

UNAMUNO'S WAR AGAINST PRIMO DE RIVERA:
POETRY AND POLITICS IN *ROMANCERO DEL DESTIERRO*

STEPHEN J. SUMMERHILL
The Ohio State University

In the third chapter of *La agonía del cristianismo*, Unamuno evokes what he believes is the deepest core of Christianity by referring to an ecstatic or mystical experience of St. Paul, who was taken up to heaven and heard unspeakable speaking: «Y cuando fue arrebatado al tercer cielo, no sabía si en cuerpo o fuera del cuerpo, pues esto Dios lo sabe... fue arrebatado y oyó *dichos indecibles*...»¹ Don Miguel then goes on to say, with more than a little sarcasm:

El que no se sienta capaz de comprender y de sentir esto, de conocerlo en el sentido bíblico, de engendrarlo, de crearlo, que renuncie no sólo a comprender el cristianismo, sino el anticristianismo, y la historia, y la vida, y a la vez la realidad y la personalidad. Que haga eso que llaman política —política de partido— o que haga erudición, que se dedique a la sociología o a la arqueología. (314)

In other words and to abbreviate somewhat, anyone who feels incapable of understanding what is meant by «*dichos indecibles*» should give up understanding life and dedicate himself to politics or erudition.

Such words are harsh and no doubt exaggerated, but they express the anguish Unamuno felt during the period of his exile from 1924 to 1930, especially the months he spent in Paris from summer 1924,

¹ *La agonía del cristianismo, Obras completas*, 7, ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid: Escelicer, 1966), 313.

through summer 1925. Having been exiled from Spain by Primo de Rivera in February, 1924, don Miguel found himself in a kind of «no man's land» of isolation, loneliness and boredom. Much that he wrote during the period carries this desperate tone of exasperation and anxiety².

But whether he was desperate or not, we should not overlook the position Unamuno takes here concerning politics. In his view, dedicating oneself to politics —by which he meant party politics— was one of the lowest, most degraded forms of human activity, and was equivalent to having no real understanding about life. Strong as they are, such ideas were not new in his work, for he had long looked disdainfully on party politics and politicians³.

At the same time, they acquire a problematic or even contradictory sense if we realize that, during the same years of his exile, Unamuno himself became forcefully involved in politics and political action, indeed, probably more than at any other time of his life. And this in turn led him to a poetry of strong political commitment, something one would never expect from this essentially Romantic poet of meditation. In other words, don Miguel began to cultivate one of the very things he said he most disliked. Driven by a relentless opposition to the dictator Primo de Rivera, as well as King Alfonso XIII and military leaders such as Severiano Martínez Anido, Unamuno undertook a veritable war of words against the leaders of the Spanish government⁴. Indeed, it was a remarkably harsh war on his side, with no holds barred and characterized, as Bénédicte Vauthier has said, by «colère» —rage, a deep and abiding anger that took discourse to the level of invective (11-61). Vauthier herself notes that Marc Angenot has called this kind of writing a «parole pamphlétaire», a language of enthymeme that does not seek to justify its arguments rationally, but simply launches its attacks with passion and vehemence (12-16). It was polemics at its strongest, and even in a writer as direct and sometimes overbearing as Unamuno, the poetry that expresses it can appear strident and harsh.

In the pages that follow, I want to study this turn to politics in

² Unamuno's state of mind during his experience in exile has of course been thoroughly examined in Zubizarreta's masterful and classical study of *Cómo se hace una novela. Unamuno en su nivola* (Madrid: Taurus, 1960).

³ See, for example, among many possible references, the 1916 article «Escritores y políticos», in *op. cit.*, 797-800.

⁴ David Robertson has also spoken of «una guerra de palabras» between Primo de Rivera and Unamuno, although he focuses on a different aspect of don Miguel's exile.

Unamuno's poetry of exile, especially as it appears in the second of the two volumes published during the period, *Romancero del destierro* (Buenos Aires, 1928). This and the earlier volume of exile, *De Fuerteventura a París* (Paris, 1925) are arguably the least well known of all his poetic works, though important recent work has begun to draw attention to them⁵. The issues I wish to consider involve the mixing of politics and poetry in Unamuno's work and especially its effect on his poetic texts. On the one hand, don Miguel pursued what could be called a «poetical politics», that is, a political action informed by his concept of poetry. And on the other, he wrote political poetry, that is, a series of poems explicitly dedicated to political issues in the Spain of the time. Each of these activities —poetical politics and political poetry— deserves consideration, though I will dedicate more attention to the second, politics as they appear in poetical texts.

An important preliminary question is why the poetry of Unamuno's exile is not well known. First, by necessity it was initially published outside of Spain and therefore remained unavailable to its target audience. This guaranteed that it would have little or no impact in the era. In effect, although Unamuno was the major dissident against Primo's government (García Queipo de Llano, 59) and managed to maintain himself somewhat in the public eye while in exile, his poetical war of words against Primo could hardly get off the ground because few in Spain had access to the texts that expressed it.

Moreover, this poetry was never published in uncensored editions throughout the Franco era, including in the two editions of the *Obras completas* prepared by Manuel García Blanco for Vergara and Escelicer, which include non-political texts and commentaries in the two volumes, but consistently remove the political ones⁶. Indeed, it was only in the 1980s, more than fifty years after their original publication, that complete editions of the two volumes became available in Spain, first in small press editions of limited circulation released in Bilbao (1981 and 1982), later in a more widely available Alianza edition (1987), and finally in the new edition of the *Obras completas* prepared by Ricardo Senabre in the 1990s. Such a late appearance obviously limits the efficacy of the political arguments presented in

⁵ See Díaz-Solís, López de Abiada, Urrutia, and Vauthier.

⁶ With respect to *De Fuerteventura a París*, it seems that all of the 103 sonnets appear uncensored in the Escelicer edition, but hardly any of the prose commentaries accompanying them are included. These are crucial because they clarify most of the political allusions in the poems.

the poetry by making them out of date. Who today would be drawn to poetry written against a petty dictator who disappeared from the scene almost eighty years ago? In her introduction to the Alianza edition, Ana Suárez Miramón also mentions a related problem: many historical details in the poems have become remote and difficult to understand, although they would have been easily recognized in the era (254-55). Perhaps Angenot touches on the complexity of the situation when he says that polemical writing wants an immediate impact and does not seek long-standing recognition:

Un écrit polémique peut difficilement prétendre à la pérennité. L'effet de rupture qui en assure initialement le succès ne garantit pas qu'il survivra à l'actualité qui l'a engendrée. (15-16)

Considering that Unamuno did not even enjoy initial success, the later silence simply reinforces an overall sense that his political poetry of exile was ineffective and probably worth recovering only by those erudite scholars don Miguel also scorns in the above quotation from *La agonía del cristianismo*.

Add to these publishing constraints the fact that during the period of Unamuno's exile, many in Spain considered don Miguel to be politically naïve or even mistaken. Ortega y Gasset was undoubtedly the most well known critic of Unamuno's politics, and as García Queipo de Llano has shown, he alluded negatively to don Miguel in the pages of the newspaper *El sol* (32). The repeated suggestion was that Unamuno should stick to what he did best, literature, poetry and religious thought, rather than involving himself in political ventures that he showed little ability or patience to understand. Then too, Unamuno's war against Primo was ineffective because it did not bring about regime change in Spain. Some even thought that it perhaps carried an egotistical element in which don Miguel could be seen as grandstanding on the stage of public affairs for his own glory, playing martyr to the masses. Unamuno himself even asked if such insinuations might be true, though he rejected that they were⁷.

Finally, the few specialists who over the years did read Unamuno's political poetry concluded long ago that it is inferior to his other work because it is excessively polemical; it subordinates aesthetic is-

⁷ See don Miguel's agonizing discussion of this in *Cómo se hace una novela*. The most reliable edition is Vauthier, 197-99, though the full text is also available in the Alianza edition, 112-14.

sues to social and historical ones; and it fails to achieve the ambiguity and complexity of more balanced poetical writings. Martin Nozick has become exemplary of such criticisms. In his well-regarded *Miguel de Unamuno; The Agony of Belief* (1971), he says:

Furious denunciations hurled at those who prostitute patriotism and religion for their own interests alternate with self-pity, weeping and gnashing of teeth, and although here and there a musical chord is struck, these poems are in the main Jeremiads, outbursts justified by circumstances but not wrought into poetry. (189)

It is not always easy to clarify the difficult issues raised by such discussions. Should we condemn Unamuno's political poetry but not that of Miguel Hernández or Blas de Otero? Is all politically oriented poetry «bad,» or can we distinguish between «good» and «bad» forms of it? Is it that Unamuno's version is simply too strong or too polemical? But what does too polemical mean, and how does one draw a line between what some perceive as excessive and others do not?

In seeking answers to these questions, I would like to suggest the following ideas. A text should be understood in terms of the societal and discursive norms in view of which it is written, and a reader's obligation, especially with texts from other eras and cultures, is to go as far as possible toward understanding these, always within an understanding that this is never possible in an absolute sense. The norms are contained partly in the author's other writings and partly within the poetic texts, in this latter case mostly in an implicit manner; and they require that a reader ask not what the text actually does (that will come later) but what it is seeking to do. This, moreover, is not the same as authorial intention because it seeks norms implied within the texts apart from what an author thinks he or she is trying to accomplish. Thus, it would be illegitimate to criticize a realistic text on grounds that it is not avant garde, just as it would be equally illegitimate to criticize an avant garde text on grounds that it is not realistic. In a similar fashion, it is not legitimate to condemn political poetry just because it does not follow traditional aesthetic norms or because a reader does not believe that poetry should contain political references. Nozick is of course correct to suggest that issues of language, rhythm, tone and so forth must be considered, but they need to be understood within the terms of the poetic texts themselves, not our prior assumptions about poetry. It is not at

all clear, for example, that a «strong» or even virulent poetic expression is necessarily inferior to a less strong or mild one, just as we cannot conclude that polemical language always lacks richness or complexity. Perhaps political poetry has different or unexpected ways of achieving complexity.

At bottom, I believe there are two fundamental questions here. First, we should seek to understand the poetic norms established by the overall concept operative in the writing. Second, we should try to determine if the actual poems embody or carry out the norms in an appropriate or accomplished manner. It is this that has been rarely understood in Unamuno's political poetry and that I want to explore in the remainder of this essay.

Let us begin by raising the issue of «poetical politics.» As already noted, Unamuno's politics did not involve political parties, that is, the plans and actions of specific groups each with a political platform or program intended to guide policies of governance. Without meaning to propose a technical or «scientific» definition of party politics, and apart from corrupted forms such as when individual politicians seek personal gain over public good, party politics involve partisan positions that confront the partisan positions of other parties, and in the best of circumstances, lead to give and take, negotiation, and in general a compromise that gives each of the different parties a portion of what they proposed while at the same time permitting some kind of advancement or accomplishment in governance. In difficult circumstances, party politics might fail to achieve consensus and could lead to paralysis of public policy. Either way, both give us a basic or even common sense understanding of politics as the art of the possible.

It is not difficult to imagine that a non-conformist like Unamuno would never accept this view of politics and would seek something much more visionary and quixotic, although also difficult and problematic. In fact, don Miguel proposed an unorthodox idea of politics as action aspiring to governance in view of the highest values of truth, justice and universal understanding. Such «poetical politics» were actually seeking no less than those «dichos indecibles» of St. Paul, the impossible longing for ultimate purity and happiness for which Christians want to believe that Jesus Christ gave his life, «política, en el más noble sentido, política —y no policía— de *polis*, ciudad, de la ciudad de Dios» (Martínez Nadal, 31). It was politics as civic commitment to the absolute freedom of each individual neigh-

bour and compatriot, always with the understanding that these neighbours and compatriots would do the same for everyone else⁸. It is only in this light that one is able to understand a statement in the prologue to the *Romancero del destierro* that on the surface appears bizarre and incomprehensible but that might well be central to his poetical politics: «La actualidad política es eternidad histórica y por lo tanto poesía. Y nada más actual que lo circunstancial cuando se le siente en eternidad. Las obras más duraderas —se ha dicho mil veces— son las de circunstancias»⁹. Unamuno seems to mean that by immersing himself in the most ephemeral, ordinary events and personalities of Spanish politics, while yet viewing these events and personalities in light of a demand for values seeking eternity, he converts the circumstantial into something poetic and of permanent importance. Such a statement articulates a tension between the non-poetic and the poetic that we will soon see in *Romancero del destierro*.

On the other hand, such political ideas are obviously utopian and were therefore rejected during the era (and probably ever since) by both ordinary politicians and commentators on politics. Their utopianism, however, does not mean that Unamuno was blind to their impossibility in ordinary life. On the contrary, he understood them as the dream or existential project in view of which actual accomplishments needed to be judged. How seek political action without a goal or projected ideal in view of which it must be sought? Thus, though pursuing a quixotic ideal of truth and justice, Unamuno fully accepted the give and take of real politics —the art of the possible—, even as he also always sought to push for more. This is corroborated by his regular though insistently independent participation in Spanish political life through his essays and speeches both before and after the Primo dictatorship.

But the other side of Unamuno's poetical politics is that he was always keenly sensitive to any betrayal of truth, justice and universal understanding by political and religious leaders of his nation. And though it was not the first such instance during Unamuno's lifetime —nor of course would it be the last—, the dictatorship of Pri-

⁸ It would be interesting to compare Unamuno's idea of commitment toward others to the philosophy of the other developed by Emmanuel Levinas. The Lithuanian Jewish philosopher would no doubt possess many differences from don Miguel, but there are uncanny parallels that would be useful to explore.

⁹ All quotations from *Romancero del destierro* are taken from the *Obras completas*, 4, ed. Ricardo Senabre (Madrid: Fundación José Antonio de Castro, 1999), 859-60.

mo de Rivera quickly revealed itself as exactly such a betrayal —one, moreover, that soon degenerated into personal animosity between don Miguel and the Spanish political leadership. With the dictatorship's installation of narrow minded military rule («disciplina de cuartel,» Unamuno called it), secret denunciations, cronyism, vulgar rhetoric, censorship and other social controls, all within an effort to hide King Alfonso XIII's complicity in the 1921 military disaster at Annual, Primo's regime was, in Unamuno's opinion, a sordid descent into mediocrity, dishonesty and corruption¹⁰. How then not pursue a political action of writing texts whose purpose would be to denounce the absence of higher ideals in Spanish public life? To understand this helps us grasp the tensions that subtend the *Romancero del destierro* while revealing an essential dimension of its norms. Thus, it is crucially important to recognize that in the political texts of the *Romancero del destierro*, Unamuno sought to write poetry that expresses the absence of the poetic. His goal was to achieve a kind of poetry that reveals where the poetic does not reside, and rather than conceding this as failure, accomplish something of value that demands the higher values that poetical politics must defend and political poetry must incarnate. In my understanding, this is where Nozick and others have failed to grasp the underlying dynamic of Unamuno's political poems. Rather than standing as failed poetry, they are a version of what was much later called «anti-poetry,» a perfectly legitimate form of poetry based on recognizing the absence of poetry while also seeking to undermine traditional poetic norms without, however, abandoning them altogether¹¹. We can see this idea of absence very clearly in poem number 15 of *Romancero del destierro*, where the breeze wafting over the border from Spain into Hendaye speaks silence, that is, the absence of the poetical world Unamuno always found in Nature: «Brisa que vienes de España/ tan cargada de silencio/ ¡Con qué tristezas futuras/ me estás vaciando el pecho!» (942). And in an authentically *poetic* turn of language, the silence paradoxically shouts the cacophony of dictatorship:

¹⁰ Among many historical sources on the Primo dictatorship, the interested reader might consult the relevant chapters of Carr, Martínez Cuadrado and Juliá in the List of Works Consulted.

¹¹ Anti-poetry came to be recognized in the 1950s with the work of the Chilean Nicaror Parra, who cultivates a quotidian, prosaic style. Other kinds of approaches, however, seem legitimate. If Ángel González's concept of «prosemas» is also prosaic, Luis Cernuda's *Desolación de la Quimera* is an anti-poetry based on a strong «culturalista» tendency and a language that approaches invective, just like Unamuno.

Estertores de galeotes,
 reniegos de cuadrilleros,
 bravatas de rabadanes,
 jesuítico siseo,
 voces de mando que a máquina
 la ordenanza dio de arreo,
 visita de viejas zorras
 mezclada de gangosos rezos,
 todo en ti, brisa de España,
 todo es disfraz de silencio¹². (942-43)

Unamuno was seeking to show the inadequacy of those who wield power in texts that denounce their failures and cry out for a better world. Of course, the task is fraught with difficulties because it tries to create a positive from a negative, a version of poetry from its absence, while also infusing the textual process with the language and perspective of denunciation that is rarely associated with poetry. Don Miguel was fully aware of this and openly sought a «voice of fire» capable of attacking his enemies: «¡Dios de mi España rendida,/ dame el fuego que le falta;/ dame la voz de tu fuego,/ haz mi lengua, Señor, brasa!» (932). Here, I would insist, is anti-poetry in one of its earliest twentieth century manifestations, and as we have since come to understand, this does not mean it is not poetry. Rather, it is authentic poetry crafted in ways antithetical to traditional poetic norms, some of which nonetheless remain embedded in the textual process¹³. In order to see this more fully, let us turn now to don Miguel's political denunciations and his voice of fire.

Like its predecessor, *De Fuerteventura a París, Romancero del destierro* juxtaposes two very different worlds, Nature and History. But unlike the previous book, it organizes these worlds into two separate sections, a first one on Nature and a second on History. The first section contains thirty-seven traditional lyrical poems about the natural world, its eternal values, the speaking subject's concern for death, and his nostalgia for the lost innocence of childhood when he was more a part of Nature. Many of these poems have a date and are placed in chronological order, as if forming a continuation of the di-

¹² Besides the paradox just noted, this quotation also reveals one of the stylistic traits of the political poems in *Romancero del destierro*, a fast-paced listing of people, officials or things he wants to attack that is made all the more rapid by the use of asyndeton. See also poems 3 and 13.

¹³ We should also be sensitive to the presence of Quevedo in this poetry, a pedigree that is obviously of the highest poetic order. See de Kock.

ary mode employed in *De Fuerteventura a París*. The texts also tend to become shorter as we advance in the book, as if the longer meditative poems in the early part gradually gave way to a sharper or more condensed focus toward the latter stages of the section. There is no doubt that several of these poems, both long and short, count among the most accomplished that Unamuno ever wrote. «Vendrá de noche,» for example, is justifiably one of don Miguel's most well-known texts, and others such as «Orhoit Gutaz», «El cementerio de Hendaya» (within a long tradition of Romantic meditations in a cemetery), and «La luna y la rosa,» to mention just a few, deserve to be equally well known.

But these are traditional texts such as Unamuno had been writing for years, and against their melancholic but peaceful vision of Nature, the second part of the book suddenly hits us with a jarring contrast. Eighteen «romances» confront us with History understood as war against the Spanish monarchy and the Primo dictatorship. The calm of Nature and childhood has been abruptly destroyed by the idea of History as angry political struggle, and the speaker presents either a virulent denunciation of the military rule in Spain, or a series of anguished lamentations («Jeremiads» in Nozick's terms) asking God or his own inner strength to sustain him in his struggle. By situating these texts exclusively in the second part of the book, Unamuno seems to be suggesting that historical events have come to overwhelm and vanquish the Nature of the first part, which thereby appears almost as a lost paradise. The Spanish tradition of military repression and religious intolerance has reared its head once again to visit injustice and lies upon the nation. The reader asks if it would ever be possible to return to the peaceful world of the volume's first section, and though of course any reader can do so simply by re-reading the earlier section, the sequence itself suggests that we have here reached an entirely new and degraded situation. The nation has no hope unless its present leaders are somehow overthrown or made to leave.

This second, political section of the volume is what I have called anti-poetry, and its texts do not carry dates. In the prologue, however, Unamuno tells us that «en cuanto al orden de colocación de estos poemas, he procurado seguir el cronológico, que es el histórico» (861). One might assume, then, that all were written after the poems of the first part, which conclude on May 5, 1927. Still, García Blanco cites letters of Unamuno that show they were started somewhat

earlier, perhaps in March of 1927 (*Don Miguel de Unamuno y sus poesías*, 310). In any case, there is agreement that Unamuno finished this section by July, 1927 when he wrote the prologue of the book. Moreover, since most of the «romances» do not constitute lyrical poetry, the reader is not concerned to trace the inner state of the speaker, which in any case is quite obviously anger and frustration.

Several have noted that the «romance» form evokes the long Spanish tradition of popular poetry while also pursuing a style more accessible to readers than is the case in, for example, the sonnets of *De Fuerteventura a París* (García Blanco, *Don Miguel...*, 309-10; Urrutia, 170). This is consistent with the re-birth of the «romance» form throughout this era both in avant garde tendencies such as García Lorca, and in more popular veins as in Antonio Machado, Miguel Hernández and other poets. Additionally, several of the texts allude to traditional «romances.» For example, Urrutia notes how Robertson and González Helguera pointed out that the opening line of the first poem, «Rey Alfonso, rey Alfonso» echoes the «romance:» «Rey don Sancho, rey don Sancho» (173-74).

One has little difficulty grasping the social and political issues that don Miguel raises in the poems. The Primo dictatorship has betrayed truth and justice, primarily because the military mentality places honor above all else and is willing to lie in order to protect it. In one of the dramatic monologues, a form to which I will return, a military voice says: «No es de sangre ni es de casta/ ni honra a la profesión/ el que a la verdad se rinde/ cuando va contra el honor» (928). As a result, lies and fraud are rampant, usually perpetrated in the name of tradition: «Se nos vienen con mentiras/ a que llaman tradición» (929). The old Spanish Inquisition has reared its head and is used as a way of avoiding truth: «Tú [Dios] eres la verdad, mas ellos/ le guardan tanto pavor/ que contra ella han levantado/ nuestra vieja Inquisición» (*ibid.*). In general, religion is used in the name of an ill-conceived «crusade» or African imperial venture that has no meaning in Spanish society: «Han hecho del Evangelio/ texto de abominación;/ de tu ley una cruzada,/ ¡Sangre, robo y destrucción!» (*ibid.*). The military are so twisted in their mentality that even when someone smiles at them, they suspect they are being mocked: «Recelan que les desdeña/ si un réprobo les saluda,/ la sonrisa les amarga/ cual si fuese una censura» (945).

Don Miguel reserves his most virulent attacks for Alfonso XIII, whom he accuses of being the degraded residue of a declining dynas-

ty: «rebojo de dinastía,/ deshecho de los Habsburgos» (917). Alfonso surrounded himself with «podencos» —hounds— and then: «A tus fieles consejeros/ difamaste con mentiras,/ palacio de la injusticia/ hiciste de tu guarida» (*ibid.*). He is now being dragged in the mud by «cuatro chulos/sin conciencia y con fajín» (919), but ultimately, he is more interested in fancy cars: «O traedme algún *Mercedes*/ porque me quiero lucir/ ya que el volante de España/ no es a mis manos afín» (920). Primo de Rivera is likewise an object of scorn, especially for his vulgar rhetoric: «Con un tono subjuntivo/ les arengas y ¡la mar!/, ¡Qué lengua!, ¡qué pico de oro!/, ¡Qué gustito!, ¡flor de azahar!» (938).

Unamuno suggested that he was not arguing against dictatorship or monarchy but against the personalities who embody them (García Queipo de Llano, 32), and some have questioned his attitude in this regard (Lechner, 48), as if to suggest that he might have supported a dictatorship if it hadn't been Primo de Rivera. But if it is true that he personalizes his attacks on specific individuals, it is also clear that the offices they represent are also thoroughly discredited. Could there be a dictatorship that offered freedom, spoke the truth and guaranteed justice without censorship? Clearly not, since the point of a dictatorship is to exercise power without dissent. Indeed, don Miguel justified his polemical language around this very point:

Cuando no se deja decir la verdad, toda la verdad, serena y tranquilamente, viene el improperio. Que nos dejen hablar y discutir y hablaremos y discutiremos dentro de normas. Pero temen a la verdad. (Martínez Nadal, 327)

By the same token, although one might imagine a monarchy that would not be as deceitful as that of Alfonso XIII, the implication of Unamuno's analysis is that mediocrity, deceit and imperial ambition have become integral to Spanish royal affairs and speak to a historical degradation of major proportions. Clearly, the only solution was a republic.

If political themes were the only important aspect of the «romances,» we would agree that these texts would probably not stand as major accomplishments in Unamuno's work. However, as suggested earlier, poetry, including anti-poetry, is articulated and sustained by language, and it is this that must also be considered. And an important aspect of poetic language that is at the forefront of recent poetical theory but that has been overlooked in these texts is the

question of voice, that is, who speaks, why, and to whom. Interestingly, the majority of the poems, twelve out of eighteen, use an apostrophic second person «tú» or «vosotros» in which a speaking voice directly addresses a person, group, figure or thing. In five of these poems (numbers 1, 3, 10, 12 and 13), the speaker does not appear explicitly as a «yo,» although he is implicitly present within the «tú». In the other seven (7, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16), he does speak in the first person while addressing someone else. In all cases, the tone ranges from mockery to anger to lamentation, depending on the addressee. For example, if the «tú» is a political figure such as Alfonso XIII, we find mocking accusations, as in poem 1: «Rey Alfonso, rey Alfonso,/ engendrado en agonía,/agónica a nuestra España/ mantienes con tu injusticia» (917). The speaker does not identify himself, but with a moral authority based on a demand for the truth and justice that the king has betrayed, he accuses the monarch of lies and dishonesty. No less importantly, in this and similar poems, the voice carries a dramatic immediacy because the addressee, in this case the monarch, appears to be actually present in front of the speaker. The latter talks to the king here and now, and both are situated directly in front of the reader. This is echoed in poem 12, where the accusations also warn that the king is mortal and will one day face his maker: «Aprovecha, Alfonso, la hora/ en que Dios te viene a ver,/ mira que acaba el reinado,/ con el reinado de papel» (936). In this way, the political denunciation carries a universal theme on the mortality of all human beings.

One of the more interesting of these second-person accusatory apostrophes is number 13, in which the speaker talks to Primo de Rivera: «Doctor Primo de Rivera/ y Orbaneja, general,/ ¿No se te cae de vergüenza/ con la cara el antifaz?» (938). The poem is full of ironic or mocking allusions to statements and acts of the dictator. To call him «Doctor», for example, alludes sarcastically to the honorary doctorate that the University of Salamanca was essentially obliged to confer on him and that, in don Miguel's vision, gave him the shameful mask of a dignity he did not possess. Later, an allusion to foul odours refers to the defense of «masculinity» that appears in Primo's 1923 «Manifiesto» to the nation and the army. These odours are also emitted from the body orifices of Primo's political party, the «Unión Patriótica»: «Qué hedor a macho cabrío!./ ¡Vaya masculinidad!./ los upistas boca y todo/ se te abren de par en par» (*ibid.*). Primo was rumoured to be excessively fond of wine, and the poem brings this into full light: «Porque hay la madre del vino/ que es tu madre natural...» (*ibid.*).

It is important to note that the hostile, accusatory language addressed directly to the culprit, whether monarch, dictator, or even the servile Spanish people (poem 14), far from being a weakness in these poems, is, in the view of this writer, actually one of their strengths. Not only does it provide a moral forcefulness that refuses to submit to dishonesty, but it also gives intensity and immediacy to the world presented in the texts. The speaker moves back and forth among mockery, accusation and lament, while he is also aware that his voice has been poisoned by the political situation. Indeed, he refuses to hide this fact:

Dios de mi España contrita,
tómame un chorro de voz
...
Sé bien que está envenenada,
mas el veneno, Señor,
viene de los empresarios
que están mintiéndote amor. (929)

Or in poem 9, while addressing the Spanish government collectively: «Que me habéis envenenado/ el pan y el vino del alma,/ que habéis hecho estercolero/ del lecho en que descansaba, ...» (932). Here again, we clearly see the goal of creating poetry out of its absence by speaking with the poisoned voice of invective while denouncing political failure.

Indeed, in the few instances where the speaker turns inward and laments his personal situation, the absence of invective weakens the intensity of the voice and tends to push the texts toward self-pity: «Ay que en estas negras noches,/ Salamanca, Salamanca,/ viene a visitarme en sueños/ la vida que di a mi España» (934). In this and a small number of other texts such as numbers 7 and 16, the inability to maintain the anger of denunciation limits the force of the poetry and reveals a wounded voice that seems less able to struggle against the dictatorship. Granting that such moments of weakness must have been frequent during Unamuno's exile, they detour certain of these poems away from their basic purpose, which is to wage war against a dictator.

However, in other inner-oriented texts, the speaker seems to realize this and quickly recovers the language of invective. Poem number 3, for example, reveals a clear awareness of this struggle. It begins with a rather pedestrian lamentation for Spain: «Pobre España, pobre España/ quién te ha visto y quién te ve,/ ¡Ay viuda de Dios!, te

mueres/ con la muerte de la fe» (922). Immediately, however, a stronger language begins to appear, as if the speaker were aware that sorrow should not prevail in this situation and he must recover his anger: «Mala leche te mamaron/ cuando herida de un revés/ del chulo de tu querido/ lamentabas tu viudez» (*ibid.*). After still further recovery, the speaker starts to attack the «legionarios, pistoleros,/ luis-es, majos y croupiers/ mejidos en la boñiga/ a que llaman somatén» (*ibid.*), and the poem ends on the offensive. The point here is that Unamuno's anti-poetic vision acquires its strength and dynamism from the very language of invective that some might find excessive. Without it, intensity and immediacy are diminished and the whole purpose of the poems weakens. This is why I believe poem 17, one of don Miguel's most virulent and harsh, is also among his best:

Sarna tradicionalista
da oficio a las largas uñas;
se rascan los asistentes;
con ello medran de sucias.
Quieren despiojarse

...
Dio suelta la tiranía
a esta gusanera inmunda,
por mote la Unión Patriótica,

que es política basura. (945)

One of the most important aspects of voice in this collection appears in the several poems that approximate the form of the dramatic monologue (2, 4, 5 and 6). That is, Unamuno creates poems in which figures such as Alfonso XIII, Martínez Anido, and others speak directly in the first person to a silent interlocutor who is essentially the reader. This makes the presence of these figures much more immediate because they speak for themselves. In the second poem, for example, Alfonso XIII laments the fact that the military control his every move:

Generales de uñas largas,
mal que me dejan vivir,
...
¿He de quedarme tronado?
¡Ay trono en el que me hundí!
Hice del trono un asiento,
de la corona un bacín. (919)

This Alfonso actually scorns Primo de Rivera: «¿No oís cómo Primo/ grazna dándose postín?/ Son el gori gori ameno/ del imperio que fingí» (920). But though he has come not to like the military, he cannot do without them: «Ven acá, mi Severiano¹⁴,/ ven con la guardia civil;/ tanto que me quiere el pueblo ...,/ ¡sin ella no he de salir!» (926) This Alfonso ultimately appears as a victim of his own manipulations.

For this reader, the most interesting of these dramatic monologues is poem number 4, in which the much feared Severiano Martínez Anido is the speaker. Reputed to be the real strongman of the dictatorship from his position as Minister of the Interior («Ministro de Gobernación»), Martínez Anido was a relentless enemy of working class movements, parliamentary politicians, and anyone who might be suspected of activity hostile to the government. In Unamuno's poem, just as in the best dramatic monologues of Browning, Eliot and Cernuda, the reader enters the character's world directly, in a fully verisimilar manner that does not seek artificial ways to hint at the identity of the speaker. At the beginning, therefore, we might not know who is talking to us but we do know the person is cruel: «¡Orden, orden, caballeros/ venga acá mi Mayoral/ que nada hay como el cadalso/ para la seguridad!» (924). Gradually, however, it becomes clear that this is a strongman associated with the dictatorship, and lest we think it is Primo himself, he eventually expresses his scorn for the dictator: «Ese puñetero mierda/ que es Primo...» (925). Toward the end of the poem, even as the speaker proudly declares that he created the dictatorship, he reveals his identity with a humorous play on words: «¡Qué régimen tan severo/ el que he logrado implantar!./ ¡ni en una casa de zorras/ tanta *severianidad!*» (*ibid.*).

The fundamental characteristics of the speaker in this poem are arrogance and cruelty. This in turn generates a second perspective in which he condemns himself with the very words about which he is so proud: «No basta ya retorcerles/ los testículos, ¡hay más!/ En el nervio del dentista/ es en donde hay que operar» (924). Even his sense of humour is sarcastic and biting, as when he recounts embracing a young girl during a hospital visit:

gustazo de acariciar
después a una tierna niña
en visita al hospital

¹⁴ We will see in the next paragraph that Severiano is Martínez Anido.

y decir muy compungido,
 ¡Cocodrilo en el llorar!,
 «¿yo tirano y carnicero?,
 si soy más bueno que el pan...» (925)

At bottom, he prefers to be hated than to be laughed at: «De mí no se ríe nadie,/ que me odien, pero ¡a temblar!» (*ibid.*). In this text, don Miguel does not offer a portrait of a fool or clown, as might almost be said of Primo and Alfonso, but rather of a monster. Thus, even though Martínez Anido laughs and chuckles throughout the poem, the reader is horrified at the image of immediate and total brutality.

In these pages, we have seen not only Unamuno's poetical politics in opposition to the Primo dictatorship, but also and more importantly, his effort to capture a political poetry by portraying a world of cruelty and betrayal from which the poetic is absent. In *Romancero del destierro*, he crafts an anti-poetical discourse based on language that is vulgar, laced with insults, and intensely dramatic or immediate. In these poems, don Miguel clearly wanted a new kind of poetry, one that we have here called anti-poetry, which is to say, a poetry that would challenge both the traditional norms in terms of which he himself usually wrote his poetry (perhaps best described as a Wordsworthian «emotion recollected in tranquility»¹⁵), and no less importantly, the movements of his time toward «pure poetry» and the avant garde, both of which, he strongly believed erred in rejecting social commitment. Ultimately, and even though few readers ever came to see these texts, Unamuno's anti-poetry anticipates the «re-humanized» or «impure» poetry that erupted onto the scene within the next few years, and at the same time, it carries echoes of Valle-Inclán's «esperpento» because it is socially committed and verbally close to the expressionistic exaggerations of the grotesque. As noted earlier and as don Miguel was perfectly aware, this was Quevedo in a modern context. From all of the above, I hope it is clear that, perhaps against the grain of many earlier readers, I believe Unamuno's political poetry is highly original, extremely audacious, and among his most accomplished.

¹⁵ See Wordsworth, 542.

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