of Unamuno's man of flesh and bone. Thus to Unamuno, Hegel seemed to be concerned with his own existence, even when he "attempted with definitions to reconstruct the universe." 1

Thus, Unamuno found at the foundation of human existence the category of the flesh and bone man. To study philosophy is to look for the flesh and bone human being contained within. In order to reach this dimension of philosophy, Unamuno utilized a procedure which might be called "emotional comprehension," to set it apart from critical analysis. This methodology implies creative participation in the life of the one who is studied; one must get behind the book or the system to the man of flesh and bone. And the creative act by which one accomplished this task was an act of imagination. Reason can re-construct the outline of a man's thought and life; but it cannot emotionally enter into the life-situation, the inner history of a man, in order to understand his philosophical work.

This laborious search for the supreme reality, the man of flesh and bone, led Unamuno to reject all those external truths which had no meaning for flesh and bone existence. What was real was the concrete man in his historical existence; and this concrete man was at the very foundation of the tragic

1. Ibid., p. 5.
sense of life. It should not be imagined, however, that Unamuno's preoccupation with the existence of man was a preoccupation with the concept of humanity. Unamuno was not a traditional humanist, if being a humanist entails an affirmation of the generic concept of man. Unamuno declared that the concept of humanity was foreign to him, for what was most real was the particular man of this world. Or, as Unamuno said: "The world is made for consciousness, for each consciousness... A human soul is worth all the universe." ¹ When Unamuno affirms man, he affirms the worth of the individual man; and this affirmation, as he says, "is the true humanism—the humanism of man, not of the things of man." ²

(2) The Spheres of Tragic Contradictions in the Man of Flesh and Bone

Human Knowledge:

The tragic sense of life is rooted in an inner contradiction in knowledge itself. Man's knowledge is dependent upon the tragic tensions in human consciousness; and consciousness is a disease:

"Man, by the very fact of being man, of possessing consciousness, is, in comparison with the ass or the crab, a diseased animal." ³

Nevertheless, although all knowledge is agony, there are at least two motivations for knowing: knowing for the sake of

1. Ibid., p. 12.
2. Ibid., p. 13.
3. Ibid., p. 18.
knowledge, and knowing in order to live.

Knowledge for its own sake, says Unamuno, leads to despair and abstraction. The symbolism of the creation story in Genesis, for example, points to the disease of knowledge for its own sake. The curiosity of Eve with regard to the knowledge of good and evil led to the Fall; and with that Fall, human history began. Eve did not seek knowledge for the enrichment of her own life; rather she sought knowledge on its own ground because it would make her into a God. And this rational disease in the creation story is also our disease: we have an appetite for knowledge simply because it is there; we want to taste the fruit of the tree of good and evil. This knowledge for knowledge's sake, Unamuno believes, was given impetus by Aristotle's philosophy; and it is the source of our malady. 1

But there is another type of knowledge: "the necessity of knowing for the sake of living." 2 Knowledge must be found in life; and afterwards, life can be found in knowledge.

Those who seek knowledge for its own sake are chained to dead truths. Knowing is the art of giving life:

"To seek life in truth, then, is to seek, in the cult of truth, to ennoble and elevate our spiritual life and not to convert truth, which is and always must be living, into a dogma, which usually is dead." 3

1. Ibid., p. 21.
2. Ibid.
Since knowledge gives life and must be wedded to life, it is also creation. To know is to create that which is known:

"To know, then, is in effect to create; and all our living knowledge pre-supposes penetration, a fusion of the bowels of the spirit that knows with the thing that is known." 1

Here is both an existential and a mystical art of knowledge. To know is not an objective act of detachment; it is, rather, a personal penetration into what is known. One never lives outside of his own knowledge; rather, he penetrates, creates an opening, so that what is known gives life. For this reason, love is also a form of knowledge. To love is to create an opening in the mystery of the loved one; it is to penetrate into the heart of what is known in order to live.

Man, then, only truly knows what is necessary for living and self-preservation. He knows in order to live; he does not live in order to know. As Unamuno said:

"In effect, that which has existence for us is precisely that which, in one way or another, we need to know in order to exist ourselves." 2

The starting-point for all knowledge is the will-to-live. Even the philosopher philosophizes in order to live. Nonetheless, the tragic dimension of knowledge takes place precisely at this point. For there are those for whom knowledge must always be in the service of life; and there are those for whom knowledge is sought for its own sake. The tension between these two modes of thought is inevitable:


2. Unamuno, op. cit., p. 34.
"For living is one thing and knowing is another; and...perhaps there is such an opposition between the two that we may say that everything vital is anti-rational, not merely irrational, and that everything rational is anti-vital. And that is the basis of the tragic sense of life." 1

This tragic dimension of knowledge can be seen in the philosophy of Descartes. In Descartes' *Discourse on Method* the real beginning is not the decision to doubt everything, but the decision to empty himself of himself, of the real flesh and bone man. Descartes had said that the first principle of philosophy was that the thinking-self was the proof of existence:

"It was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be somewhat; and as I observed that this truth, I think, hence I am, was so certain and of such evidence, that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the Sceptics capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruple, accept it as the first principle of the Philosophy of which I was in search." 2

Unamuno held that Descartes' famous dictum, "Cogito ergo sum," did not simply mean "I think, hence I am." Rather, it meant: "I think, hence I am a thinker." Life forces us to live whether or not reason is able to prove our existence. For this reason, Descartes' famous statement should have read, "I am, therefore I think." 3

Despite Unamuno's division of knowledge into two distinct categories, it is quite clear that the world will not be anything

1. Ibid., p. 35.
3. Unamuno, op. cit., p. 36.
else but world; men will not suddenly turn away from the abstractions of pure reason toward knowledge for the sake of life. And because of this situation there will remain a tragic dimension in knowledge itself; the struggle between the "reasons" of the heart and the reasons of the head will continue.

Will and Passion:

John A. MacKay of Princeton Theological Seminary had called Unamuno "Europe's most outstanding men of letters in the early decades of the present century." 1 In the tragic depths of the will and passion Unamuno returned to literary forms to develop his theme, for literature depicts the passions, wills, and thoughts of flesh and bone men. Certain philosophers, including such men as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, or Berdyaev, have been able to charge their works with passion. And, though Unamuno shared in their passionate concerns, he found that passion had to be portrayed in the life of the flesh and bone man. Literature, he believed, provided an arena where the passion and will of real men could be most creatively portrayed, where men could be seen as they acted out this passionate drama of existence.

In the Prologue to the Three Exemplary Novels Unamuno provided background material for the development of his tragic dimension in passion and will. Novels are creations, he said, and not merely representations of life. Literary

realism, which was in fashion during Unamuno's time, had urged writers to portray life in its most detailed form, to "paint a picture" of the world around them. In opposition to realism, Unamuno believed that true art was creation, where "reality is an intimate, creative thing--it is a thing that is willed!" Therefore, the characters in novels were to be portrayed as they would like to be, and not as they are; for the real person is the "creator within one, in one's heart." The personality of any human being is a mystery; and one must respect the dynamics of the heart, and not attempt to overcome the essential mystery with so-called realistic pictures.

For these reasons, Unamuno's characters are not products of an intellectual procedure which desires to characterize a man by the outward events of his life. Rather, the characters in his novels are extensions, projections if you wish, of Unamuno's own tragic sense of life. As creations, however, the characters are dreams; they do not participate in the same dimension of reality as does their author. However, dreams are also part of reality; they simply have another realm of meaning. For this reason Unamuno can say of his characters,

"But I know they will live. I am as sure of that as I am that I shall live myself. How? When? Where? Ah, that, God only knows!"

2. Ibid., p.20.
3. Ibid., p. 33.
Unamuno turned to the question of passion and will in the first novel in his work, *Three Exemplary Novels*. *Nothing Less Than a Man* is one of Unamuno’s best known stories in this country, although it is one of the most baffling. At first reading the story seems bare; the language is too simple and obvious. But the purpose behind the story is clear: Unamuno wished to give life to his tragic dimension in passion.

Alejandro, the main character in the work, is a Nietzschean hero. He is the man who creates his own values, whose world is not the social or political stage, but whose existence issues from some deep passion. His world is personal because he creates it, because he believes that he is the author of his own destiny. At one point in the novel his wife asks him about his family, and he replies: "My family begins with me. I made myself.

And yet, Unamuno’s tragic sense of passion permeates this work. Alejandro is a man who arrives at the affirmation that things exist simply because he wants them to exist; he affirms things with the passion and energy which makes them so. He affirms that his wife loves him, even if he does not love her in return. He affirms that his wife has not had an affair with a count, even when he knows she had. Reality is simply self-will; what is real has been created by the person who makes it real. Even illusions become real simply because he gives them reality. And if it is true, as Unamuno affirms in his Prologue,

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that God rewards or punishes one on the basis of what one has wanted to be, then Alejandro is a lost soul. For he has wanted to be his own universe, self-sufficient, and a law unto himself. Early in his life he had asserted his right to be his own man when "he had shaken his fist at a figure of Christ in his little village church." 1 And later in his life, when his wife dies, he begins to realize the tragedy of his passion.

The tragedy of Alejandro's passion is that he only asserts his own will, apart from the spiritual comfort which is possible in the acceptance of others. He has made himself, but he has no strength to make his world subsist. Death conquers his self-affirmation; he cannot will himself beyond death: passion dies with the body.

In the end of the story Alejandro finishes life with the same affirmation as he began life: he commits suicide.

"When later on, they had to break down the door of the death chamber, they found him with his arms around his wife. He was pale and deathly cold and bathed in the blood that had been drained completely from him." 2

In another of the stories in Three Exemplary Novels Unamuno returns to the same tragic dimension of self-will. Two Mothers is the story of a demonic will of a woman gone astray in some kind of dark maternal urge. The protagonist of the novel, Raquel, is a woman who cannot have children; and thus,

1. Ibid., p. 226.
2. Ibid., p. 228.
to guarantee her immortality and to satisfy her passion for personal creation she makes her husband, Juan, marry another woman so that she may have their first child. Juan is torn between these two women; but he is always under the power of Raquel, who symbolizes an evil passion that cannot be satisfied. Berta, the woman whom Raquel has forced Juan to marry, is the opposite force in the novel. Her will is dominated by the love she has for Juan. Juan's feelings in the abyss between these two women is a perfect description of the tragic tension involved in the region between good and evil passions:

"Poor Juan, now without the 'Don,' trembled between the two women, between his angelic and his demonic redeemer. Behind him was Raquel and before him Berta, and both were driving him on. Where to? He saw that it was toward perdition."

Raquel, who is the demonic passion, finally triumphs, gains the newborn child, and her own personal immortality. Juan, who is the pawn between two powers, makes his only possible choice: he kills himself.

In both of these stories in Three Exemplary Novels Unamuno seems to be pointing to the tragic dimension in passion. Passion is necessary for life, because it is out of passion that creation emerges. And yet, passion can also turn upon itself, consume itself, and lead to death. To paraphrase another bromide, it might be said that one strong passion dies the death of a thousand smaller passions.

1. Ibid., p. 88.
But it is in another novel, *Abel Sanchez*, where the contradictory modes of "being-in-passion" can best be seen. Passion not only turns upon itself, but it also struggles with the reason. This struggle with reason can be seen at the heart of *Abel Sanchez*.

On one level, the obvious level, Unamuno's *Abel Sanchez* is the story of a man possessed by a passion, living out his life from the depths of this passion, and enduring the consequences. The passion is envy; the life lived is one of torment; the consequences are spiritual death.

The framework of this novel follows the biblical account of Cain and Abel. Joaquin (Cain) is greatly disturbed by the success of his brother Abel, who manages to acquire fame from his paintings, marry the woman Joaquin loves, and secure immortality through his son. In the end of the novel Joaquin, like his biblical counterpart, kills his brother.

Most critics, including Angel del Río of Columbia University, see *Abel Sanchez* as a novel which revolves around the themes of envy and hatred, and the tragedy of passions which possess human beings. It is, of course, quite clear that one of the themes of the novel is the death which hate and envy bring. As Joaquin put it in the novel, "I began to wonder if I would die with my hate, if my hate would die with me, or outlast me." Nevertheless, it seems that a rather different analysis of the novel is possible in the light of Unamuno's tragic sense of life.

Unamuno felt that the struggle between reason and passion was one of the primary forces in the tragic sense of life, and that the depths of personality arose from the tension between these two powers. Is not the tension between Joaquin and Abel symbolic of the tension between reason and passion? Abel is the imaginative artist, and Joaquin the rational scientist. But the usual contradictory manner of Unamuno's story unfolds, so that Joaquin becomes the creative artist yearning for "pure research" and Abel turns into a mechanical artist who lacks any deep passion. Abel becomes so engrossed in the mechanics and logic of his artistry that he grows insensitive to the suffering people around him. Joaquin, however, who starts out as a disinterested spectator, ends by finding the passions of others through his passion. If this analysis seems contradictory, Unamuno's own words in the novel should be recalled: "Like Job, every man is a child of contradictions." 1

Joaquin and Abel exist in tension throughout the whole novel. Abel's disinterestedness is balanced by Joaquin's intense passions; Abel's lack of interest in personal immortality by Joaquin's strong desire to live on; Abel's acceptance of reality by Joaquin's deep eternal questions; Abel's disregard for religious problems by Joaquin's moving search for God. This opposition occurs throughout the whole novel, for the personalities of Joaquin and Abel are always in conflict.

1. Ibid., p. 135.
If this analysis has any merit, what might be said of Unamuno's solution to the contradictions between these two characters, which is to say, between reason and passion? As in all of Unamuno's work, there can be no final solution. All that can be said is this: the depth of human personality arises from restlessness, from divine discontent; and peace means the end of growth. Just as Dostoevsky wanted to protect the dimension of freedom, even at the cost of human suffering, so Unamuno wanted to guard the dimension of human struggle. The tension between Joaquin and Abel is not resolved, but maintained to their deaths. We are left with the faint hope that had Joaquin turned the passion of hatred into love there might have been a creative struggle. But he did not love; and Unamuno gives the impression that perhaps he will find his peace in God. But, then, can a God who lives in agony and self-doubt offer peace? Joaquin offers no final resolution, except that "in eternal forgetfulness perhaps there is peace." 1

Despite the tragic dimensions in the will and in the passions, Unamuno saw how vitally important they were for the creative existence of the flesh and bone man. To exist was not merely to live by the reasons of the head, but to live by the powers of the heart. The choice between the life of passionate concern and the life of rational detachment is a radical one, similar to the either/or decision of an Ibsen

1. Ibid., p. 173.
or a Kierkegaard. Unamuno also knew the terror of this awesome choice:

"All or nothing! There is profound meaning in that. Whatever Reason may tell us--that great liar who has invented for the consolations of failures, the doctrine of the golden mean... whatever Reason may tell us--and she is not only a liar but a great whore--in our innermost soul... we know that in order to avoid becoming, sooner or later, nothing, the best course to follow is to attempt to become all." 1

Creation: Word and Concept

Unamuno was not only a poet, novelist, and philosopher; he was also a student of language. It must be remembered that Unamuno occupied the chair of Greek language and literature at the University of Salamanca, and that his official profession was as a philologist. Here was a man who worked with words, who taught students about the use and misuse of words, and who knew at least twenty languages and dialects. This was a man who read the Bible in its own tongues, who read Pascal and Kierkegaard in their own languages, and who worked as a poet works with the complexities of human language. More importantly, Unamuno felt that it was his destiny (destino) to educate and to stir his people with words:

"The instrument of this stirring, this awakening and renewal of souls was the word--the spoken and written word. In these words--words of exhortation, of injunction, of indignation--each man could discover what he unknowingly and even intentionally

1. Ibid., p. 198.
concealed from himself. The 'word' was, as it has always been in crucial times, the instrument of revelation—of 'personal revelation.'

Unamuno's mission was to speak in the midst of his people so that they might awake from their sleep. And this mission of speaking and writing the words of life was, or ought to be, the primary concern of the man of the spirit in the contemporary world:

"What, then, is the new mission of Don Quixote, today, in this world? To cry aloud, to cry aloud in the wilderness." 2

But Unamuno was far more than an analytical philosopher, obsessed with the analysis of language. His task was more than that of the scholar who chases after words, who looks for the structure or use of language. Rather, Unamuno saw words as living entities, into which the human being must enter in order to live or to die with them. Words were more than facts of experience or phenomena of cultural configurations; there was a mystery of the word which eluded any critical analysis. Words were experienced just as any other human emotion was experienced. Words excited us, stirred us, paralyzed us. Words struck at the very core of our existence, and might bring us into relationship with the universe or deaden our sensitivity for the mystery of life.

In short, words were not the source of philosophical


language games. Words are the language of reality:

"Language is that which gives us reality, and not as a mere vehicle of reality, but as its true flesh, of which all the rest, dumb or inarticulate representation, is merely the skeleton." 1

Unamuno would never have given ground to those contemporary philosophers of language who deal with words as they would deal with mathematical formulations. Language is more than an object open to the critical analysis of philosophers; language is more than logic, and its meaning must not always be verified in sense experience. Rather than asking the analytical question of language—what do you mean by such or such a preposition?—Unamuno would have asked: is this language part of existence; does it cling to the depths of who and what you are as a flesh and bone being; would you live or die with your language? Words were not objects, but subjects, living realities, which tended to take on human characteristics.

To be sure, words were also subject to the same tragic contradictions as the flesh and bone man. They lived in a constant state of war and conflict. In particular, words were at war with concepts. Words pointed to some depth-experience, while concepts were the intellectual formulations of abstractions. But both words and concepts had to engage in a vital struggle, for without this struggle language would be only the speech of a skeleton.

1. Ibid., p. 311.
Because words were at the root of who and what man is, and because language was the living reality which helped men to communicate and to find meaning in the world, Unamuno was able to say: "All things were made by the word, and the word was in the beginning." 1

Even though human history was tied to the words of living language, there was a sense in which Unamuno felt that the last word was God's word. The word of God, however, always existed in tension with the words of men, for God's word called men into repentance. Unamuno's poem to the Christ of Velazquez best conveys this faith:

"Thou, the Word that was made flesh; for the substance of man is the word, and it is our triumph to make our flesh the word, making ourselves angels of the Lord. The Word became flesh, our Jesus, Thou didst dwell with us to make our sinning flesh words that may live forever in heaven, and thy death on the cross was pledge of the resurrection of our bodies." 2

Dreams and Logic

Unamuno's notion of man can be derived from the characters in his novels, because these characters are imaginative creations of what goes on in the inner turmoil of the man of flesh and bone. All the characters which Unamuno created in his novels were engaged in a struggle to exist. Like their creator, they were men of contradictions. In these novels, moreover, there is a frequent mention made of dreams and logic as being at the foundation of the tragic dimension of human life.

1. Ibid., p. 312.

Dreams, however, are not merely passive entities; they are related to the creative and imaginative depths of existence, for as Unamuno said,

"The maddest dreams of the fancy have some ground of reason, and who knows if everything that the imagination of man can conceive either has not already happened, or is not now happening or will not happen some time, in some world or another?" 1

In his novel Mist (Niebla) Unamuno turned to the tragic tension between dreams and logic. Augusto Pérez, the main character, falls in love with a woman called Eugenia; but when they are about to be married, Eugenia leaves Augusto to marry her former sweetheart. Augusto decides to commit suicide because of the turn of events. At this point in the novel, however, Unamuno, the creator, steps into his creation; he tells Augusto that he will not allow him to commit suicide. This procedure seems to be the precursor of Pirandello's method in his book Six Characters in Search of An Author. As lord of his creation, Unamuno finally decides to permit Augusto to kill himself.

The contradiction between dreams and logic is best seen in this novel in the tension which exists between Augusto, who is a dreamer, and Paparrigópulos, the logical scholar, who believes dreams are useless functions of the mind.

Augusto is a flesh and bone man caught in a dream-like creation of his creator. He knows reality to be a mist, a dream, a "nebula." The essential question which constantly returns to him is simply this one:

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1. Unamuno, op. cit., p. 126.
"What is the real world but the dream that we all dream, the common dream?" 1

Life is a dream, a "nebula" to Augusto. And he describes his feelings in the midst of this dream in these words:

"For the street forms a web in which are cross-woven looks of desire, of envy, of disdain, of compassion, of love, of hate; words of ancient import whose meaning has become crystallized; thoughts and aspirations; all forming a mysterious fabric enshrouding the souls of those who pass along." 2

This feeling for the mist-like qualities of life permeates all Augusto's actions. The world, to him, is a kaleidoscope in which the events of daily life seem hidden in the dream of the universe. Augusto has a difficult time in determining which is the deepest dimension of reality: the dream in which all men are involved, or the daily life which consumes their energies:

"All of this that is happening to me, and happening to the others about me, is it reality or is it fiction? May not all of it perhaps be a dream of God, or of whomever it may be, which will vanish as soon as He wakes?... Is not the whole liturgy, of all religions, only a way perhaps of soothing God in his dreams, so that He shall not wake and cease to dream us?" 3

This feeling for life as a dream in Augusto exists in radical opposition to the conception of life as it exists in the scholar Paparrigópulos. Augusto goes to see Paparrigópulos, seeking advice on his problem. What he finds is a typical word-chaser, devoid of any feeling for the mist of

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2. Ibid., p. 34.
3. Ibid., p. 166.
existence.

Paparrigopulos is convinced that the universe can be explained through a rational analysis of individual Forms, and that all these Forms fit together to produce the essence of the universe. In order to prove his thesis, he studies the past; and he comes to believe that progress is the result of "bug-stickers, word-chasers, date-guessers, and drop-computers." 1 There is certainly nothing about Paparrigopulos to justify a characterization in the least "nivolistic" or imaginative. He is far too concerned with the truth of the head to be confused by the mist of the heart. For, a man with a heart, who knows life to be a dream, will exist in agony. Paparrigopulos is too crafty to be stupid, and too logical to have a heart. He is an abstract man, a no-man.

The tragic contradiction between dreams and logic must exist in mutual agony, each one calling the other into question. If Unamuno considered his characters of fiction to be, in a sense, real flesh and bone men, how much more are real living men to be considered characters in a cosmic dream? Men are also products of a dream—God's dream. This is the origin of the anguish men feel as they become aware of the vast dream in which they immersed, a dream where "nothing is sure; everything is elusive and in the air." 2 Logic attempts to overcome this dream by making life seem rational, by saying to men:

1. Ibid., p. 224.

"One can be sure of reality; there are reasons for everything under the sun." And logic must continue this attack, for dreams might fall into the abyss of nothingness from which they came. But, at the same time, logic must be confronted by the dreams of life, for as Unamuno says:

"May we not imagine that possibly this earthly life of ours is to the other life what sleep is to waking? May not all our life be a dream and death an awakening?" 1

The Tragic Contradiction in the Man of Spain 2

It will be remembered from the earlier sections of this thesis that Unamuno lived in a Spain of transition and conflict. The Spanish-American War of 1898 had left Spanish culture at such a low point that one Spanish politician, Silvela, remarked that the times were such that he could "scarcely feel the pulse of Spain." 3 Spain was simply not ready for life in the modern world. The dogmatism and Inquisitional spirit of her Catholic past still remained; the economical and political organs of the Spanish government were burdened with an ancient ideal of monarchy; and the educational system had not yet felt the impact of science and technology. In short, Spain was trying to live in the modern world with systems developed in the Medieval world.

1. Ibid., p. 232

2. Though it might first appear that this section was discussed earlier in the thesis, I have included a separate section of analysis on the tragic dimension in the individual man of Spain to contrast it with the earlier section on the collective nature of the tragic sense of life in Spanish culture.

The tragic contradiction in the man of Spain, then, was simply how to live in the dawning world of European civilization. In his early work, En Torno Al Casticismo, written during the searchings of the Generation of 1898, Unamuno had discovered two directions open to his people: the first was to return to the deeply rooted traditions of Spanish culture; the second was to become more European, to take into Spanish culture European ideals and practices. The first direction, which was that taken by the Hispanizers, meant that the origin of Spain's decline was to be found in the blind adaptation of European vices: disbelief, scepticism, rationalism, the acceptance of material rather than spiritual things, scientific values, and reason over against faith. The men who formed this group of Hispanizers argued that the Spanish man should return to the authentic tradition of his past, where faith, intuition, mysticism, and spiritual realities had been central. The second direction entailed the reformation of the religious, political, and economic orders along the lines of European countries. Spain's tragic condition was thought to be rooted in its refusal to be a modern nation in a new age; and the solution to this problem might be discovered in an "open door" policy toward Europe.

During his university days, Unamuno stood with the liberals who wanted to reform Spain along European lines. Later in his life he was to call for the regeneration of the traditional Spanish values. But what was central throughout his life was
his concern that these two directions in Spanish culture struggle with each other; and that this struggle between European and Spanish qualities constitute the core of the unique Spanish agony. These two directions, then, are not united by intellectual compromise; rather, they are formed by a vital dialectic. The conflict between the values of the modern world and the values of the Spanish tradition should not be diminished, but increased. Spain had need of the modern world, for the values of the contemporary age—reason, technology, disbelief—had to engage in struggle with the values of the Spanish heritage. Nevertheless, Spain could never lose her unique history as a feeling, intuitive, spiritual people. In Don Quixote, Unamuno found a symbol for the Spanish struggle against the modern age:

"Like a new Savonarola, an Italian Quixote at the end of the fifteenth century, he fights against this Modern Age that began with Machiavelli and that will end comically. He fights against the rationalism inherited from the eighteenth century. Peace of mind, reconciliation between reason and faith—this, thanks to the providence of God, is no longer possible." ¹

As in all the other categories Unamuno utilized, the man of Spain must be engaged in a struggle between contradictory modes of being. A human community does not live in peace and certainty, but in vital anguish and conflict. The anguish of the Spanish man is his historical place in an age which is in opposition to his own tradition. This anguish must not be decreased, but increased; for this precise agony is the source

of creative possibilities; this explains why in the last analysis Unamuno could only cry to his people: "May God deny you peace, but give you glory!" 1

The Tragic Dimension in Death

The tragic dimension of death is closely allied with the hunger for immortality and the agony of the Christian faith. But the reality of death is a theme to which Unamuno returned to throughout his philosophical and literary works. Death was not merely a speculative problem in the Unamunian world; it was a force which remained behind and within his agony. To die was a serious thing, perhaps the most serious event in the existence of the flesh and bone man. Death permeated all existence, covering it with the sorrowful anticipation of the finality of its action. In an Unamunian sense, perhaps, human beings had more knowledge of death than they did of life. Death was always before the gaze of every man, asking him the ultimate question of his destiny: After I die, what? The presence of death was always before Unamuno:

"This thought that I must die and the enigma of what will come after death is the very palpitation of my consciousness. When I contemplate the green serenity of the fields or look into the depths of clear eyes through which shines a fellow-soul, my consciousness dilates. I feel the diastole of the soul and am bathed in the flood of the life that flows about me, and I believe in my future; but instantly the voice of mystery whispers to me, 'Thou shalt cease to be!' the angel of Death touches me with its wing, and the systole of the soul floods the depths of my spirit with blood of divinity." 2

1. Ibid., p. 330.

2. Ibid., p. 40.
Man’s consciousness cannot quite comprehend the full impact of death; he cannot think of himself as not existing:

"Try reader," says Unamuno, "to imagine yourself, when you are wide awake, the condition of your soul when you are in deep sleep; try to fill your consciousness with the representation of no-consciousness, and you will see the impossibility of it. The effort to comprehend it causes the most tormenting dizziness. We cannot conceive ourselves as not existing."

And yet, man must die; that much is certain. But to die is also to live; herein exists the tragic contradiction of death. Death produces life; it makes men struggle unceasingly against it. This explains why for Unamuno to live is primarily to agonize, to fight against death. Death produces the love of life, the longing to prolong and perpetuate life.

Nevertheless, Unamuno does not treat the theme of death systematically, employing critical tools for analytic purposes. Mario J. Valdés, whose most recent work was on death in the literature of Unamuno, believes that Unamuno looked at death in three ways: as a mystic, as an existentialist, and as an artist.

Some scholars have tended to classify Unamuno as a mystic, whose contemplative spirit was the result of his poetic nature. This mystic strain in Unamuno, however, is present only in the early writings, before the religious crisis of 1897. In this

1. Ibid., p. 38.
stage of his life, which might be thought of in terms of the aesthetic stage, the overwhelming spectacle of life seemed to be saying that nothing dies, that everything merely changes into another form. Unamuno would have stood very close to position of the Romantic poets, who attempted to lose themselves in the mysteries of life. He might have given voice to the same stoic contemplation of death as did Wordsworth in his poem "The Prelude":

"A thought is with me sometimes, and I say
Should the whole frame of earth...Be wrenched, or fire come down from far to scorch Her pleasant habitations,...Yet would the living Presence still subsist Victorious..." 1

Unamuno also came to look at death as an artist, so that the threat of death became an impetus for artistic survival. Death posed the ultimate problem to the writer, for it meant that his words had to be so charged that they lived again in the lives of his readers. In the re-creation of his words in others, the writer lives on. Unamuno certainly expressed this longing for aesthetic survival:

"When you think me quite dead
I shall tremble in your hands.
I leave you here my soul-book,
Man, the real world,
When all of you vibrates
It is I, reader, who vibrates in you." 2

But Unamuno's hunger for immortality could not find deep enough ground in either the mystic or the artistic view of

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death. In the early stage in his life, when he had come under the influence of the English and Spanish Romantic poets, the thought that death was but the transformation of life into another form gave him consolation. Once, when he had observed a man digging a trench by the side of a river, Unamuno thought he had not seen a man but a human form in a process of transformation, which would change, not die, and merge with the eternal currents of time. But this vision could not remain with Unamuno for a lifetime; it was a possibility for the young who had not witnessed the brutal finality of death, but in the sufferings of his people Unamuno saw the agents of death. But neither was the artistic attitude toward death a continuing possibility for Unamuno, even though he considered himself to be a poet above all else. It was one thing to live on in the thoughts and memories of others, and it was another thing to live on for oneself. To live on through one's words was not enough, for eventually the words would lose the personality of the artist and be submerged into the dream of life. In one of his poems, "For After My Death," Unamuno called attention to the fact that death conquers even the aesthetic survival of the artist:

"I am not, but my song lives after me and carries round the world the shadow of my shadow, sad non-existence! Reader, you hear me, I do not hear me and this trivial truth, which because it is so we allow to fall as falls the rain, is rain of sorrow, drop from the ocean of bitterness."
Where are you going to die, oh my song?
In what secreted corner
will you breathe your last breath?
For you also will die, as all will die,
and in infinite silence
all hope will sleep forever!" 1

If there is to be any understanding of why the gospel was "good news" to Unamuno, it must first be understood that he knew the sting of death as part of his present existence. Death claimed everything in the universe; neither the artistic nor the mystical stance could hide the fact that death was the final word in life. For this reason, it might be said that Unamuno would agree with the stance of some contemporary existentialists who point to death as an existential characteristic of life and not merely as the biological end of existence. In another of his poems, "Two Rome Incidents," the lurking presence of death lends belief to the notion that Unamuno literally lived with death during his lifetime:

"It is night, in my study.
Utter solitude; in my breast I hear
the throbbing of my heart
-it feels alone,
it feels itself the target of my mind-
I hear my blood
whose gentle murmur
pervades the silence....
Here, at night, I alone in this my study
the books are silent;
my oil lamp sheds
its peaceful light upon these sheets of paper,
light like that of a sanctuary;
the books are silent;
the spirits of the poets, of the thinkers,
and it is as if death were very cautiously
hovering around me." 2

2. Ibid., p. 143.
It is this existential reality of death, where the threat of non-being causes despair and anxiety over finitude in being, that Unamuno finds the tragic sense of life. He wants to live; he wills to live, but he knows that he must die: this is the tragic dimension of death. He wants the cosmic "I," the Yo, to live on, despite the certainty which reason gives as to its end. Unamuno's cry to live on is a passionate affirmation of life:

"I do not want to die--no; I neither want to die nor to want to die; I want to live for ever and ever and ever. I want this 'I' to live--this poor 'I' that I am and that I feel myself to be here and now, and therefore the problem of the duration of my soul, of my own soul, tortures me." 1

The man of flesh and bone is aware of his personhood because it pains him to lose it. The result is a struggle that cannot be avoided: the will demands to live on, but the rational faculties reply that this is an absurd desire. Like Pascal, however, Unamuno could not understand those who believed that death was not important, or those who thought that the fear of death was a result of pride. More than once, Unamuno attempted to stress the ultimate importance of death for human existence:

"If we all die utterly, wherefore does everything exist? Wherefore? It is the wherefore of the Sphinx; it is the wherefore that corrodes the marrow of my soul.

"And they keep on wearying our ears with this chorus of pride! Stinking pride! Pride, to wish to leave an ineffaceable name? Pride? It is like calling the thirst for riches a thirst for pleasure. No,

it is not so much the longing for pleasure which drives us poor folk to seek money as the terror of poverty, just as it was not the desire for glory but the terror of hell that drove men in the Middle Ages to the cloister.... Neither is this wish to leave a name pride, but terror of extinction." 1

What does death mean for life? How does the demand of the will for eternal life and the negation of this demand by reason lead to creativity? The only direction which Unamuno could give from the abyss of this tragedy was uttered in the name of Christ. 2

Reason and Faith

Unamuno once wrote in one of his poems these words:

"Life is doubt,
and faith without doubt is but death.
Death is the sustenance of life,
and doubt the food of faith.
While I live, oh Lord, give me doubt,
and pure faith when I die; give me life in life, Lord." 3

These words express Unamuno's central conviction that the doubts of reason and the hopes of faith were conflicting agents in the tragic sense of life, feeding off one another, warring with one another, and existing side by side in perpetual tension. We must avoid the common error of supposing that Unamuno was in revolt against reason in the name of life. Were this fact true, neither reason nor faith could exist.

1. Ibid., pp. 43-57.

2. The Christian response to the question of death, which Unamuno was to embrace, will be discussed in the next chapter.

Their warring co-existence was the substance of tragedy, and without their struggle there would be no deep dimensions in the human personality.

But it is a fact that Unamuno was more often in revolt against the reason than against faith. This was due to the fact that reason, both in the Hegelian system of his time and in the rise of science, had gained the upper hand. Men had begun to judge reality in an empirical sense, thinking of spiritual realities as hopeless wanderings of human fancy. Unamuno wished to give life to the dimension of spiritual truths, showing that it was only in the struggle between faith and reason that human beings could live an authentic existence. In his essay "Intelectualidad y Espiritualidad," Unamuno protested against the worship of philosophical reason, taking his starting-point from the words of Hamlet to Horatio: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy." 1 In the same essay, Unamuno declared that the realities of the spirit were as much a part of man as his reason. And in his novel Amor y Pedagogía he helped to attack the dogmatic confidence in scientific reason's capacity to overcome the problems of existence. The hero of this story attempts to rear his son "scientifically," so that he will "amount to something." This inhuman task proves to be futile, for what the father forgets in raising his son is

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the demand of the heart. His own daughter is the person who finally realizes this, for as she says: "Father, do not play thusly with the heart!" 1 Eventually, the son kills himself because he does not have the heart to live.

But it is in Unamuno's commentary on Miguel de Cervantes' Don Quixote that one finds the arena in which reason and faith struggle. Unamuno sees Don Quixote as a symbol of the spiritual struggle for meaning in a world of facts. Quixote is a man of the imagination, for his greatness lies in the fact that "on the altar of his people he made the greatest of sacrifices, that of his reason." 2 Quixote is at times an absurd figure, with his withered face and lantern jaw, his rusty armor and his ramshackle horse Rozinante. But Quixote's quest is not an absurd one; it is a quest of the spirit for immortality. The way in which Quixote describes the nature of his quest is the way in which the man of faith should live in the world.

"At last, having lost his wits completely, he stumbled upon the oddest fancy that ever entered a madman's brain. He believed that it was necessary, both for his honour and for the service of the state, that he should become knight-errant and roam through the world with his horse and armour in quest of adventures, and practise all that had been performed by the knights-errant of whom he had read." 3


But is the man of faith necessarily an absurd figure in the modern world? Yes, Unamuno would say. The man of faith is also an absurd figure, riding off to endure the taunts of a hostile world with nothing but his trust in some power beyond him. But the quest of the man of faith is not absurd, as Don Quixote's quest was not absurd. The man of faith must also ride off into the world with nothing but a promise that he is doing God's will; but the adventure in which he is engaged is one of the greatest adventures open to human beings: the encounter with God.

In opposition to Quixote, Sancho stands as a symbol of the rational, pragmatic life. When Quixote thinks that windmills are giants, it is Sancho who knows they are only windmills. Whenever the madness of Quixote threatens to drag him down into depths from which he cannot escape, it is Sancho's common sense which pulls him up. But it is also Sancho's reason which cannot comprehend the spiritual quest of Quixote. Even in the beginning of their adventures, Sancho urges Quixote to return home:

"In fact, what I can gather clearly from all this is that those adventures which we are after will bring us in the end so many misadventures that we shan't know our right foot from our left. The best thing for us to do, in my humble opinion, is to go back again to our village, now that it's reaping time, and look after our own affairs."

And because Sancho is deaf to the realities of the spiritual world, Unamuno chides him:

1. Ibid., p. 73.
"Concrete solutions! O practical Sanchos, positivist Sanchos, materialist Sanchos! When will ye hear the silent music of the spiritual spheres?" 1

Nevertheless, despite the obvious differences between Quixote and Sancho, they form a unity of opposites. Were it not for the reason of Sancho, Quixote's imagination would have driven him mad; but if Quixote's passionate faith had not been present, Sancho would have been doomed to a life of dull facts. Unamuno called this unity of opposites in Don Quixote and Sancho the greatest literary experiment in Spanish history:

"The greatest, most consoling feature of their common life is that we cannot conceive of the one without the other; and that, far from being two opposed extremes...were...a single being viewed from either side. Sancho kept alive the sanchopanizism of Don Quixote, who quixotized Sancho." 2

This mutual tension is at the heart of the tragic contradiction between faith and reason. Reason must exist as it was symbolized in Sancho, because the demands of reason are fully as imperious as those of life; but the faith of a Don Quixote must also exist, because it is only in faith that the dimensions of spiritual realities can be experienced. Neither reason nor faith, then, must gain the upper hand in a man's life; rather, they must collide in a man's heart:

"In the maintenance of that struggle between the heart and the head, between feeling and reason, in which the former cries: 'Yes!' when the latter says: 'No!' and 'No!' to the other's 'Yes!'--in maintaining the strife and not in trying to harmonize the adversaries is the essence of a fruitful and saving faith." 3

2. Ibid., p. 151.
3. Ibid., p. 167.
(3) A Creative Ethic in the Tragic Sense of Life:

Any man who can teach us how to turn despair and doubt into sources of creative energy has something to say in this generation. For an age which has plunged into the darkness of the soul and has become acquainted with the night is prone to outbursts of despair and resignation. Certainly these are times in which there seems to be no way home, in which the traditional openings of meaning have become obscured. Is it any wonder that a man like William Butler Yeats, standing at the brink of the modern abyss, could cry out in despair?

"Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldier Can leave the mother, murdered at her door, To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free; The night can sweat with terror as before We pierced our thoughts into philosophy, And planned to bring the world under a rule, Who are but weasels fighting in a hole." 

Despair and doubt have a way of turning upon themselves and destroying the possibility of creativity. In the face of an indifferent universe the only pathway which seems light enough is the one in which the sojourner stoically accepts the chaos itself. For one who looks into the indifferent dimensions of the universe too long, it is possible to become as deadly indifferent as the universe itself. And who is able to create in a world which is gone flat, in which creation is as absurd as life itself?

Miguel de Unamuno was a man acquainted with the night. He was a man who felt the precarious dilemma of human beings who suffered, loved, and then disappeared into the darkest regions of death. But instead of turning this darkness into resignation he affirmed that it was precisely from within the tragic contradictions of human personality that creativity was most alive. Like a strange Don Quixote living at the dawn of the twentieth century, which is a century as insane as that of Cervantes, Unamuno embraced agony and uncertainty and turned them into ways of life. This life was, first of all, the path of freedom; for unless man freely elected the struggle of existence there could be no creativity. Like another apostle of freedom, Nicholas Berdyaev, Unamuno might have said:

"The mystery of the world abides in freedom: God desired freedom and freedom gave rise to tragedy in the world." 1

In short, rather than transforming the tragic sense of life into the occasion for resignation, Unamuno saw that it was only from within the tragic struggle of life that creation was possible. For this reason, Unamuno's philosophy, as John MacQuarrie has said of it, was not one of "peace and submission, but of struggle and action, maintaining itself amid doubt and uncertainty." 2 All his philosophical and literary work


has as its central quality the same force which Berdyaev was operating in the novels of Dostoevsky: "They are parts of a tragedy, the inner tragedy of human destiny, the unique human spirit revealing itself in its various aspects and at different stages of its journey." 1 But it was into the tragic struggles of existence that Unamuno called men:

"Don't preach peace to me because I fear it. Peace is submission and falsehood. You know my watchword: truth before peace.... I seek religion and faith in war. If we conquer, what will be the reward of victory? Forget it; seek the struggle.... I don't care, then, whether you agree with me or not, nor whether the others do, since I do not seek them to help me win the victory. I seek them in order to struggle, not to conquer, and I struggle to bear the cross of solitude, for in peace it crushes my heart." 2

But what kind of creative ethic is possible from within this tragic sense of life? How does an authentic existence issue from a region of irreconcilable forces?

Unamuno saw one possible direction from within the abyss as being that of love, suffering, and pity. There is a continuing contradiction in love, which is produced by the conflict between the head and the heart. Love is creation, in the sense that to love is to enter into relationship with that which is loved. But reason tells us that this form of relationship is impossible, for to enter into relation with another means that something of ourselves must be given up or transformed. But it is precisely at that point where human love

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breaks down that spiritual and sorrowful love is born. When there is a realization that human love is finite, the will is directed to that region of love wherein the wounds of men are healed. This particular region, Unamuno believed, was to be found in the suffering love of Christ.

Unamuno also saw that faith, hope, and charity were three possible directions in the ethic from within the tragic sense of life. Faith, to Unamuno, is "the ardent longing that there may be a God." 1 Thus, faith is united with uncertainty; those who claim that they have some secret knowledge about God which relieves them of doubt are gnostics. Faith is uncertain because it is uncertain in life, because it must hope. Faith is a "movement of the soul towards a practical truth, a person, towards something that makes us not merely comprehend life, but that makes us live." 2 And because we live in hope and faith we love. For "love hopes, hopes ever and never wearies of hoping." 3 Nevertheless, faith is not always eschatological; it always has a present aim, which is charity:

"The consciousness that everything passes away, that we ourselves pass away...fills us with anguish, and this anguish itself reveals to us the consolation of that which does not pass away, of the eternal, of the beautiful.

"And this beauty, thus revealed,...only realizes itself practically, only lives through the work of charity. Hope in action is charity." 4

2. Ibid., p. 191.
3. Ibid., p. 200.
4. Ibid., p. 203.
In all this work Unamuno is simply testifying that it is the inner contradiction between the world of the heart and the world of the reason which gives him purpose and meaning. More than once in his writings he stressed this idea; and he sought to show the impact of this truth in his own life:

"It is the conflict itself, it is this self-same passionate uncertainty, that unifies my action and makes me live and work. "We think in order that we may live, I have said; and perhaps it were more correct to say we think because we live, and the form of our thought corresponds with that our life exhibits...."But putting all this aside for the present, what I wish to establish is that uncertainty, doubt, perpetual wrestling with the mystery of our final destiny, mental despair, and the lack of any solid and stable dogmatic foundation, may be the basis of an ethic...." 1

The central symbol for this ethic of creativity was to be found in the figure of Don Quixote, who was the authentic spiritual man of Spain. Unamuno saw that the destiny of man within rationalistic systems was simply

"to create science, to catalogue the universe, so that it may be handed back to God in order...and at the end of all, the human race will fall exhausted at the foot of a pile of libraries...in order to bequeath them--to whom? For God will surely not accept them." 2

Don Quixote's existence, however, was a struggle for consciousness, a battle for the spirit. Though he was thought to be a madman, he existed within the tension between the heart and the head and made of this tension a way of being in the world. Quixote never gave up his quest for

1. Ibid., pp.'s 260-261.
2. Ibid., p. 308.
Dulcinea, for glory, for life, because he realized that the spirit of man only emerged in the midst of the struggle in which man sought to extend his consciousness. To live, for Quixote, was to struggle, to struggle without any hope of victory, to wrestle with the mystery of life. And out of this struggle might come creativity and truth. A truth "which is not, far from it, a reflection of the universe in your mind, but its home in your heart." 1 Moreover, the creative ethic of a Don Quixote is also a spiritual journey taking place in the midst of life: "Spiritual agony is the door to substantial truth. Suffer, in order that you may believe; and believe, in order that you may live." 2 And lastly, the mission of a Don Quixote in the modern world, the mission of any man who must live in the contradictory dimension of his self, is simply this:

"To cry aloud, to cry aloud in the wilderness. But though men hear not, the wilderness hears, and one day it will be transformed into a resounding forest, and this solitary voice that goes scattering over the wilderness like seed, will fructify into a gigantic cedar, which with its hundred thousand tongues will sing an eternal hosanna to the Lord of life and of death." 3

There is a striking relationship between this creative ethic of Unamuno and the philosophy of Pascal, whom Unamuno often spoke of as a man who knew the meaning of the tragic sense of life. Indeed, there are some interesting relationships

2. Ibid., p. 329.
3. Ibid., p. 329.
between the life of Unamuno and the life of Pascal. Both of these men went through similar periods of crisis, during which their life-directions were profoundly altered. In 1655, Pascal turned from his studies in mathematics and physics to a life of meditation in the abbey of Port-Royal. Unamuno also experienced a similar crisis. Prior to 1898 he had fought for the opening of Spanish culture to European ideals. But his directions soon changed. In his own religious crisis Unamuno also turned his heart toward spiritual matters. Moreover, both Pascal and Unamuno felt a desire to replace abstract philosophy with a philosophy of life. Both felt that life was the supreme reality, and that to reduce it to some particular conceptual system was a process of rational prostitution. Significantly, both of these men attacked Descartes in order to strengthen their own positions. Unamuno felt that Descartes had emptied himself of himself; Pascal believed that Descartes' radical search for certainty had left him closed to existence.

Unamuno's insight into the character of Pascal helps to clarify the meaning of a creative ethic within the tragic sphere of existence. For Pascal was not only a man who lived in a state of consciousness where reason and faith were at war with each other, but he also was a man of contradictions who knew the meaning of human agony. In his Meditations, Pascal voiced the same sense of agony which Unamuno saw in his tragic sense of life; Pascal was also a man burdened with
wisdom. Certainly his words betray the same tragic view of man as did Unamuno's writings:

"Let man consider what he is in comparison with all existence; let him regard himself as lost in this remote corner of nature; and from the little cell in which he finds himself lodged, I mean the universe, let him estimate at their true value the earth, kingdoms, cities, and himself. What is man in the infinite?... "A Nothing in comparison with the Infinite, an All in comparison with the Nothing, a mean between nothing and everything." 1

Unamuno believed that Pascal remained in a state of contradiction, and that he passionately wanted to believe with his heart what his head told him was impossible. 2 What is Pascal's famous Wager Argument but a device to go beyond reason, to gamble on God's existence? And yet it is this Wager Argument which shows that Pascal still lived within the tension between reason and faith. Intimately aware that his reason would never be overthrown, Unamuno's Pascal clutches at his will to believe in a frantic attempt to create a supernatural world which, lacking any objective proof, might be safe from rational doubt.

It would not be overly academic to say that what Unamuno found in Pascal was his own tragic sense of life. For his description of Pascal's agony is a description of his own agony; and the depth of Pascal's life is the real meaning of Unamuno's creative ethic. In his study on the concept of


agony in Pascal and Unamuno, Juan Lopez-Morillas has arrived at the essential foundation of Unamuno's creative ethic:

"In the end he (Unamuno) neither resigned himself to the strife between reason and his faith, nor sought to escape it. He came to understand that his life and that strife were merely two perspectives on the same thing, namely his function as a man, and, also, that the agony of Christianity was its most adequate instrumentation. In the struggle between his head and his heart he saw a source of inexhaustible energy and persistence, the assertion of man's integrity in a world conceived as a crusade against death and oblivion. Sensing a close kinship with Pascal, he looked, not for a conclusion—which would be impossible to find in the Frenchman's works, but for the man whose entire life was a contradiction and who made of his thought a system of contradictions."

What Unamuno found in Pascal is also what he asks each man to find in his own soul: that source of creative energy which issues from a agonizing struggle between reason and faith, heart and head, intellect and intuition. In short, Unamuno asks each man to discover the meaning of forging his own soul:

"Shake off your sadness and your will regain, inert you may not look on fortune's wheel that turns and as it passes rubs your heel, for who would live, in him life doth now reign.

You only nourish thus that mortal pain of dying slowly, net whose toils you feel; to labor is to live, the only weal is work; set hand to plow and sow the grain!

You, as you pass, your very self must sow, not looking back, not looking on death's strife, lest the past weigh upon the path to go.

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In you no movement, in the furrows life
whose breathing passes not as clouds but life
with works, whose reaping is the self you sow."
Chapter III

The Religious Dimension of the Tragic Sense of Life:
The Hunger for Immortality and the Agony of Christianity

(1) Introduction

Unamuno has been called an existentialist, ontologist, and pragmatist; his writings have been described as mystical, lyrical, metaphysical, and didactic; his life has been seen as that of a contemplative philosopher, creative artist, or political activist. Despite all these various descriptions of his life and writings, no one has ever denied that Unamuno was a Christian. And it is as a Christian that the real flesh and bone man, the poet and the activist, the pragmatist and the existentialist, must be confronted. For above all other categories, the reality of the Christian faith is at the deepest level of all Unamuno's work. To be sure, Unamuno expressed the centrality of this Christian faith in many ways. As a pragmatist he found the solutions to many practical problems in life in terms of Christian charity. As an existentialist he discovered the meaning of Christian agony for human existence. As an ontologist he found the deepest level of "being-in-struggle" within the agony of a God who struggled in the world. And as a poet he saw the creative center of the Christ event; and in his poetic vision he drew strength from Saint John of the Cross, Saint Theresa, and Saint Ignatius. Moreover, even within the Christian faith
Unamuno found himself in no dogmatic school, nor did he advocate any particular theological stance. He called all men Christians who "invoke the name of Christ with love and respect." Moreover, he said, "the orthodox are odious to me, be they Catholic or Protestant--one is as intransigent as the other--who deny Christianity to those who do not interpret the Gospel as they do." Nonetheless, Unamuno was involved in the Catholicism of his Spanish culture and in the bleeding, suffering Christ of Velazquez. He knew that the Roman Church was the organ of Christian teaching in Spain; but he also sought the meaning of the gospel from Protestant sources, from Kierkegaard and Harnack, from Luther and from Ritschl. In many respects, Hernan Benitez in his book El Drama Religioso de Unamuno seems close to the truth when he says that Unamuno was a man with "a Protestant mind and a Catholic heart." 

If, then, the deepest dimension of the tragic sense of life is to be understood, it must be seen in its relationship to the agony of the Christian faith. Though Unamuno's philosophy was anthropological, in the sense that he began with the existence of the flesh and bone man in the world, it must be remembered that he looked at man, through the eyes of faith, as a participant in a mysterious religious drama. The reality

2. Ibid.
of faith gave men new hearts and eyes to behold the struggles of human existence; and faith created the ears to hear the word of the suffering Christ. In his book, The Christ of Velazquez, Unamuno expressed this conviction in living, rich images:

"Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye shall see me; because I live ye shall live also'--Thou didst say; and see, the eyes of faith grasp Thee in the most secret recesses of the soul and we create, through art, thy visible form." 1

Moreover, Unamuno found the deepest expression of this tragic sphere of faith in the God-man relationship. Man did not simply struggle by himself, but he struggled with God also. Indeed, it was only because God himself lived in agony that the possibility for man's struggle was meaningful:

"Thy sleep is the peace that is given in war, and thy life is the war that gives us peace!" 2

It was always to the God of the Christian faith that Unamuno directed his thoughts, for he believed that it was in the suffering Christ that the tragic sense of life was fulfilled:

"Upon the ebony mantle of night, with the constellations of the stars, God did trace the mystery of human life and Thou with drops of thy blood on the earth didst reveal its secret in faithful testament." 3

In short, above all other interpretations given to Unamuno, the most faithful to his writings and life is the one which begins with the recognition that Miguel de Unamuno

2. Ibid., p. 19.
3. Ibid., p. 115.
was a man who began with human existence in the light of the Christian faith. In his book on Unamuno, Julián Marías begins with the conviction that Unamuno's work is basically religious in nature:

"All the work of Unamuno is steeped in an atmosphere of religion; whatever his theme it ends by showing his religious roots or culminates in a last reference to God. Unamuno was a man of immense reading, but whose spirit, never erudite, showed quite clearly his preferences, and they are very revealing. Above all the Holy Scriptures, particularly the New Testament, and of that, St. Paul, whose thought he scarcely detached from his own. And then some spirits moved essentially by religion in one form or another: St. Augustine, Pascal, Spinosa, Rousseau, Senancour, Leopardi, Kierkegaard, Butler, St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross, St. Ignatius."

And who knows if in the last analysis all the secret of Unamuno, as all the secret of every great religious writer, does not lie in a region closed to all those who demand non-paradoxical language, a region of mysterious existence open only to the heart which is sensitive to the paradox of the hidden and revealed God. Unamuno wanted to protect the struggle of man, for in truth it was also the agony of God.

(2) Death and Immortality

Unamuno's major themes unfold within the drama of a struggling man existing in a world where his faith and reason always collide. One of the most central themes in this drama is that of death and immortality. Faced with the question, "What is man?" Unamuno might have answered, "the hunger

1. Ibid., p. XII.
for immortality." Though Unamuno often returned to the problem of the immortality of the soul, which had been one of the concerns of the Enlightenment, he did not use the term soul in its Platonic sense, as if it were something separate from the body. The real problem that concerned Unamuno was that of the individual human being, both body and soul, who had to face the threat of non-being. Was man doomed to death, to a death of both body and soul? Or could a man hope to survive death? These were the essential questions which Unamuno asked.

To be sure, there are some pragmatic souls who would no longer travel down the same pathway with Unamuno once they had discovered his fear of extinction and his hope for immortality. Death, they would say, is so much a matter of factual experience that it is useless to think about it; and to struggle against it would be a matter for lunatics.

And immortality? Immortality is merely the hopeless fancy of men who cannot endure life. Perhaps these same men, who lack an existential understanding of death, would not voice so different an opinion as that given by Epicurus:

"...but death is deprivation of sensation. And therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not because it adds to it an infinite span of time, but because it takes away the craving for immortality. For there is nothing terrible in life for the man who has truly comprehended that there is nothing terrible in not living." 1

Unamuno knew the terror of death. No pious platitudes nor stoical slogans could remove that utter fear of final extinction. He did not hold a speculative view of death and immortality, for he knew how vitally important they were for the present existence of human beings. To live was to struggle against death, not to avoid it; to live was to make one's life so valuable that the end of it would be an injustice. And to exist was to exist fully, to strive after life and more life, to extend the consciousness into the realm of eternity. Only a sage or wise man could be indifferent in the face of the grave; but for the flesh and bone man who desired, and willed, and loved, the threat of death was a vision of terror.

One of Unamuno's spiritual brothers, Dostoevsky, was also a man who believed that the question of death and immortality was absolutely central to the problem of man's destiny. In his Diary of a Writer he said:

"Neither a man nor a nation can live without a 'higher idea,' and there is only one such idea on this earth, that of the immortal human soul; all the other 'higher ideas' by which men live flow from that.... The idea of immortality is life itself, the definitive formulation and the first source of the truth and integrity of conscience." 1

What this means to Nicholas Berdyaev, one of Dostoevsky's interpreters, is simply that "the denial of man's immortality is equivalent to a denial of man." 2 Either man partakes of

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2. Ibid.
the eternal, or he is a social, passive product of the so-called "real world." Dostoevsky defended the freedom of the human soul, both to will good and to will evil, because only in freedom could the soul be open to eternity. Both Dostoevsky and Unamuno held that human destiny can only be meaningful when it is seen in the light of the destiny of the soul. To believe that immortality and death are not important, is to be chained to a wheel of unfulfilled time, wherein the destiny of human beings can only be thought of as a dream before the final victory of death. Unamuno had no certain knowledge as to what might happen after death, but he did possess a hunger to live forever. Perhaps it might be said that when men are passionately involved in life and concerned with the growth of consciousness they needs must turn to an eschatological notion of a time beyond this one, of a region where human history can be fulfilled and life can be deepened and not destroyed. On the other hand, might it not be that men who place no hope in anything beyond death are sick unto death of life, and would rather have nothingness in death than life in eternity?

Unamuno's most complete analysis of the hunger of immortality was developed in his Tragic Sense of Life, even though many of the characters in his novels possessed this same hunger. Unamuno begins his analysis with this deceptively simple statement: "We cannot conceive of ourselves as not existing."

By the most immense effort of the mind to think of itself as unconscious, it cannot. Consciousness cannot realize absolute unconsciousness. But neither can consciousness realize full depth of being. To be completely conscious, then, one must have a desire for a span of time in which consciousness can be fulfilled. Eternity is born in the Unamunian world:

"Eternity, eternity!—that is the supreme desire! The thirst of eternity is what is called love among men, and whosoever loves another wishes to eternalize himself in him." 1

What is here at work in Unamuno's mind concerning the question of immortality has its roots deep in the spiritual traditions of the Western world. There has often been an intuitive vision in the history of thought which looks beyond the temporal world to some everlasting order of eternity. From Plato to Alfred North Whitehead, certain philosophers and poets have caught glimpses of that order beyond the wreck and decay of worldly events. Perhaps the impetus for this vision comes from a deep sense of the changing currents of time, where human life seems to pass and return nevermore. This same feeling troubled Unamuno: "Everything passes! Such is the refrain of those who have drunk, lips to the spring, of the fountain of life." 2

Because Unamuno was both a poet and a philosopher, he gathered together both the poetical and the philosophical themes of the flux of time. In the poetical yearning for a vision of the eternal and in the early Greek philosophers,

1. Ibid., p. 39.
2. Ibid., p. 40.
Unamuno sensed a strange kinship. As a poet longs to find the presence of the infinite in the finite, so the early Greek mind longed to find the changeless in the midst of change. In his work on the history of philosophy, Wilhelm Windelband has characterized the early Greek mind in terms that bear directly upon Unamuno's thesis: "The fact that things of experience change into one another was the stimulus to the first philosophical reflections." 1 Unamuno carried this poetical and philosophical notion of change into the realm of eternity, where things do not change, but where consciousness and agony live in everlastingness. For this reason, Unamuno's eternity was not one of peace and tranquility, but of the agony and struggle fulfilled and extended. And this eschatological notion of a realm of finality issued from a deep sense of the finite nature of human life in the all too fragmented world of time. His was a passionate cry for eternity:

"To be, to be for ever, to be without ending! thirst of being, thirst of being more! hunger of God! thirst of love eternalizing and eternal! to be for ever! to be God!" 2

Nevertheless, as in all Unamuno's philosophy, the meaning of death and the hunger of immortality participated in a being-in-struggle. We may believe in immortality because we see how unfulfilled life on this earth is; we may desire to be immortal because we wish to be forever, to survive beyond our


deaths. But reason teaches us that immortality is highly problematic, that we can never be certain of anything beyond the grave. The more reason contemplates the fact of the finality of death, the more belief in immortality penetrates our minds. For reason tells us that our lives will cease to be. Moreover, as Unamuno illustrated in his book El Espejo de la Muerte, even imagination gives us the certain fact of death. Imagination anticipates death as a fact of our being, and brings the future state of non-being into the living present. 1

Before any attempt is made to understand how any type of creative existence is possible from within the tragic dimension of death and immortality, it is absolutely mandatory to arrive at some "definition" of immortality in the Unamunian sense. To begin with, Unamuno is extremely vague with regard to what he means by immortality. In most of his literature he regards immortality as being limitless in time and being. Immortality is related to the notion of impetus or conatus, which, according to Spinoza "impels" all things to subsist in their own being. The essence of immortality, therefore, would seem to be the struggle to perpetuate one's self, or as Unamuno said, "the wish never to die." 2 Unamuno's notion of immortality must be understood in its widest sense and not limited to the desire felt by one individual as to his future state. There is an unexpressed desire in Unamuno

that all things, even the universe, persist in their being, so that the primary force behind the hunger for immortality is a form of "ontological greediness." Thus, the desire for immortality cannot be limited in any way. Neither the Buddhist sense of being absorbed into the All nor the artistic view of living on through one's works would characterize what Unamuno means by immortality. The desire to live on is the desire to live on fully, both body and soul, mind and spirit; there must be a resurrection of the body as well as a survival of the soul. As Unamuno said,

"No, my longing is not to be submerged in the vast All, in an infinite and eternal Matter or Energy, or in God; not to be possessed by God, but to possess Him, to become myself God, yet without ceasing to be I myself, I who am now speaking to you...

"More, more and always more! I want to be myself, and yet without ceasing to be myself to be others as well, to merge myself into the totality of things visible and invisible, to extend myself into the illimitable of space and to prolong myself into the infinite of time. Not to be all and for ever is as if not to be—at least, let me be my whole self, and be so for ever and ever. Either all or nothing!"

Unamuno would agree, then, with all those who hunger for immortality, who desire to live on forever; but he would not agree with the specific dogmatic content of various "religious theories" about survival after death. Unamuno, it will be remembered, was a professor of Greek, and he possessed a great love for the poetry and philosophy of Greek culture. And yet this love of Greek thought did not forfeit Unamuno's attack upon the Platonic conception of the immortality of the soul.

1. Ibid., pp.'s 36-47.
Unamuno could not agree with the words of Socrates in the 
Phaedo, for example, when he speaks of the immortality of the 
soul:

"That soul, I say, herself invisible, departs to the 
invisible world—to the divine and immortal and 
rational: thither arriving, she is secure of bliss 
and is released from the error and folly of men, 
their fears and wild passions and all other human 
ills, and for ever dwells, as they say of the ini-
tiated, in company with the gods." 1

Unamuno believed that this Greek conception of immortality 
was a limiting ideal, for instead of claiming that the man 
of flesh and bone is immortal it claimed that the soul was 
immortal. Unamuno was also concerned with the resurrection 
of the body.

Though there is no concept of immortality which com-
pletely satisfied Unamuno, there is at least one concept to 
which he always returned: the Christian one. As a matter 
of fact, he often discussed the question of immortality and 
the agony of Christianity simultaneously, for the hunger of 
immortality and the agony of Christianity were part of the 
same paradox. Unamuno felt that the "purpose of Christianity... 
is to save men's souls for immortality, not to bring better 
health or better government, nor to spread culture." 2 As 
J.E Crawford Flitch has said:

"Yet, though loose in the modern world, he refuses 
to be drawn away from the main business of the 
Christian, the saving of his soul, which, in his 
interpretation means the conquest of his immortality." 3

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1. Plato, Dialogues of Plato, trans. by J.D Kaplan 


Nevertheless, even as Unamuno traced the abstraction of the doctrine of immortality to the Greeks, he saw that the Greek conception of the immortal soul had to engage in a vital dialectic with Christian categories. The relationship between Greek philosophy and Christianity was one of struggle; and this struggle essentially meant that Christian doctrine could not dispense with the rational categories of Greek thought any more than it could dispense with the categories of its Hebrew background. On the other hand, the very rational categories which Christian thought inherited from its Greek tradition sometimes turned upon the faith itself, and produced a tragic situation in which faith had to affirm what reason denied. The doctrine of personal immortality is such a case in question. Christian thinkers are committed to the doctrine of personal immortality, to the resurrection of the body as well as the soul, to the eschatological vision of a kingdom beyond and within the kingdoms of the world. And yet, reason, indeed the very reason which is part of the Christian faith, turns upon these affirmations of faith with zeal. What Christian thinkers must do in such a situation, Unamuno would say, is to struggle against reason while they embrace it. They must affirm, at all costs, the doctrine of personal immortality, while at the same time strengthening their faith and hope in immortality through a process of rational doubt and passionate denial. It is quite clear, moreover, that Unamuno spoke from within the struggle itself, and that he saw the necessity to embrace this struggle as part of Christian agony:
"Because of this struggle, the Christian concept of immortality of the soul must have appeared to Unamuno, on closer consideration, considerably less 'limited' than the Hellenic concept. It is still concerned, to a large degree, with the immortality of the 'soul,' but this soul is no longer comparable to an idea; it is the soul of a person—of a 'man of flesh and bone,' who wants to perpetuate himself not only with his mind, but with all his being."

This is why Unamuno sharply opposed both the rational proofs for immortality and the rationalistic dissolution of the doctrine of immortality. He felt that reason had gained the upper hand in such cases, so that nothing but an abstraction was left. David Hume, it will be remembered, had argued that reason could not prove the immortality of the soul, particularly since the self was seen as a bundle of sense impressions in constant flux. This line of argument, Unamuno felt, proceeded from a central fallacy: the attempt to view all reality in the light of one systematic concern. In the case of David Hume, the one systematic concern was rational comprehension. In truth, any philosophical system which attempts to reduce the complexity of reality into one systematic concern lapses into materialism. "Every monist system," Unamuno said, "will always seem to us materialist." 2 In the rationalist dissolution of immortality, reason contradicts the hunger for life beyond this life. But reason can only go so far before it casts doubt upon its own validity. Once reason has reached


2. Unamuno, op. cit., p. 80.
its limits, it remains to be seen whether there is a realm beyond reason: the irrational, contra-rational, or super-rational. If reason seeks to overcome its limits, and judge the value of those realities which are outside its method, it plunges into the depths of despair and doubt. And where rational doubt and despair enter the dimension of non-rational realities is "where the scepticism of the reason encounters the despair of the heart." 1

In opposition to this rational approach to immortality, Unamuno wished to discuss the meaning of a soul which suffered and loved, stumbled and sinned, regained its footing and repented. What he wished to speak about was the immortality of the personal being of real men. Unamuno believed in something which the early Greeks or the rationalists would have refused to admit for fear of betraying the rational spirit: namely, the resurrection of the dead, which Saint Paul knew to be an offense to the sceptical minds of the Greeks.

The problem of immortality, as it has been illustrated in the preceding paragraphs, partakes of the same tragic sense of life as do all other Unamunian categories. There is in the notion of immortality, therefore, a perpetual contradiction between the hunger to live on and the sense of mortality. The sense of mortality shows us that our lives are but a brief shadow, existing within the vast drama of an

1. Ibid., p. 105.
empty space left by death, where personal moments hide in the
twilight of an impersonal night. When this sense of mortality
joins with reason and common sense, the conclusion is in-
escapable: death is certain; immortality is an illusion. But
it is precisely against this certitude of reason that faith
affirms the eternal. Man is thus a tragic victim, caught
between the reason which affirms his death and the faith
which looks beyond the grave. Within this tragic situation,
man can neither despair over the certainty of his death nor
rest in the certainty of his immortality. Rather, man must
agonize; he must fight against death as Don Quixote fought
against reason. And in this struggle, as in all the struggles
which are part of the tragic sense of life, there remains the
possibility for a saving faith. How is this faith possible?

"Scepticism, uncertainty—the position to which
reason, by practising its analysis upon itself,
upon its own validity, at last arrives—is the
foundation upon which the heart's despair must
build up its hope."

When a man realizes that reason can never resolve his
longing for eternal life, hope is born. The continual war
between reason and faith must be a constant struggle of the
spiritual life. And from within this struggle a saving scepti-
cism is produced. This saving scepticism is not the same as
the methodological doubt of a Descartes, which ends in a
denial of life itself. Rather this doubt is found in the
ethic of battle, between reason and feeling, science and life,

1. Ibid., p. 106.
head and heart. And this battle will continue while man remains a human person in the world; for

"the tragic history of human thought is simply the history of a struggle between reason and life—reason bent on rationalizing life and forcing it to submit to the inevitable, to morality; life bent on vitalizing reason and forcing it to serve as a support for its own vital desires."  

Under these conditions, reason cannot lead us to a saving scepticism, for a man would die before he ever proved to himself that he existed. Thus, we are caught between two extremes: we can never doubt completely nor can we believe completely. But we must believe because we must act; complete doubt stifles action. Saving scepticism is produced by the eternal and agonizing battle between the head and the heart, and leads to "that sweet, that saving incertitude, which is our supreme consolation." 2 Uncertainty lies at the heart of faith.

This basic incertitude, which lies at the base of tragedy in immortality, reaches its deepest level within the Christian faith. It is the Christian faith which teaches of the resurrection of the body, and not merely the Greek notion of the immortality of the soul. As Jesus of Nazareth was resurrected from the dead, so shall all those men who live within his community of suffering love. And the Christian, in incertainty and agony, will believe the word of his master, and have faith in the resurrection of the body. But the contradiction between reason and faith occurs precisely here:

1. Ibid., p. 106.
2. Ibid., p. 118.
does not reason remain in doubt as to participation in the eternal, while the desire to live on is never satisfied? But it is out of this very contradiction that Unamuno sees the root of a personal God, who suffers, dies, and is resurrected. For God becomes man in time so that man can live on in time created beyond the finality of death. Unamuno's poem, "Death," sings praise to the God whom he believed had denied death:

"The Man is the son of God, and is God of the Son of Man; Thou, Christ, with thy death hast given the Universe human aim and Thou wast the death of Death at last!"

(3) God and Man:

Unamuno's philosophy is essentially anthropological in method. He begins with what he considers to be the most concrete dimension of human existence, the flesh and bone man, and attempts to direct his thoughts around the inescapable fact of this man in the world. But this starting-point does not preclude the reality of God. On the contrary, it is precisely because of God that the flesh and bone man lives an authentic existence. For it is the dialectic between man and God which helps man to become truly human, and also aids God in the realization of his creative activity. God and man, not man alone, is the central conviction of Unamuno's writings.

Unamuno brings God into time; God is that being who suffers, doubts, and creates. In this sense, God is an immanent source of human creativity. But on the other hand,

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Unamuno also spoke of a God beyond God, whose personality was not simply the projection of human needs and values. If either the complete immanence or the total transcendence of God is stressed, however, the Unamunian dialectic forfeits its central affirmation. Not unlike Martin Buber, Unamuno saw the vital importance of the sphere of relationship between God and man. A vital dialogue must take place between the creature and the creator; a personal speaking and hearing must occur on both sides of the equation God-man. Out of anguish man must listen to the words of God, who is also in agony. And this tragic relationship must not be overcome, either in terms of God speaking alone (theological positivism) or of man by himself (humanism).

If it is the relationship between God and man which is central to Unamuno's thought, the essential question to be asked is: What kind of relationship does Unamuno feel taking place? There are at least two forms of relationship which Unamuno discusses in his writings: the relationship of human dreams to God's dream; and the relationship of man's faith and reason to God's existence.

There seems to be in Unamuno a notion of the dream as the unifying force in the man of flesh and bone. It will be remembered that Unamuno saw a tragic contradiction between dreams and logic. But he also saw a tragic contradiction in dreams as a form of relationship between God and man. God is the Great Dreamer who dreams human life; but man is also a dreamer who dreams God as the finality of the universe. And
who is to say which party is the creator of dreams: God or man?

In the last few chapters of his novel, *Mist*, Unamuno discusses the dream-like relationship between God and man. The literary form of this novel is really a philosophical experiment, for when Unamuno enters the novel as one of his characters he is seeking to ask profound questions. Don Miguel sees a relationship between the author and his literary creation, and God and his creation. In his fiction, therefore, Unamuno realizes that he is really a god over his creation, for as he says of two characters in *Mist*, "And I am the God of these two poor 'nivolistic' devils." 1 But, at the same time, he realizes that that there is a God who is the author of his own personality. It is this relationship between man as creator and God as creator which needs more careful analysis.

It will be remembered from previous discussions of the novel *Mist* that the main character, Augusto, after being rejected by his sweetheart, decides to commit suicide. But before he kills himself he decides to speak with Unamuno, who is "the author of this whole story." 2 Augusto arrives in Unamuno's study and begins to tell his story. But since Unamuno is already the author of his story, he knows everything; and he tells Augusto the secret of his life: "You do not exist except as a fictitious entity, a character of fiction....You are only a product of my imagination." 3 But Augusto shocks

2. Ibid., p. 291.
3. Ibid., p. 294/
Unamuno with these words: "May it not be, my dear Don Miguel,... that it is you and not I who are the fictitious entity,... who is neither living nor dead? May it not be that you are nothing more than a pretext for bringing my history into the world?" Unamuno tries to explain to Augusto that he has no independent existence, but is dependent upon his creator. And Augusto answers, "that you (Unamuno) do not exist outside of me and of the other characters that you think you have invented." Moreover, Augusto appeals to his own freedom, for even "characters of fiction have their own inwrought logic." And it is out of this same freedom that Augusto threatens to kill the author of his life, Unamuno. It would not be "the first case in which a fictitious entity...had killed him whom he believed to have given him his being." Unamuno finally asserts his authority, however, by pronouncing the sentence of death upon Augusto: "I hereby render judgment and pass the sentence that you are to die....You shall die, I tell you, you shall die." As a creature of Don Miguel, Augusto's only reply is one of anguish: "I want to live--live--I want to be myself, myself."

1. Ibid., p. 295.
2. Ibid., p. 296.
3. Ibid., p. 297.
4. Ibid., p. 301.
5. Ibid., p. 302.
6. Ibid., p. 303.
Unamuno will not relent in his harsh judgment, however; and Augusto is left with only his last words of warning to Unamuno: "You are to die; yes, you are to die.... For as for you, my creator Don Miguel, you too are only a 'nivolistic' entity." 1

It is, perhaps, too easy to draw parallels in these closing chapters of Mier between Unamuno/Augusto and God/man. The theological implications of this analogy, however, are explicit in the novel. One feels that Unamuno discussed the God/man relationship in artistic forms for a purpose: to give expression to an intuitive vision which his heart could not speak of in any other way.

Some theologians, particularly within the Russian or Thomist tradition, have always stressed the positive relation between God and the natural world. God has not left creation without his effect on it, they would say; man was created in the image of God. One cannot go from the natural world to the living God of the biblical tradition, but one can know something of God in creation. Moreover, says the Thomist, in going from the natural world to God one must respect the limitations of human language and understand the nature of human analogy. If these limitations are respected, perhaps Unamuno's analogy between God and man as creators can prove to be valuable.

God is the author of his creation; but like a poet who

1. Ibid., p. 304.
creates his own world and then must stand back to let his
world retain its own autonomy. God stands both within and
beyond his creation. But God's creation is a dream; it is
mist. In this sense, we are all the dreams of God; he is the
dreamer of dreams. But if we are dreams, we are such with
freedom, for we have our inwrought logic. As a novelist
creates his characters, he gives them life and meaning. But
his power is limited. His characters have their own logic.
If a writer creates a character of despair and futility, for
example, he cannot suddenly alter his personality so that the
character appears optimistic and joyful. So, too, God has his
limitations. He creates human beings for his purpose; but
they also have freedom, a logic of their own. They can turn
away from God's purpose, but cannot escape the fact that he
is creator.

Unamuno's God, at least in this novel, is a heretic God.
He enters his creation, to be sure; he is involved in his world
just as Unamuno was involved in the world of his novel. But
he is a God who doubts himself, who dreams himself, and who
suffers. He agonizes over himself and the world, and in this
agony pours forth love on his creation.

More terrifying than anything else in this novel is the
feeling which Unamuno conveyed that God was dependent upon his
creation for existence, and that his creation could deny him.
One might say that Unamuno is developing an earlier, less
sophisticated and organized version of the contemporary theme
concerning the "death" or "eclipse" of God. Man's freedom is
a primal source of his creativity; and this freedom is so powerful that they very ground of freedom, which is God, can be denied. In Unamunian terms, it is not that God died, but simply that he stopped dreaming because men no longer yearned for his dreams. He did not die on the cross or during the Reformation or with the rise of science in the Victorian Age; he just slipped out of our dreams.

What, then, does this form of dream relationship between God and man really mean? If God be God, can human beings destroy him? Unamuno seems to say that we cannot destroy the dreamer, but that we can destroy the dream. We can cut ourselves off from God. And what this means for human life is truly a vision of terror; for in destroying the dream of God, we destroy the ultimate meaning of our lives.

The funeral oration in the last chapter of Mist, which is given by Augusto's dog, Orfeo, is a result of the terror of Augusto's death. Perhaps these same words could also describe the emptiness felt by those who must live in a universe without God:

"He had experienced other deaths. He had smelled dead dogs and cats,...but his master he supposed to be immortal. Because his master was for him a god. And when he saw now that he was dead he felt that within his own soul all the foundations of life and the world were crumbling; and his heart was filled with immense desolation." 1

This funeral oration can be seen as Unamuno's reaction to what might happen to human existence if God were dead. When men close themselves to God, to life and the world, existence...

1. Ibid., p. 325.
becomes a study in the eclipse of the human person. Men are no longer human when they are not open to the existence of faith. All that remains in the wasteland of a world without God is a dream without purpose. As one of the characters in the novel exclaimed after Augusto's death: "But tell me if I have ever done anything else but sleep? Anything but dream? Has the whole thing been anything but mist?" 1

One suspects that Don Miguel was slowly fading into the mist, and that the dream he thought had been dreamed by God was simply the vision what was already gone.

The other form of relationship between God and man which Unamuno discusses in his novels and philosophical works is that between man's faith and reason with God. The essential contradiction between reason and faith as modes of being before God is at the heart of Unamuno's analysis.

The sense of divinity in primitive life, says Unamuno, was "the subjectivity of consciousness projected exteriorly." 2 Like Freud or Feuerbach, Unamuno saw some meaning in the idea that man projected the image of God upon the universe. The imaginative feeling for divinity, that was present in primitive life, projected personality to the cosmos. Like Schleiermacher, Unamuno directed his attention to the feeling of dependence upon some power; and Unamuno believed that "the Universe...was present as a definite feeling." 3 The gods who act like men in the

1. Ibid., p. 315.


3. Ibid., p. 49.
myths of Homer, the savior-gods of the mystery religions, the
gods of the fertility and spring rites: all these are imagin­
native projections which give personal characteristics to
the universe.

Nevertheless, this primitive notion of divinity was taken
over by the intellect and converted into an idea. "The God
of feeling...was converted into the idea of God." 1 This
rationalistic conversion, Unamuno believes, was the source
of the prostitution of the God of life. The logical god, the
god of theological systems, is a dead thing.

It is only by way of faith, which is to say by way of
love, that human beings come to God at all. We cannot know
God before we love him; "we must begin by loving Him, longing
for Him, hungering for Him, before knowing Him." 2 And thus,
 it may be that the man who professes no belief in God, but
who has a hunger for eternity, is much closer to God than the
man who possesses a special theology but has no vital desire
to stand before God. The Unamunian conception of faith, there­
fore, finds its deepest dimension in the anguished desire to
know God:

"To believe in God is...to be unable to live with­
out Him...It is not, therefore, rational necessity
but vital anguish that impels us to believe in God....
And it is the wish to save the human finality of
the universe." 3

For this reason, the object, or better said, the subject,

1. Ibid., p. 159.
2. Ibid., p. 160.
of the Unamunian category of faith is no static, established, conservative God. In God himself there is also strife, struggle, and war. The tragic war in which all things are engaged has its roots in the divine reality. God is both immanent in human struggles and transcendent. He is man projected to infinity and eternalized there in perpetual agony; and he is also the transcendent person who affirms himself over and against man's projection. Whether or not Unamuno intended to set up a bi-polar dimension in God, it is quite clear that the God whom he addresses is a heretic God, who doubts himself. This fact explains why Unamuno could say in one of his sonnets,

"God is the unattainable
desire we have to be Him; Who
knows? Perhaps God himself
is an atheist."

In his analysis of Unamuno's God, José Ferrater Mora characterizes the dynamic quality of the philosophical stance:

"This is the God who denies and affirms Himself, who desires and fears, who pulsates in the heart of mankind and hovers above it. A God who defies rational proof but welcomes those who approach Him armed with the tools of belief and love. This last point is all-important, since a 'belief in God begins with the desire that there be a God, with the inability to live without Him.' Such a longing for God is no mere desire—at least, not one that thought can assuage; it is more in the nature of an anguish, a yearning for Him... Without man and the world, God would not exist. But without God, man and the world would founder in the nightmare of the void from which the only salvation is an unending dream."  

2. Ibid., p. 44.
Friedrich Nietzsche had proclaimed that God is dead: "the old God no longer liveth, in whom all the world once believed....He is indeed dead." Unamuno would maintain that even the death of the old God is the life of man; for as God hides himself in the night of history, man searches for the divine in deadly earnest.

(4) The Agony of Christianity:

Unamuno's Christianity was one of conflict, tragedy, and agony. He saw a perpetual contradiction at the heart of the Christian faith which both ripped it apart and revitalized its sources of strength. And this same agony, far from being the result of man's perverted being, was at the very heart of what Christianity means. Drawing his inspiration from Pascal's insight that Christ was to be in agony until the end of the world, Unamuno found it necessary to repeat this phrase throughout his work:

"Agony, then, is struggle. And Christ came amongst us to bring us agony: struggle, not peace....It is of course possible to quote other and even more numerous passages in the Gospels which speak to us about peace. Yet the fact is that this kind of peace can grow only out of war, just as a certain kind of war can be won only in peace. And this precisely is agony....Like Christianity, Christ Himself is forever in agony." 2

According to Unamuno, risk, uncertainty, and doubt have become necessities in the life of the modern Christian.


must be tested day by day, reconquered and renewed in a continual struggle. The vital anguish of living in a world of suffering would not allow many man, and particularly the Christian man, to shrink from the burdens of doubt and despair. Unamuno would not have described faith in any other terms than that of struggle and restlessness; far from being a once-and-for-all claim on absolute truth, faith was essentially a claim placed on human lives, which are a great deal more fragile and contradictory than absolute truths. Unamuno believed that every Christian must repeat within himself the sojourn from doubt to hope, and that both these two factors must be at war with one another constantly. In the realm of spiritual realities he believed that every man had to start from the beginning. With Kierkegaard, Unamuno would agree that "as an individual, quite literally as an individual, to relate oneself to God personally is the formula for being a Christian." 1 No one can accept or inherit faith except as they elect to do so as free individuals; and this choice is always made in the midst of agony and despair. Unamuno wished to throw the individual into existence:

"It is necessary to plunge men into the depth of the ocean and leave them to themselves, so that they may learn to swim, to become human beings.... Those anxieties, tribulations, and doubts of which you are so much afraid, are the living and eternal waters." 2

2. Unamuno, op. cit., p. XX.
Since faith and agony are the central characteristics of the Christian faith, it is engaged in a series of conflicts. Unamuno saw the same continual contradictions in the realm of religion as he did in all other factors in human life.

One of the contradictions emerges as soon as men attempt to define Christianity. Unamuno proposed a definition of Christianity that was both contradictory and reminiscent of the definitions outlined by some of the neo-Kantian philosophers. Christianity, he wrote, "is a value belonging to the universal spirit which has its roots in the most intimate recesses of man as an individual." 1 How different is this statement from that made by Harald Höfdding in his work on the history of philosophy? Religion's "permanent value is assured by its struggle on behalf of the inner as against the outer, and its assertion of the significance of the inner happenings of personal life." 2 The essential difference between Unamuno's definition and that of the neo-Kantians is not one of terms but of purpose. Unamuno's purpose was to describe what he considered to be a contradiction in Christianity; and his definition, far from being a dogmatic statement about religion as such, was really an attempt to clarify the meaning of this contradiction: that the personal and the universal dimensions of the Christian faith coexist in a state of war. In reality, then, Unamuno's definition of Christianity is not nearly so limiting as that expressed by the neo-Kantians.

1. Ibid., p. 15.

There is no "essence of Christianity," whether that essence be found in values or experience. Perhaps, Unamuno's definition is simply an invitation to penetrate into the mystery of Christianity, for the Christian faith has no essence—it simply exists as a fact of human experience, and as all existences it must wrestle with itself.

Because of this "definition" of Christianity, one of the most agonizing struggles Unamuno saw in the Christian faith was between the social and individual components of Christian doctrine. He felt that social Christianity, which he considered to be the definition of faith within group consciousness, was in part an illusion. With Kierkegaard, Unamuno would have said that "it is impossible to edify, or be edified en masse." 1

On the other hand, Unamuno felt that individual (personal) Christianity had to solve no other problem that of the individual's place before God. Kierkegaard would have spoken of the "religious singling out of the individual before God" as being at the heart of Christianity. 2 Unamuno began at a point even more singular: "Christianity is radical individualism." 3 Nevertheless, far from holding a Romantic conception of individuality at the expense of society, Unamuno saw that Christianity

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4. By a Romantic conception of individuality I mean essentially that form of relationship described by such men as Shelley or Byron, in which the individual is justified in and of himself, with no reference to any transcendent source. In the traditional Romantic sense, it frequently occurs that the individual gains his individuality at the expense of society.
could not exist except as a society of believers. We are thus confronted by a hopeless situation: the individual is at the heart of faith, and yet he must live in a society of Christians. How does Unamuno resolve this contradiction? The answer is rather simple: he does not attempt to overcome the contradiction, for he saw that the individual Christian and Christendom must engage in a vital struggle. If individual Christianity triumphed it would be followed by subjective anarchy; if social Christianity dominated it would lapse into institutionalism.

Another contradiction which he saw pulsating within the dynamics of faith consisted of a struggle between faith and doctrine. Although he frequently discussed the reality of faith, he only touched upon the nature of doctrine. But this fact does not mean that he dismissed doctrine as scholastic dogmatism; on the contrary, despite his attacks upon doctrine, he knew that the existence of this reasonable form of belief was as necessary as faith itself. Indeed, faith was only possible as it struggled with reason and concepts.

Before understanding the nature of the agony between faith and doctrine, it is necessary to grasp some of Unamuno's viewpoints concerning faith itself. Many philosophers, including such men as William James or Schopenhauer, have drawn parallels between faith and will. In his famous book, The Will to Believe, for example, William James found that the will to believe was the source of belief itself; or, as he said, "faith in a fact can help to create the fact." 1 Unamuno, however, wishes to

make a most important distinction between belief and faith. Belief is essentially rational assent to certain viewpoints about the nature or purpose the universe. Unamuno felt that faith was to be found in desire (la gana). The thirst for the divine, the inability to live without God, divine discontent—all these are other ways of describing what he meant by faith. The opposite of this passionate desire to know God is a placid acceptance of God's existence or a stoical indifference to the question of God. The opposite of agonizing faith is Victorian confidence in God as the president of a universal corporation; and this attitude leads to a form of cosmic indifference. And this indifference is in sharp contrast with the reality of growth: that all things advance through struggle. Rather than the will to believe, then, Unamuno wishes to discuss faith as agony endured in the struggle with the living God. This fact explains why his favorite phrase from the Bible were words which combined faith and doubt: "I believe, help Thou my unbelief." 1

If Christianity is seen agonistically and polemically as struggle, the resulting contradiction between faith and doctrine becomes more understandable. Doctrine is abstract; it avoids struggle by sneaking around the contradiction with rational formulations. Doctrine wishes to reduce Christianity to another "ism," comparable to socialism or activism. Unamuno wishes to show that Christianity is not another ism. Rather

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1. Unamuno, op. cit., p. 93.
than being another doctrine among a world of doctrines, Christianity is a state of personal, individual being. There is a difference, for example, between Platonism and the state of being Plato. One can adhere to Platonic doctrine while never really knowing the mystery of who Plato was. The unique quality of the Christian faith is that it claims that one can be in Christ. Or, as Unamuno says, "the state of being Christian is the state of being Christ." Original Christianity did not come in the guise of correct belief or doctrine, but in the reality of the presence of this Jesus of Nazareth; and it was the abiding presence of this man in the lives of his disciples which appeared as struggle and agony.

One last reference might be made to the agony which Unamuno saw between faith and doctrine, and this concerns the contradiction in scripture between the letter (doctrine) and the word (faith). The word, which is the gospel rather than the Bible, is the creative source of God's actions in the world. The word is an event which occurs at the most mysterious times and places, although Unamuno frequently returned to the idea that the word was a spoken event, part of an "oral tradition." The letter, however, which began with the misinterpretation of some of the Pauline epistles, is devoid of creativity; it is simply a book, a letter, a no-word; a letter bids us read, but not live and die with it as does the word. Both the word and the letter engage in a vital struggle; at

1. Ibid., p. 34.
2. Ibid., p. 48.
certain times the law of the letter rules, and at other times
the word manages to break through history with its gospel.
Unamuno saw this vital process at work all throughout Chris-
tian history, but he especially interested in the Reformation
because such men as Luther wanted to "unbind the Word, to drag
the Word from the Book." 1 Unamuno believed that the Reforma-
tion once again proclaimed the gospel, and that the agony of
this proclamation became the life of the church. Needless to
say, this freeing of the word could not remain; it again was
forced to struggle with the letter. The Protestants who
followed Luther "chained the Word to the letter. And they
set out to teach the peoples to read rather than to listen." 2

It must be clear by now that whenever Unamuno spoke of
Christian agony his unifying purpose was not to direct his read-
er to some dogmatic formula or to the "essence" of the Chris-
tian faith nor to some eternal principle of love in Chris-
tianity. Rather, the subject of Christian agony was a person:
Christ. In this man of Nazareth Unamuno found the deepest
dimension of this tragic sense of life. But it remains to
be asked: who is this man, and what does his life mean?

Unamuno believed that there were two representations of
the Christ figure in religious history, and that these two
images were engaged in vital agony. The one Christ, the dead
Jesus, he called "the Recumbent Christ of Palencia." This was
the Christ of the rationalists, or of those who pictured Jesus

1. Ibid, p. 48.
2. Ibid, p. 44.
as a great teacher or a continuation of the Hebrew tradition. This was the Christ who demanded no agony on the part of his believers; this was the human Christ taken down from the cross to be buried. This Christ gave birth to what Carl Michalson had called the "coalman's faith," which is the faith of a man who thinks Christ set down a list of moral rules to be followed or who believes in giving blind obedience to the regulations of the church. 1

The other representation of Christ which Unamuno seeks is the "Crucified Christ of Velazquez." This is the Christ who lives in agony, who perpetuates struggle because only in war is there peace. Unamuno found the deepest symbol for this insight in the Christ of Velazquez, who was the bloody, flesh and bone man who suffered at the hands of men:

"Here, in the arena of the world, in this life which is but a tragic bullfight...here the livid, scarred, bloody, drooping Christ." 2

This Christ of Velazquez, as John MacKay of Princeton Seminary had said, is the Christ of Pascal, the bleeding God who will be in agony until the end of the world:

"The Christ of Velazquez is for him not the utterly dead Christ, but the Christ who continues to suffer— the Pascalian Christ who will live in a love passion of suffering until the end of the world." 3

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The entire drama of these two Christs takes place in the arena of human history. Man still adhere to a dead man who gave certain ethical formulations and then was crucified. Others have experienced the living presence of a Christ who was in agony on the cross, and who will continue in agony until the end of the world. Unamuno's Christ, though he was a historical figure, was not bound to the so-called biography of a man who lived two thousand years ago. His was the Christ "who gave his soul to humanity, and it is he who lives on in humanity." 1 In short, Unamuno was able to cry out: God lives!

From his writings, and particularly from his Agony of Christianity, it is certain that Unamuno lived within his agonizing faith, that he was possessed by the paradox of Christianity, and that he struggled from within the very faith he expounded. In Unamuno's soul, the agony of Christianity was that reason was powerless to penetrate into the mysteries of this man of Nazareth, and that men had to be possessed by doubt while affirming love. Despite Unamuno's despair and doubt, however, one feels that there stood a love for the very God he was denying:

"Grant me, Lord, that when lost at the last I am going to depart from this night of darkness in which the heart dreaming is shriveled, that I may enter into the bright day that never ends, mine eyes fastened on thy white body, Son of Man, complete Humanity,... and my gaze submerged in Thee, Lord!" 2

1. Unamuno, op. cit., p. 38.

(5) Creative Possibilities Within the Realm of Religion

It is a certain fact that Unamuno's religion was "not a religion of peace and submission, but of struggle and action, maintaining itself amid doubt and uncertainty." 1 It is possible, of course, that like Nietzsche, Unamuno incorporated into his religion of struggle elements of the scientific mentality, with its stress on the struggle for survival. But Unamuno's religion differed from the scientific viewpoint in that it was not the struggle to subsist which mattered most, but the struggle to exist as authentically as possible. And the authentic existence, Unamuno believed, was only possible in the realm of religious agony.

Needless to say, there will be those who strongly object to Unamuno's continual references to tragedy and agony on the grounds that these components of reality cannot be utilized as modes of existence. Tragedy, these same people would claim, leads to bitter resignation, to morbid self-analysis, and to inaction. But on the contrary, the amazing paradox of the Unamunian stance is that the tragic sense of life, engaged in continual agony, leads to an affirmation of life, a passionate concern for others, and action. It was the optimists, the Victorian activists or psychologists, who most destroyed life; by refusing to take into consideration the complexity of human life

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and by believing that people were really good at heart and only needed a change of situation and not a change of heart, they managed to elude the necessity for personal struggle and growth. For human beings to be truly human, Unamuno would say, they had to be participants in the dramas of agony—death, despair, finitude, alienation—and it was from out of the agony that creativity arose. To exist was to struggle, and to struggle was to live; and the true living struggle was to be found within Christian agony.

Unamuno returned to the problem of creative possibilities in the realm of religion in many ways. The essential unity of these various ways to express his conviction is very often disguised in the paradoxical language which he used; but it is a unity maintained in his principle of contradiction. It seems valid, therefore, to say that Unamuno expressed the idea that there is a creative dimension in religious agony in three forms of his writings: philosophy, poetry, and novels. As these three distinct forms are discussed separately, it will be necessary to remember that they formed part of a unified vision.

It will be recalled from the thrust of this thesis that Unamuno's philosophy is essentially a philosophy of tragedy, in the sense that tragedy means a conflict or collision between forces so well matched that no final victory is possible. In most of Unamuno's writings these forces were generally considered to be faith and reason. The tragedy of human existence took place because neither of these forces could
ultimately triumph; they had to engage in a vital struggle. Nevertheless, Unamuno felt, it was in the maintenance of the struggle between these forces that creative existence was possible. Or, as he said in the Tragic Sense of Life: "It is the conflict itself... that unifies my actions and makes me live." 1 The foundation for this creativity activity of philosophical agony was essentially a religious one. Religion did not give answers to questions which philosophy raised; rather it gave birth to the courage and hope which made the asking of philosophical questions possible. To be a philosopher was first of all to be a man, to exist in the world as authentically as possible; and to be a man was to struggle, to agonize. Since the agony of Christianity was at the deepest level of who and what man is, the roots of philosophy lay in the religious dimension of existence. Unamuno believed that even behind the most abstract systems of philosophy there lurked the figure of the flesh and bone man. Whether in the Critiques of Kant or in the system of Hegel, Unamuno found the heart of a real man. Often he deliberately called philosophers by their first names in order to reach the flesh and bone man. William James became known as Guillermo, Carlyle as Tomas, or Pascal as Blaise. This procedure was not done out of a lack of respect for philosophers; but Unamuno considered these men to be his friends—and whoever calls a friend by his last name? Even more importantly, Unamuno found that

beneath the external facts of philosophers' systems there was a ground of religious agony. The religious agony of men such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, or Augustine was obvious; but even behind the most abstract systems Unamuno saw the religious premise. In the work of Descartes or a Hume he found the same sense of religious agony; in Nietzsche's denial of God he saw a passionate concern with God; in Kant's reconstruction of religion along the lines of morality he saw the foundations of Christian agony. In short, Unamuno found the creative source of philosophical work in the asking of theological questions. In defining his position as a philosopher, Unamuno also illuminated what he considered to be the task of philosophy: to struggle with the mystery of life.

"I shall spend my life struggling with the mystery, even without any hope of penetrating it, because this struggle is my hope and my consolation. Yes, my consolation. I have accustomed to finding hope in desperation itself....

"I have hope only for those who do not know, but who are not resigned to being ignorant, for those who restlessly struggle to learn the truth and who are more concerned with the struggle than with the victory." 1

In his poetry Unamuno also returned to the theme that true creation is only possible because there is a creator; because God, man creates. Though Unamuno's poetry lacks something of the lyrical quality which is so vital to the Spanish poetic tradition, from the Poem of the Cid to Garcia Lorca, it must be remembered that Unamuno's poetic vision was greater than his poetic craft. He was a man who had something

to say, and who would say it in as many forms as possible. And yet, Unamuno will also be remembered as a poet; perhaps he cannot be called a poet of song, for he never thought highly of music. But he will be recalled as a poet of life, as one who tried to wrestle with the mystery of the universe within an imaginative framework. Ruben Dario, one of the giants of Spanish poetry, said that Unamuno was essentially a poet, "if being a poet is to lean out of the gates of mystery and come back with a glint of the unknown in your eyes....His vision of the universe is full of poetry. He is the pelota-player of the Apocalypse." 1

Unamuno's poetical universe is a religious one. His greatest volume of poetry, The Christ of Velazquez, he considered to be a work of the religious imagination, for his explicit purpose was to make "a thing Christian, biblical, and Spanish." 2 All his poetical achievement, it might be said, arose from a creative, religious agony. Because God was the creator, man could also be the creature who creates. Because God entered human history in pain and died in agony on the cross, all those men who followed in his footsteps had to participate in the same agonizing drama. But out of this drama, in which God was the great artist, man was free to be his own artist, to be a creator. In his Christmas Canticle, Unamuno expressed this concern:


"Oh, fruitful mystery!
Lo God is born!
All who are born suffer and die!...
Who makes himself a child suffers and dies.
Thanks be to Thee, my God!
Thou with thy death
dost give us life that never ends,
the life of life." 1

He saw a close kinship between artistic creation and struggle, for it was out of struggle that creation emerged. To create was to struggle with that which was to be created, to find better expressions for creativity. And this kinship between creation and struggle, in which the artist wrestled with the materials of his creation as God did with the world, found its deepest dimension in the notion of a God who entered human history in agony to create new men. What Unamuno really gives us, then, is a theology of the imagination, or, better yet, a faith expressed in imaginative terms.

"Art, art? wherefore is art?
Sing, my soul, sing
in your own way....
I know not what I want
-nor know myself-
-nor do I care to know!
Am I anything more than the frail reed
Through which whistles the wind?
The wind of the Lord, the wind of infinity,
with neither beginning nor end....
Reed, my wild reed,
speak and tell me, what have you to do with
what they call art?
Reed, my wild reed,
yield yourself to the Lord, for at his pleasure
He sings in you;
in you, wild reed,
his power is tested without any plan;
He plays with you;
be you his toy, my reed, my poor wild reed." 2


2. Ibid., pp.'s 167-173.
In most of his novels, moreover, Unamuno also allied the meaning of the tragic sense of life with the possibility for creativity. But it was especially in his novel Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr, that he stressed the meaning of religious agony for creativity.

In this novel Unamuno attempted to show how religious doubt and agony could be turned into creative values for life. The story is essentially centered around a priest who is tormented by the illusionary character of his faith, but who knows that these same realities of faith are necessary for men to live creative lives. He knows that the belief in the resurrection of the body is rationally absurd, for example. But at the same time, he sees that the life of his people feeds off of this belief, that their lives are given finality and purpose in the light of this belief. While living through the doubts and terrors of his unbelief, however, the priest continues to minister unto his people because he sees that the very faith which he denies is their staff of life. Lazaro, who comes upon the scene later in the novel and is at first critical of the stance the priest takes, later finds himself converted to the priest's ideas; as he explains to his sister:

"For he is a saint, sister, a true saint. In trying to win me to his saintly cause, the most saintly—he was not trying to chalk up a triumph for himself; he was doing it for the peace, the happiness, the illusion, if you like, of those entrusted to his care.... I surrendered to his arguments and there you have my conversion."  

What the priest has done is to turn his spiritual despair into life for his people, even if the faith he brings to them seems to be an illusion. His words to Lazaro express this concern for life:

"The truth? The truth, Lazaro, is something so terrible, so unbearable, so deadly, that perhaps simple people could not live with it....

"And that is what the Church does, makes them live.... All religions are true in so far as they make the people who profess them live spiritually, in so far as they console them for having had to be born." 1

Unamuno expressed the thought that life is "the unmitigated blackness of the chasm of weariness of living." 2 Man's sin in this life is simply having been born human, prey to the sickness of despair and the agony of uncertainty. Religion's task is to create the illusion of purpose, to assure people that this earthly existence is not the end. For without this illusion--that life is worth living--everything is emptied of its meaning. If this analysis seems to be beyond honesty, if it seems to fall into the pit of superstition and ignorance, then Unamuno would say that it at least creates purpose and meaning. For if meaning itself is something beyond intellectual honesty, and must be measured by the creative effect it has on life, then perhaps the priest in the story was actually living the truth.

Angelita, the girl who aids the priest in his work, offers this final testimony to his life. Perhaps her testimony is also a fitting tribute to the creative meaning of religious agony:

1. Ibid., p. 67.

2. Ibid., p. 71.
"One must live! And he taught me to live, he taught us to live, to feel life, to feel the meaning of life....He taught me by his life to lose myself in the life of the people of my village, and I felt the passing of hours, of the days, the years, no more than the passing of the waters of the lake; it seemed as if my life would always be the same. I did not feel myself grow old. I no longer lived in myself, but in my people, and my people lived in me."

Creativity, thus, was possible within the tragic dimension of existence; moreover, it found its deepest roots in the agony of Christianity. Spiritual realities, however, like all other realities in the Unamunian world, participated in a war which could never be resolved. To be a Christian in the modern world was to agonize, because Christ himself would be in agony until the end of the world. Unamuno's spiritual man is thus a tragic man in the world, who knows the depths of the innermost self to be structures of essential contradictions. To be a man is to be a man of the spirit, who feels, suffers, pities, and loves. But far from utilizing the tragic sense of life as an occasion for resignation, the spiritual man uses it as a source of creativity, of purpose, faith, and unyielding love.

In the end, then, Unamuno neither resigned himself to the tragedy of life nor sought to overcome it. Rather he sought to utilize this fact of human existence for creative meaning in a suffering world. He knew that life only gave peace in war. But it remains for more subtle verification principles.

1. Ibid., p. 81.
than are now open to the human mind to determine whether he
found that final home he so often sought in God. His place
of burial in his beloved Spain gives some reason to believe
that he never relinquished his desire for that home, for on
his tombstone these words are carved:

"Lay me, Eternal Father, in thy bosom,
that mysterious home:
I will sleep here, for from life's fierce struggle
I come all undone." 1

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1. Carl Michalson, Christianity and the Existentialists
Summary and Conclusions

(1) Summary:

The Unamunian universe was essentially a place of struggle and agony. And this struggle was tragic, because it entailed hostilities between forces so well matched that no ultimate victory could ever occur. All realities participated in what might be called a "being-in-struggle," whose deepest roots were spheres of contradiction and paradox. Within this universe, therefore, there seems to be only one essential reality: the tragic sense of life.

Because of this tragic sense of life in men and peoples, which revolves around the notion that existence consists of a struggle between forces in continual agony, there remains in the Unamunian world an unyielding dimension of contradiction or paradox. Indeed, Unamuno described himself as "one who affirms contraries, a man of contradiction and strife, as Jeremiah said of himself; one who says one thing with his heart and the contrary with his head, and for whom this conflict is the very stuff of life." 1 In almost every dimension of Unamuno's life, writings, and times this structure of contradiction can be seen. In the history of his Spain this contradiction arose in the attempt made by traditional Spain, the Spain of the kings and the mystics, to confront the modern world of science, technology, and political movements. The struggles between conservatives and liberals, Catholics and

freethinkers, traditionalists and communists all were given birth by the agony of the times. Unamuno stood within this period of historical crisis, but his personality and writings often deviated from the norms of his time. The contradictions which he faced were not only political or cultural ones, but spiritual paradoxes which found their roots in another dimension: God, man, and Christian agony. His God was a heretic; he denied and affirmed himself; he remained closed to rational proof, but he welcomed those who came to him in love. And as man searched for the same God, as man lived in agony without this God, he came to understand the meaning of Christian agony—that the heart has its reasons as well as the mind. Rather than turning the contradiction between the heart and the head into stoic resignation, however, man utilized the tragic sense of life for creativity and meaning.

(2) An Evaluation of Unamuno’s Theological Position:

Ever since the writings of Kierkegaard, the concept of the paradox has been vital to Western thought. All our thoughts about God, it seems, must run into a paradox or contradiction, and these contradictions must exist in a state of tension. At least one contemporary theologian, Gustaf Aulen, has made the point that this state of tension cannot be eliminated nor embraced for its own sake, for there is a tension-filled unity in revelation itself. God is not simply the prime mover of the universe, but is involved in history; and yet he is above change. God is sovereign, and yet there is evil. These
are but two examples of contradiction in our talk about God. For these reasons, Gustaf Aulen has said, "The Christian affirmations of faith are characterized by a certain tension which cannot be eliminated. The reason for this tension is that all these affirmations... are affirmations about God." 1

The essential question to ask those men such as Unamuno, who begin with the centrality of paradox in faith, is whether there is a higher truth in an I-Thou relationship which transcends paradox. And why should this higher truth be broken up into contradictions when we think about it?

Could it be that the nature of paradox has something to do with thinking itself, since it belongs to the nature of thought to set up oppositions? The human mind cannot understand light unless there is darkness; it cannot think of good without evil. Whenever the mind contemplates reality the threat of the paradox appears. Unamuno would project this contradictory character of thought to God himself, who doubts and agonizes. Despite this dynamic understanding of God's nature, it remains to be seen whether the paradox of human thought, which is in part a linguistic problem, can be best understood by projecting its origin into God. There is one central question which should be asked of Unamuno at this point: are the contradictions of thought part of the nature of God himself, or are they merely structures of the mind? Moreover, is it possible that within the dimension of faith the

contradictions lead to a deeper unity which holds the paradoxes together? Are spiritual mysteries simply paradoxes taken back into the region of feeling, and transcended there? In short, is revelation necessarily a paradox? Or might it not be that in the ultimate mystery of God's being all things are gathered into one?

If human history is taken seriously, however, it seems difficult to believe that any mode of being, even the I-Thou relationship, can transcend the paradox. Whenever God relates to man the paradox is heightened, for the category of man-as-sinner cannot be overcome. Human history itself is contradictory, and if revelation takes place in human history, the result is a paradox. It is, of course, difficult to determine whether the paradox is the result of the God who enters human history as something different from man, or whether the paradox is part of the nature of God. Traditionally speaking, it would have to be said that the paradox rests in human history and not in God himself. When God elects to enter the drama of history, he freely opens himself to the contradictory medium of his revelation. God's ways are not our ways; but when he elects to enter our ways, his ways become a paradox. In this sense, then, Unamuno left us a valuable insight into the paradoxical ways of God in human life; but the religious availability of his God is limited on the modern scene because he insisted upon projecting the contradictions of human existence unto God.

The nature of paradox and contradiction, and its meaning
for our knowledge of who and what God is, is the major question concerning Unamuno's theological posture. But there are other, less radical, questions which must be put to the theology of Miguel de Unamuno.

The first of such questions deals with Unamuno's use of the Bible. It might be possible to write an entire book on this question, but there are points at which Unamuno's interpretation of the biblical literature is unique—and perhaps less than adequate. For example, is Unamuno's God of agony the same God who covenanted with Israel and delivered them from the hands of the Egyptians? Is Unamuno's God the Other who confronts man; or is he the fellow sojourner who suffers and doubts within himself? And does the God of the Old and New Testaments need man in order to exist, as Unamuno would say? Along with this question, it must also be asked whether Unamuno's Christ, the suffering Christ of Velazquez, is an adequate portrayal of the biblical Christ. Must Christ be in agony until the end of the world, or has he already conquered the world? Is Unamuno's Christ the Christ of faith and not of history? And is Unamuno's Christ the Christ of the Spanish mystics and not Jesus of Nazareth? In many respects, it must be remembered that Unamuno's interpretations of the biblical record were not formed in the light of modern biblical criticism. But at least I think it might be said, with some justification, that if Unamuno's Christ cannot be completely portrayed as the biblical Christ, it is a portrayal which is concerned first of all with the living Christ who suffers today.
A second series of questions which must be asked of Unamuno's theology concerns his use or misuse of certain central words: eternity, death, sin, history, eschatology, creation, immortality, human destiny, the word. All of these words are situated within existential frameworks; that is, they are given meaning in the light of two prior conditions: the existence of the flesh and bone man, and the reality of the tragic sense of life. Unamuno believed that the existence of man in the world was tragic, and that in the face of his history (both inner history of the individual and the outer history of the race) man was faced with the existential reality of death, sin, and depravity. Nonetheless, within these same tragic depths of man there pulsed a thirst (la gana) for eternity and the possibility of creatorship. But human history could not fulfill these craving desires, and thus an eschatological hope was born in the Unamunian universe for a finality which human destiny apart from God could not provide. Human destiny had to be seen in the light of divine purpose; there had to be a new creation of man in eternity. Unamuno found such a new creation in the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body.

Although Unamuno frequently discussed the creatorship of man at the same time as he discussed the tragic condition of human life, his doctrine of man-as-sinner was not as pronounced as man as creator. Unamuno believed that man was not totally separated from the God, and that sin did not entirely obliterate
the divine image of God in man. If Unamuno conceived of man's life as a crusade against death and oblivion, it is difficult to see why he did not also stress man's crusade against sin. It is also difficult to understand why Unamuno did not speak often enough of re-creation in this life, and always found it necessary to speak of re-creation in the light of immortality and eternity. In most of his other categories he dwelt on the existence-sphere of the flesh and bone man in this world; but in his analysis of immortality he seemed to go beyond the existential fact of the worldly life into the possible reality of a post-worldly life. And it must also be asked whether Unamuno's God, the heretic God who doubts himself and struggles with his creation, can be of adequate power to insure immortality. Can one really trust in a God who is an atheist, who doubts himself, and who is dependent upon his world for existence? Is this God of agony the same God who created the world out of nothing, whose mighty acts moved the Hebrew nation, and whose power was such that he freely elected the cross?

(3) Human Existence in the Unamunian World:

Despite various objections to the Unamunian God, it is more difficult to object to Unamuno's portrayal of human existence. To the question "What is life?" Unamuno might have replied: struggle, agony, and creation. Indeed, the question of life holds many more tragic possibilities than the question of God or Truth or values, for it is life which binds men to the yoke of history. Rather than discussing human existence in general, however, Unamuno wished to discuss the meaning of
individual existence, the history of the flesh and bone man.

In a positive sense, it might be said that the life of the flesh and bone man, Unamuno's authentic man, gives many insights into the nature of human personality. The life of this authentic man is linked to an existential concern for life; all human effort must be brought into the fulfillment of consciousness. At this point there would be little disagreement as to Unamuno's purpose, for even the socialist or linguistic analyst desires to add something better to the human condition. The essential question to be asked, however, goes deeper: what makes life human? In answer to this question Unamuno would have stood within the tradition of thinkers which included such men as Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Berdiaev, and others. Certainly human life is more than rational comprehension or empirical existence, and what this "something more than" is demanded a feeling for the utter and often terrible mystery of human beings in the world. Suffice it to say that Unamuno saw that being a man entailed various conditions: human personhood meant struggle; to struggle was to exist fully and to create completely; to be a man meant that there would be a logic of the heart as well as a logic of the head. Moreover, Unamuno saw that the deepest dimension of personhood was to be found in an agonizing faith in God, in the inability to live without him, in the desire that he might exist. In short, Unamuno saw that the way to be human led through the agony of death, anxiety, finitude, and despair to a God who entered human history as a suffering man.
Nevertheless, there are some points at which Unamuno's authentic man seems to fall short of personhood, and all these points revolve around the theme of tragic contradictions in man. Unamuno begins with what he considers to be a given reality: the tragedy of human life. It is difficult to disagree with his analysis at this point, but it is not difficult to see that tragedy can also be the occasion for destruction and resignation. There is no necessary connection between the tragic sense of life and creativity. It is a characteristic of the tragic characters in Unamuno's novels that they are so preoccupied with their own egos that they are controlled by their passions and indifferent to society. Endless struggle and continual agony can also lead to agonizing inaction and a lack of balance in personality. And since Unamuno's tragic sense of life cannot be overcome, a man is left to struggle without any hope of final victory. Can a man struggle with the mystery of life without any hope of believing that he will find something of that mystery revealed once and for all?

(4) Conclusion:
Why is this thesis important? Is there any justification for the long and weary hours of reading and organization, writing and re-writing?

Western anthologies have often dismissed Unamuno as a product of Spanish culture, or they have not bothered to admit him to the select circle of modern writers. Outside of his native Spain Unamuno's impact on European literature has not been overwhelming. José Ferrater Mora's work on Unamuno's
philosophy is, perhaps, the most complete interpretation of his work done in English. And outside of short chapters in books written by Carl Michalson, John MacQuarrie, and John MacKay, Unamuno's name is missing in the anthologies of the West. Perhaps this fact is caused by the many untranslated works of Unamuno; only his Tragic Sense of Life and The Agony of Christianity have become well-known in European circles. This may explain why Ortega y Gasset's works, which have been translated, are more a part of Western scholarship than Unamuno's; but Unamuno's philosophy is just as vital to the West as is Ortega's, and, moreover, it is difficult to understand how Ortega's works can be interpreted without some reference to Unamuno and the plight of modern Spain.

But it also seems that Unamuno's life and writings are important to the task of contemporary theology; and if there has been a lack of literary interpretations of Unamuno's work, there has been even more a lack of theological interpretation of Unamuno's literature. This lack of interest in the theology of Miguel de Unamuno is disheartening for several reasons. There have been interpretations given to the Russian religious mind, to Berdiaev and Bulgakov, to Dostoevsky and Tolstoy; but how often has theology concerned itself with the Spanish religious mind? The Spanish religious mind, open as it was to Moslem and mystical influences, is different from the mind of Western Christianity, as it was situated in Rome. There is an essential root of tragedy and mysticism in the Spanish religious mind which set it apart from Roman Christianity. Why has this root not been
more frequently investigated?

It is even more discouraging to find how little modern theology has concerned itself with Unamuno, for there are certain vital insights which he brings into the modern interpretation of the Christian faith. There seems to be at least five areas of concern which Unamuno dealt with which could be utilized in the contemporary task of theology.

1. Unamuno's repeated use of existential themes, set within the dynamics of the Christian faith, can be a unique source of new interpretation. Indeed, Unamuno's novels and poetry are sources of existential images, and could be used for further analysis. It could also be shown how these existential Christian themes took root in Spanish culture.

2. Unamuno's analysis of the word, both the created word of man and the Word of God, acts as a critique of the modern concern for linguistic analysis. His conception of the word as a living reality lays the foundation for a critique of philosophies of language.

3. Unamuno's ontology also offers a unique insight into the structures of being. Rather than speaking of Being-itself, Unamuno spoke of being-in-struggle.

4. Unamuno's metaphysics also offer a new direction for the metaphysical task in our time, in which the whole of reality is seen as engaged in struggle.

5. Unamuno's analysis of God and man can act as a logical corrective to theological positivism.
which speaks of the honor of God apart from the dignity of man.

The value of this thesis, however limited it may be, could be simply to point out those areas of theological concern in Unamuno and the Spanish religious mind which have not yet been fully comprehended.

Needless to say, the final justification of this work will have to rest with the author himself. For if it has not been edifying to him it will not be valuable to anyone else.

Unamuno once remarked of his writings:

"My intent has been, is, and will continue to be, that those who read my works shall think and meditate upon fundamental problems, and has never been to hand them completed thoughts. I have always sought to agitate and, even better, to stimulate, rather than to instruct....

"I do not know whether anything I have done will endure for years, for centuries, after my death, but I do know that if one drops a stone in the shoreless sea the surrounding waves, although diminishing, will go on ceaselessly. To agitate is something, and if, due to this agitation, somebody else follows who does something which endures, my work will be perpetuated in that." 1

Suddenly the thought rushed into my mind that more than the literature or the philosophy, during the last few months I had been living with Miguel de Unamuno, sharing in the drama of his life. More than books or systems, human beings have a way of remaining in one's memory, becoming part of one's life. Only now, in retrospect, can I begin to see the impact this man has left on my existence. Perhaps this feeling is due to the fact that I understand something of the tragic sense

in men and peoples.

I know what Unamuno meant by a tragic contradiction between two modes of existence: that of faith and that of reason. Imaginative faith has a double destiny: it pries open men's hearts; and it lays a curse there. Like S.T Coleridge's Ancient Mariner I can understand that there is a terror in faith itself, that faith can create a whole structure of meaning out of contact with reality, and that it can project a world full of powers and presences not visible to the physical eyes. And yet, as was the case with the young John Stuart Mill, reason can stifle the feelings and drive the heart into hiding; it can deny validity to those dimensions of existence which are necessary for creative existence, but closed to reason itself. And how is man to live fully in these tragic depths?

And even more than the individual, are not our times as tragic as Unamuno's? Still the funeral bells ring out the solemn message of death in this land; still the quiet despair of men suffering in crowded cities. No eternal panacea seems capable of overcoming our situations or changing them, and the wisdom of Ecclesiastes runs rampant: Man was born to live, to suffer, and to die, and what befalls him is a tragic lot.

There is no sense in denying this fact of tragedy, and


yet men must live within this dimension of tragedy. How are they to do it?

Unamuno gave one possible answer to this problem in his life and writings. He stressed the importance of living within the land between faith and reason, neither embracing faith at the expense of reason nor clinging to reason in the face of faith. It was his contention, witnessed to in his life, that a man could exist creatively in the borderland between faith and reason, and make of this style of life an authentically human experience.

I do not know whether Unamuno's name will be uttered in generations to follow; at times I suspect that like his mysterious Spain he will forever remain a riddle to minds which demand more analytical methods. In a time such as ours, however, when philosophy has been more concerned with chasing words than with finding truth in life, it brings hope to know that some men in this century have been concerned with the agony of human existence and the meaning of the Christian faith. Unamuno's words still live on, as he once hoped they would:

"I banish myself to memory,
I go to live in remembrance.
Look for me now, if you lose me in the wilderness of history,
for this our life is an illness and if living ill I die.
Therefore I go to the wilderness,
I go where death may forget me.
I take you with me, my brothers,
that I may people my desert.
Then when you think me most dead within your hands I shall quiver.
For here I leave you my soul
--a book, a man--a true world,
and when you tremble profoundly, reader, I tremble within you." 1

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