

«DOLOR COMÚN»: ONTOLOGICAL (IN)SECUTIRY
IN UNAMUNO'S *ROSARIO DE SONETOS LÍRICOS*

MATTHEW J. MARR
University of Virginia

Within the overwhelmingly extensive body of studies commenting upon the works and philosophy of Miguel de Unamuno, a singular void exists with respect to his *Rosario de sonetos líricos*, published in 1911. Few comprehensive critiques of this collection, which Don Miguel himself calls the «fruto de cinco meses» of his mature literary and intellectual life (Unamuno 414), have been presented to date. That such an apparent gap in the criticism should exist is all the more surprising, given the assertion of a scholar like Donald Shaw, who boldly claims that the poetic branch of Unamuno's literary production is, in effect, «donde mejor puede apreciarse [la] verdadera posición espiritual» of the author (98). Of course, it is precisely with this «spiritual position» (ever at the foreground of Unamuno's thought and fiction) that so many critical studies, as well as a great many of Don Miguel's own writings, have sought to grapple time and again, ultimately forging an estimable corpus of commentary and detailed analysis on the subject of the author's spirituality. In fact, as just a glance at the bibliography shows, over the course of the last century so much has been written on Unamuno's idiosyncratic theology and existential anxieties that these *themes* have naturally passed into a sort of canonical sphere of common knowledge within the profession. Yet, in fashioning a truly nuanced vision of the author's varied modes of *expression* and his evolution as a literary crafts-

man, the position and character of the *Rosario de sonetos líricos* as a text should not be overlooked.

The collection, at core, can be seen as a poetic medley of several quintessentially Unamunian concerns, each of which involves, in one aspect or another, the anguished condition of the rationally contemplative Christian individual. In this, its publication in 1911 can be viewed as prefiguring, in verse form, Don Miguel's landmark essay, *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*, the 1913 philosophical treatise in which he explicitly ponders the distressing—and, in the end, irresolvable—dialectic between the ontological skepticism inherent to reason and the glimpse of transcendent hope that is offered by devout religious faith. However, critics' traditional neglect of the *Rosario's* one hundred twenty-eight poems seems to stem much more from *stylistic* concerns than from a possible lack of interest in the collection's ideological content. Namely, certain scholars have perceived a mediocrity of form in Unamuno's sonnets, a tendency toward artistic imperfection which seems wholly out-of-line with, for example, the prose fiction of this novelistic innovator, whose narrative creativity introduced the «uso del 'flujo de conciencia' en la literatura española» (Shaw 86). García Morejón, for one, highlights several of Unamuno's shortcomings in mastering the architecture of the sonnet, observing «ciertos defectos de construcción en algunos que la precisión del artesano habría evitado: durezas del ritmo, carencia de melodía externa, sequedad angustiosa... y hasta falta o sobra de sílabas» (30-31). Similarly, Shaw underscores the poet's often deficient rhymes, «especialmente las de los esdrújulos», and he characterizes Unamuno's use of enjambment as excessive (104).

On the other hand, other critics have made the general observation that Don Miguel's sonnets evince an admirable sort of structural complexity. Cernuda, for instance, declares that the poems could stand respectably beside those of Quevedo (93), while Young commends their particular capacity to «close with a metaphor of death that reproves both the reader and Unamuno for forgetting... mortality by surrendering to the [deceptive] beauty of the world»—a beauty, he finds, that is reassuringly sketched in the initial lines of several poems (14). In a sense, this latter tendency toward sudden pessimistic revelations constitutes not only a noteworthy structural technique of several poems' conclusions, but moreover, the thematic core of Unamuno's *Rosario* as a whole. As the title

would suggest¹, the collection is much like a Rosary. That is, like this cyclical Catholic prayer, Unamuno's *Rosario de sonetos líricos* poetically unveils, sets forth, and then reiterates a most central «mystery» around which his ontological (or religious) vision is constructed. Clearly, of course, the «mystery» of Unamuno's poetic Rosary bears little resemblance to the mysteries at the heart of the Catholic faith. For the author, the principal «mystery», or rather, the most astounding and foundational truth of our existence concerns the irreconcilable tension produced by man's paradoxical existence as a being who instinctively longs for, but cannot logically embrace, the comforting notion of a benevolent God: that supreme absolute who might guarantee him ontological security. Interestingly, the essence of this tragic paradox appears effectively compressed into the collection's very title. For there, the poet juxtaposes the Rosary and the sonnet as contrastive symbols, with the former signaling the religious faith and the latter denoting, it would seem, the sort of structural logic and syllogistic precision conventionally associated with this most classical of poetic forms. Ultimately then, such a pairing functions in an especially apt manner, anticipating, as it were, the work's cardinal antagonism between reason and faith —forces which mutually decenter one another throughout this collection, as in much of Unamuno's thought and fiction.

Strangely though, a number of remarks made by Unamuno with regard to his intent in composing the *Rosario* seem to guide us toward a presupposition that the work is of a much less universal, sophisticated, and consciously crafted mold. Indeed, in the epigraph to the collection it appears as if Don Miguel espouses a model of the sonnet that, quite curiously, would express a spontaneous, personal, and particularized vision of existence. In this precursory text, he includes a quotation from W. Hazlitt's *Table Talk*, a passage —commenting upon the sonnets of Milton— which underscores the «great object» of this poetic form as the expression «in musical numbers» of some «occasional thought or personal feeling [,] 'some fee-grief due to the poet's breast'» (my emphasis, 335). In this, the reader might anticipate a series of poems

¹ The Real Academia's *Diccionario de la lengua española* defines «Rosario» as a «Rezo de la Iglesia, en que se conmemoran los quince misterios principales de Jesucristo y de la Virgen, recitando después de cada uno un padrenuestro, diez avemarías, y un gloriapatri.»

reflecting an idiosyncratic and improvisational tone, sonnets whose argument and perspective are unilaterally focused *inward* on the situation of the poet and his state-of-mind over the course of several months. The collection is, after all, a poetic diary whose organization remains purely chronological (arranged in order of the listed dates of composition), a fact which Unamuno himself emphasizes in the epilogue (414). Thus, just as the genre of the diary tends to be confessional and typically centered around the self, one might expect the *Rosario* to reveal a similar orientation. Even the poet's personal correspondence seems to allude to the very personal, introspective nature of these sonnets. In a letter to Maragall (17 March 1911), we find that Unamuno highlights specific biographical circumstances which have served as the thematic nuclei for his forthcoming work. In the following passage, the poet expressly states that the outlook of the sonnets has been very much informed by his personal trials during a period of tremendous physical affliction.

En breve le enviaré mi *Rosario de sonetos líricos* (en prensa), donde verá mi estado. ¡Gracias que estoy casado y con hijos!... ello se complica con que creo que mi corazón, el de carne, envejece de prisa. Los médicos le llaman a esto aprensión; otros, neurastenia. ¡Palabras! El brazo izquierdo, dolorido de continuo, y hace dos meses, terribles insomnios... tengo un estado hipertensivo. Y como todo cardíopata acaba en neurópata, mis nervios están de punta. Y unas perspectivas lúgubres, de que le darán noticia los sonetos. (qtd. in García Blanco 167-168).

Moreover, even Unamuno's own characterization of his technical approach to writing these poems seems to belie the *Rosario's* contemplative depth. Oddly enough, he claims to have written most of his sonnets without the explicit intention of developing or condensing his own philosophical thoughts. Rather, he maintains that much more *musical* concerns inspired this poetic endeavor, as he states that his primary motivation in composing the *Rosario* was, in his own words, merely to «desarrollar un endecasílabo, un verso, una frase que me gusta.» And at times, when pondering a first line, he alleges that he effectively had no idea as to where the second would lead him. Nonetheless, this seemingly whimsical love of language for language's sake, coupled with the ostensibly confessional, diary-like form of the collection, are thorough-

ly misleading. Interpretively speaking, such remarks represent a case of authorial commentary that predisposes the reader to a vision of the work which partially obscures its universal transcendence.

Upon a close reading of the collection, it becomes clear that the vast majority of these sonnets, much like the whole of Unamuno's literary corpus, reflect a much broader condition than that of a single man struggling each day with certain physical ailments and consequent emotion turmoil. In fact, as Orringer asserts, Unamuno's poetry generally «eleva sus vivencias a un nivel religioso si no divino y dota la lectura de sus versos de una solemnidad de que suele carecer la vida cotidiana» (329), a quality which is characteristic of the author's overall concept of what constitutes genuine art, especially as it is set forth two years later in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*. In that essay,

Unamuno concibe la poesía como «la eternización de la momentaneidad», pues el poeta recoge los temas de siempre, los sitúa fuera del tiempo, los perpetúa. (Orringer 329)

This conceptual «eternalization» of personal experience through the medium of poetry has, in Orringer's view, an almost *priestly* effect in Unamuno's work. His craft functions as a poetic liturgy which is directed *away* from the self, and *unto* his public (329). Figuratively, it is a sort of transubstantiation in which the poet's own solitary intuition crystallizes as wisdom henceforth available to the reader; or in linguistic terms, it represents a speech act which consolidates and preserves an *episteme* through a rite of «eternización»: a term which may be, in fact, an Unamunian neologism forged specifically to characterize the poetic process. This observed dynamic Don Miguel's poems—that is to say, their decidedly non-hermetic stance which advances beyond isolated, self-indulgent meditations to comment upon the tragedy of existence for *all men*—represents, in *Rosario de sonetos líricos*, a constant.

In fact, it is an ideal which Unamuno quite clearly espouses in «Dolor común» (XCVI): a poem, we find, whose selfless sentiment resounds as a sort of *lema* for the poet's enterprise throughout *Rosario*. «Dolor común» represents a forceful censure of the sort of self-oriented artistic sensibility whose intuition fails to extend itself beyond the mere realm of the poet himself. In the first qua-

train, the speaker demands that his heart refrain from pathetically lamenting its own «pesares / de los que no deben decirse» (1-2), those pains which solely concern the *individual*, and that therefore only serve to accentuate his own egotistical vanity (7-8). At the point of the sonnet's *volta*, the poet eases the severity of his own self-reprimand, addressing his poetic heart, instead, with a bit of fatherly counsel. In essence, he urges this heart to consider its own agony in relation to that of humankind in general.

tu vanidad no más. Nunca separes
 tu dolor del común dolor humano,
 busca el íntimo, aquel en que radica
 la hermandad que te liga con tu hermano.
 el que agranda la mente y no la achica;
 solitario y carnal es siempre vano;
 sólo el dolor común nos santifica. (8-14)

The use of enjambment between the second quatrain and the first tercet, hinged on the phrase «nunca separes», stresses, in a formal sense, the sonnet's unmistakable theme of solidarity. The mission of the poet, it seems, should be to depict a sort of shared human suffering which supersedes his own particular situation. In other words, the poet must not abuse his position by falling into the practice of portraying his own existential condition as somehow apart from that of other men. Rather, Unamuno here voices his belief that poetic worth, or «sanctification» through the medium of poetry, is achieved through developing an artistic perspective which aligns itself with the shared spiritual concerns of the *human* condition: specifically, the anguished situation which all contemplative men share. Thus, the solitary sensibility so intrinsic to the Romantic-modernista tradition, in this light, is presented by Unamuno as vocationally irresponsible. The authentic imperative of the poet should be to contemplate a kind of suffering that transcends the self.

With this fundamental conviction of Unamuno in mind, we shall now examine its relevance to several of the *Rosario's* sonnets. In our view, many of the collection's best sonnets can be placed into one of three dialectic categories: firstly, those which present a perspective on the tragedy of man's existence; secondly, those which present a possible solution to such problems (remedies which often seem somehow against human nature); and thirdly, those poems which relate cases of the disheartening failure of

such proposed solutions in effectively resolving man's spiritual anguish.

«La oración del ateo», perhaps the best known sonnet of the collection, clearly falls into the first category, and is often understood as a fourteen-line condensation of Unamuno's essential vision of man's despaired situation. Essentially, the poem describes the tragic paradox of mortal existence for the rational individual, a situation in which «[uno] sufre porque Dios no existe y es el único que podría dar sentido a su vida» (Federici 97). In other words, the great human tragedy lies in the fact the only God's offer of everlasting life can satiate our inherent need for immortality. Yet, God's most empowering gift to man (that of reason) constantly works toward a negation of the conditions of possibility for this very Creator's (and ostensible Redeemer's) own existence. This overall sense of *paradox* within the poem is reinforced by the semantically contradictory nature of the title (an atheist would have no entity to whom he might pray), as well as in a number of deliberately contradictory phrases employed by the speaker: «Cuando Tú de mi mente más te alejas / más recuerdo...» (6-7), «Eres tan grande que no eres sino Idea» (9-10), «es muy angosta / la realidad por mucho que se expande» (10-11). And, with respect to the sonnet's theme (apparently inspired by the case of a minister who lost his own faith while writing a sermon meant to fortify it in others)², Unamuno has said that «Sí, si existiera el Dios garantizador de nuestra inmortalidad personal, entonces existiríamos nosotros de veras. ¡Y si no, no!» (qtd. in Cancela 39). Interestingly, the tragic sensibility of just this sort of realization provokes a tone of disgust on the part of the poet (one not unlike that apparently produced in the minister), a sentiment expressed in his haughty and confrontational verbal sneers and insults toward an impossible God. The sonnet, for instance, begins with the abruptly familiar command «Oye» (1), it refers to God's worthless «consuelo de engaño» (4), and eventually it belittles the Supreme Being's grandeur in the contextually ironic exclamation «¡Qué grande eres, mi Dios!» (9).

² According to Orringer, «La oración del ateo» informs us of Unamuno's «lectura de la *Historia del pietismo*, donde Ritschl narra el caso curioso del ministro pietista August Francke (VII, 181). Al preparar un sermón sobre la fe, Francke perdió la suya. Cuenta Ritschl, 'En este percance seguía clamando al Dios en que ya no creía para que, si Él existiese, tuviera lástima de él'» (326).

In other poems, too, this peer-like (over-)familiarity and derisive tone toward God are undeniably present, especially in cases where the speaker squares off against the Maker in what seems a sort of duel. This is illustrated, for instance, in the beginning of sonnet XC, «Señor, no me desprecies», where God is verbally taunted in an attempt to lure Him into what seems, semantically speaking, something akin to an episode of domestic violence: a confrontation that would, at the very least, bring God into *some* form of manifest communication with man. The speaker implores God, «conmigo / lucha; que sienta al quebrantar tu mano / la mía... / pues beligerancia consigo de tu parte» (1-5), lashing out as if he were an abused child rising up in violent frustration against a cruelly negligent father. Indeed, he does so with a precocious arrogance typical to the human race, a tone that is quite in keeping with man's sense that he *rightfully* deserves a glimpse into the meaning of the cosmos, and that a truly benevolent God would make Himself readily intelligible to his most cherished creation: beliefs quite harmonious, in the end, with what the poet signals as man's mythological conception of the «origen divino de lo humano» (6).

Still, the poet's evidently muted faith in this God who fails to reveal himself ultimately takes hold, and a much more optimistic persona emerges. In the last two lines of the second quatrain, his anger becomes somewhat quelled, and he stumbles upon a somewhat reassuring revelation: «luchando así comprendo que el arcano / de tu poder es de mi fe el abrigo». In short, the unfathomable nature of God's works and presence stimulates the speaker's rational powers. A constant mental struggle with the question of God's existence (the «arcano»), then, acts as a stimulus keeping man alert. Thus, faith remains an issue charged with tremendous vitality, the focus of a *lucha diaria* which actually invigorates man, and perhaps, a force that makes his life a bit more impassioned³. With this in mind, the speaker retreats from his attack, «desarmado ya de su armadura» (12). His «alma», while still clinging to just

³ In «Días del siervo albedrío» (LXIV), similarly, the poet reveals a sort of optimistic insight forged through his experience with a dark, languid period of seemingly hopeless struggle. The last tercet of the sonnet places the somber, defeated tone of the previous stanzas under a quite contrastive light: «...días de siervo albedrío, / vosotros me enseñáis con vuestro oscuro ceño / que nada arrastra más al alma que el vacío» (12-14).

the necessary amount of doubtful anguish that will fuel his very rational sense of skepticism, does nonetheless look forward to a day of serene resolution, «[cuando] salga de esta senda oscura» (14), thereby passing into a more definitive knowledge of God and the cosmos.

«Señor, no me desprecies», in this light, represents a poem which falls into our second proposed category: that of those sonnets which present a possible solution to man's spiritual anguish before a tragic existence. It seems to advocate embracing the internal struggle between rational doubt and faith, since it proves to be this very kind of heightened awareness —this thirst and consequent quest for absolute truth— which is the pulse of the spiritually alive individual. Sonnet CXIII, «¿Por qué me has abandonado?», constitutes another poem which offers a line of metaphysical counsel, although its overall tone remains much less affirmative than that of «Señor, no me desprecies». In fact, the poem approximates what amounts to an invective against God and His miserly ways. In particular, the poet rebukes God's selfish failure to reveal Himself and the truth of eternal life to man through *rationaly comprehensible* means. The poem is situated in a moment of incensed frustration, in which the speaker's plight parallels that of an abandoned Christ at Gethsemane who, in his human frailty, places his head down on the ground and begs a seemingly absent Father to deter his destiny of suffering (Matthew 26:39). Jesus, like contemplative mortal men, yearns to see meaning in God's punitive plan, and thus wonders if his suffering is truly necessary: a question, in the end, which implicitly represents a criticism of God's cruelty toward men.

Unamuno's sonnet poetically amplifies just such a critique. The poem is structured as a sort of rally cry for man's platform of complaints against this God, a figure the poet portrays as nothing shy or sinful: in fact, one against whom man should react. The speaker beseeches us to «haz de modo que sea una injusticia / nuestra aniquilación» (2-3): an implicit petition that man remain firm in his morality, thereby making his «vida una protesta» (4) against the «avaricia / de Dios» (3-4). According to the logic of the poem, the «impía suerte» (12) which governs existence under this type of God is a force «sin pago» (5) which can only be righteously combated through adhering to a standard inverse to the ostensibly *laissez-faire* and *engañoso* ways of the Supreme Being. This

opposed standard would necessitate moral vigilance, as well as a pious attentiveness toward others which seems so wanting in Unamuno's indifferent, distant figure of God. Curiously, God is actually depicted as an ethical model whose very *antithesis* is that toward which we should aspire. Man must show himself to be much more steadfast and engaged in upstanding pursuits than this absent figure of Yahweh.

Whatever the case, the ultimate result of embracing morality in such a conscious manner can only be the achievement of one of two forms of poetic justice. On the one hand, if God *does* appear in the moral individual's final hour, then man will be redeemed, as promised, in Paradise. Yet, even if, as reason forever encourages us to believe, God does *not* exist in the end, then a life-long sense of doubt is sublimated as an absolute truth: the matter is finally resolved, and rational skepticism—the dominant force in contemplative man—legitimizes its sovereignty in the individual. The poem proposes, then, that man cling to morality no matter how strong or weak the fire of his faith in God. For, even despite the speaker's underlying current of disgust when confronted with the possibly fraudulent promise of eternal salvation, Unamuno's allusion to Christ's own struggle implicitly invokes the ultimate redemption of the Resurrection, and thus, the poem falls short of entirely dismissing the idea that Christian suffering is inevitably in vain.

«¡Victoria!» (sonnet CXXVII), whose title articulates a wholly ironic value given the spiritually bankrupt voice of the sonnet, is a great deal less balanced in its vision of the redemptive possibilities of morality as an absolute. Indeed, the poem falls most appropriately into our third proposed category, given that it presents a case of entirely shattered faith in one who should, it seems, stand out as a model of spiritual resolve. This penultimate sonnet of the collection is focused upon the situation of a «buen caudillo» (2) whose glorious «memoria / brilla hoy» (7-8), even after passing through a crisis of faith which he appears able to have hidden from those he influences. The quatrains of the sonnet emphasize the magnificence of his military prowess as a leader of armies: a sort of valor («a la gloria / sin creer en ella les llevó» [my emphasis 5-6]) which semantically signals a much more spiritual enterprise. This *caudillo's* surface persona, endowed with a physical strength which enables him to rally troops with ease and topple any obstacle in his path, is—with-

in the tercets— set off against a personal core of clandestine doubt. For, we find that this portion of the poem is a monologue actualized in solitude, and its content resounds with the poet's belief that his existence is tainted by an inevitable sense of fraud. The *caudillo* is somehow aware of the fleeting nature of his victory, and, because of this, it seems a defeat. His chest lacerated by the «poderoso trillo / de tedio» (4-5), he is forced to pose the rhetorical question, «¿Y esto es vencer?» (9).

If we are to see this warrior as a voice responding to Unamuno's enthusiastic and ambitious call in «Razón y fe» (LIII) for men to «levanta de la fe el blanco estandarte» (1), then this is truly one of the most spiritually demoralized pieces in the *Rosario*. Certainly, the speaker will continue to crusade (much like Unamuno's protagonist in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*), but he does so with a resigned sense of how false such a sacrifice truly is. In a world with no absolutes («vence el que cree vencer» [11]), the *caudillo* impotently endorses the furthering of a fiction which benefits others, believing that «hay que engañar a los hermanos» (10) so as to aggrandize the myth of victory «por su bien» (12). Like the so-called «cradle Catholic» who never authentically examines and reformulates the constitution of his faith, then, he is a figure who adheres to the moral status quo which surrounds him, failing to venture forth into a postmodern sensibility critically recognizing—in an outward manner—the meaninglessness and ultimate nothingness of existence. In the end, his supposedly sacrificial alliance with a fiction that seeks to impose order upon the chaos of existence fails. Indeed, we find that the speaker is unable to immerse himself completely within the *engaño*. Despite his participation in the masquerade, he can never fully rid himself of a pervasive and tragic sense of fraud, one which stirs him to lament at the sonnet's conclusion, «¡pobres humanos, / que así fingen el mundo a su deseo!» (14).

To fall into such a knowledge of the tragic *engaño* of life while sensing an obligation to obscure it from others is, in itself, a most distressing experience for the contemplative individual. Yet, as Unamuno intimates in «El fracaso de la vida», sonnet XCIV, it turns out to be an all the more excruciating predicament because man is inclined to «recall» the bliss of ignorance as he ostensibly enjoyed it in the past. The human spirit, standing before an ideal of everlasting life which has been shattered by the dominion of

reason, still longs to perceive some sort of calming «absolute» toward which it might direct its sense of emptiness. According to the sonnet, this need often sublimates itself in an idealization of the past: in a nostalgic vision of days which never really were — a mythical time filled with «la esperanza que nutrió su juventud» (1-2). Yet, the image that memory projects of such an idealized youth is, according to the central metaphor of the poem, a vision in constant flux, an illusion. Man has a mutable recollection of the past that is much like «la lumbre que sube del ocaso» (10), the type of light whose shifting angle (as the sun falls at the end of the day toward the horizon) makes «el verdor trueca en herrumbre» (11), a visual change symbolizing man's skewed view of the past as he approaches the finality of death. As the «alma recuerda», or more precisely, as it fabricates such a virtuous, exultant past-self, anxiety is created. The human spirit cannot, «con sus ensueños» (5), «alcanza[r] lo que esperó» (5-6). The revelation of life's tragic sensibility attained through total submission to reason is too strong; we cannot be purified of our tragic epiphany. And so, as is the case with Unamuno's «Don Juan de las ideas» (sonnet CVII), the «lujuria / intelectual» (9-10) of contemplative man ends up «haciendo[le] estéril» (14).

In two particular sonnets, however, Unamuno seems to propose that solidarity between men might serve as a potential solution to this sort of crisis. In the poem «Inactual» (CXII), for example, the first tercet feverishly exclaims that «¡Fraternidad!» might be «la palabra / que del vivir nos cubre hoy el quebranto.» Unamuno here posits that a quasi-socialist movement toward brotherly love might actually surprise man in its effectiveness as a «mágico moderno abracadabra» (9-11). Solidarity, in short, would «sustituir de Dios el manto» (12), combating man's perception of life's meaningless and his solitary existence which —in the absence of God— has lost even its ascetically redemptive character: an idea Unamuno develops in sonnet LXXII, «Soledad.»

¡Pobre alma triste que caminas sola
perdida del desierto en las arenas,
llevando a cuestras solitarias penas
oscuras, que no brillan con la aureola
del martirio... (1-5)

Quite unexpectedly though, in the last two lines of «Inactual», Unamuno swipes from us the caress of this potential blanket, re-

tracting his own advocacy of solidarity (and of socialism, it would seem) as a solution, abruptly thrusting the reader once more into a realm of unresolved anguish: «mas es en vano, soledad nos labra / del pomposo progreso el desencanto» (13-14). Earlier in the collection, in «Civilitas» (Sonnet LXXV), the poet had revealed a similarly pessimistic line of thought. There, Unamuno ponders the root cause of civilization's failure to embrace solidarity with any degree of success. The poet points to envy, that «más firme cimientto / de la hermandad civil, y ley primera» of human conduct (12-13), as the inevitable, insatiable force which, since the time of Cain, has separated men and fueled conflict between them.

In spite of this undeniable current of pessimism in the *Rosario*, in a pair of poems Unamuno does espouse, quite affirmatively, certain means to realizing a degree of spiritual peace within the potential chaos of mortal existence. Both involve, in a sense, the refuge of personal relationships and the powerful remedy of the love produced within these. In «El ángel negro» (LXXIX), for one, Unamuno «atestigua tiernamente el apoyo de su mujer en los momentos de desesperanza» (Shaw 101). The sonnet hails, in the second tercet, the sublime power of one's beloved to shelter the spirit from the looming abyss of mortality and the unknown. In this, the structure of the poem—leading us, at its conclusion, *into* an optimistic sort of intuition (rather than away from it)—is inverse to that of many of the *Rosario* sonnets we have examined.

Sumido entonces en mortal quebranto
tomo con la verdad odio a la vida,
y cobro de mí mismo un recio espanto,
pero me miras tú, compadecida,
y tus ojos me vuelven al encanto
del dulce ensueño en que verdad se olvida. (9-14)

With this type of reassuring warmth emanating from the *hogar*, the anguished individual seems much better equipped to enjoy a life endowed with some degree of inner peace. Indeed, the love of this almost protective, maternal figure of the wife (consistent with how she is depicted in much of Unamuno's work, especially after his spiritual crisis of 1897)⁴ provides a base of existential comfort which

⁴ For a discussion of this movement in Unamuno's evolution, see Sánchez-Barbudo, Antonio. «Una experiencia decisiva: La crisis de 1897.» Ed. Antonio Sánchez-Barbudo. *Miguel de Unamuno: El Escritor y la Crítica*. Madrid: Taurus Ediciones, S.A., 1974. 95-122.

allows the skeptical man to feel a bit more patient in his lingering mortal days. And, with the severity of his ontological distress somewhat quieted, he is able to wait out the storm of life, clinging—while ever so tenuously—to an anticipated «consolation... that with death, the mind, 'free of the tombstone of thought, source of illusions,' will sleep in God's powerful» and redemptive hand (Nozick 178). This difficult movement through so much pain, torment, and anxiety, toward the virtue of patience, (as it is depicted in sonnet LXXVI, «En la mano de Dios») may constitute the *Rosario's* most definitive and optimistic proposal of remedy for contemplative man's tragic sensibility:

CUANDO, Señor, nos besas con tu beso
 que nos quita el aliento, el de la muerte,
 el corazón bajo el aprieto fuerte
 de tu mano derecha queda opreso.
 Y en tu izquierda, rendida por su peso
 quedando la cabeza, a que revierte
 el sueño eterno, aun lucha por cojerte
 al disiparse su angustiado seso.
 Al corazón sobre tu pecho pones
 y como en dulce cuna allí reposa
 lejos del recio mar de las pasiones,
 mientras la mente, libre de la losa
 del pensamiento, fuente de ilusiones
 duerme al sol en tu mano poderosa. (1-14)

Ultimately then, Unamuno's *Rosario de sonetos líricos* undoubtedly leads the reader toward a finer appreciation of the spiritual position of this most studied, and broadly interpreted, member of the Generation of 1898. In our estimation, the *Rosario* represents a verse-form diagnostic assessment of man's ontological condition. The collection, evidently superseding the rather «personal» and «whimsical» character suggested by Unamuno in his introductory remarks and correspondence, ultimately constitutes an ardent poetic expression of man's universal «Dolor común». And moreover, the book anticipates—through verse, metaphor, and symbolism—a significant portion of the author's better known (posterior) philosophico-religious essays and prose fiction. It is a volume of sonnets that reveals and explores the *mystery* of man's spiritual malaise, time and again, through the lucid poetic vehicle of the sonnet. However, somewhat like its Catholic namesake, this collection can also be seen as a «Rosary»; and as such, its design

seems directed toward procuring some sort of «intervention» —or perhaps more fittingly— a certain sort of *poetic intuition* that might proffer a means toward alleviating the symptoms of despair so inherent to man's spiritual plight. And certainly, while such proposals do not always turn out to be viable remedies (more often than not, they are disheartening failures), Unamuno as sonneteer is poised in reflection on behalf of his fellow man, striving to reconcile the forces of intellectual skepticism and irrational confidence which vie so fiercely within the individuals who authentically contemplates God and notions of transcendence. In this light, the poems of the *Rosario* necessarily position Don Miguel near the dialectic epicenter of the modern century's crisis of faith and its gravitation toward existentialism. Consequently, in literary terms, the work fulfills the performative function of «eternalizing» this crucial philosophical moment with a uniquely Unamunian brand of verse that is ideationally provocative, confessionally intimate, and heartfelt in tone.

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