

Intra-historia in Miguel de Unamuno's Novels:

A Continual Presence

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Peggy W. Watson

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INTRODUCTION

Linguist, philosopher, novelist and poet, Miguel de Unamuno is a writer in whose works it is virtually impossible to separate literary inventiveness from philosophical intent. In his 1907 poem "Credo poético" he proffers this advice:

Piensa el sentimiento, siente el pensamiento
que tus cantos tengan nidos en la tierra,
y que cuando en vuelo a los cielos suban
tras las nubes no se pierdan. (OC 7: 168)

Unamuno feels a desperate need to influence his readers, to cause them to think, to feel, to understand, and, in the ultimate analysis, to offer immortality to the writer himself with a continuous process of re-creation. Through a unique writing style and a constant awareness of the presence of the reader, don Miguel provokes and tantalizes, hoping to discover his own sense of being.

A critical analysis of any specific idea or philosophy developed by Unamuno is much like deciphering a puzzle, for the author's own needs and his perceptions of his readers' needs are an integral part of his creative process. Such is the case with the present study of *intra-historia*. Developed as a theory in Unamuno's early essays, the term *intra-historia*, at its most elemental level, refers to those obscure, yet highly significant aspects of history that generally elude historical texts, the "inner" eternal traditions and beliefs that sustain the temporal, or surface passage of history. Presented theoretically in his early essays and fictionally in his first novel, *Paz en la guerra* (1897), it is a concept intimately linked to conflicting personal needs for unconscious peace and conscious immortality. As depicted by

Carlos Blanco Aguinaga in his ground-breaking study *El Unamuno contemplativo*, these needs frequently correspond to the two opposing sides of Unamuno's personality, the "contemplativo," and the "agonista."

The theory that the historical development of societies and, by extension, of individuals is multifaceted and contains both temporal and eternal, or conscious and unconscious aspects is not original with Unamuno, but rather formed part of the intellectual and cultural climate of late nineteenth-century Europe. Unamuno was undoubtedly influenced by the tenets of Romanticism and by the German idealists. He frequently mentions the Hegelian concept of *Volksgeist* in his early essays, and, as Elena de Jongh has shown, his ideas about history mirror in many ways those of Karl Krause as developed through the Krausist movement in Spain. J.W. Butt also argues convincingly that Unamuno's "romanticized vision of the pueblo" is the basis of the theory of *intra-historia*, and that "the idea was developed through Unamuno's readings in sociology and linguistics and is basically an extension of the idea of collective unconscious which was novel and fashionable in the 1880's" ("Unamuno's Idea" 14).

As a Spaniard writing during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Unamuno was not alone in his preoccupation with history, for an interest in this theme links him to the other members of the Generation of 1898. Azorín, whose concern with "grandes hechos" and "menudos hechos" corresponds roughly to Unamuno's dichotomy of *historia* and *intra-historia*, has affirmed that his generation of Spanish writers is "una generación historicista" (qtd. in Laín Entralgo 145). In his study of this group of writers, Laín Entralgo includes discussions of Baroja, Valle-Inclán, and Antonio Machado as well as the more obvious Unamuno, Azorín, and Gánivet under the general rubric "historia sine historia." He notes succinctly: "Todos los miembros de la Generación del '98 dan expresión en su obra a una actitud común, en la cual es nota fundamental la disociación conceptual o estética de lo fugaz y lo permanente, o, como diría Unamuno, de la historia y la intra-historia" (170).

Unamuno's contribution to the philosophy of history is therefore not necessarily the concept of *intra-historia* itself, but

rather the coinage of a term with which to describe this particular view, and more importantly, the complicated, creative use he makes of *intra-historia* in his various writings. As we shall see, his theoretical explanations are creative in themselves, involving an elaborate process of extended and overlapping metaphors that encourage the active participation of the reader.

A study of *intra-historia* in Unamuno's writings is complicated by the fact that the word itself, if not the idea, disappears almost completely from Unamuno's post-1900 vocabulary. Significant changes, both stylistic and philosophical, take place in his writings around the turn of the century. Philosophically, he begins to concentrate less on humanity and the role of people within societies, and more on the agonizing need of the individual to understand and to affirm the reality of existence. In existential terms, he changes his focus from that of essence, the depiction of the individual from a point of view located outside of that individual, to existence, a perspective that requires the delineation of a character as seen from within. Greatly influenced during his early years by deterministic precepts as filtered through Darwin and Spencer, Unamuno uses *intra-historia* to conceptualize the absolute and eternal bonds between people, considered as a collective group, and the world surrounding them. In his post-1900 writings, however, he insists upon a strident relativism, affirming that individuals must reject facile, *a priori* determinations and strive to create their own realities. Because of the drastic nature of these philosophical changes it has been difficult to determine the exact role that *intra-historia* plays in Unamuno's twentieth-century thought.

Stylistically, an equally radical change takes place. *Paz en la guerra* reflects the aesthetic posture of the nineteenth-century realistic novel, depicting historical events that occur within a well-defined time and place. Unamuno focuses specifically on the Basque region of Spain, where he spent his childhood, during the middle to late 1800's. The pacing of the novel is languid and relaxed, allowing for the development of a poetic, metaphorical approach to description. This type of writing, described as "ovíparo," is conducive to the creation of *intra-historia* both as a theory and as a nonthreatening, unconscious mode of existence.

Amor y pedagogía (1902), Unamuno's first twentieth-century

novel and his second long work of fiction, typifies in many ways the author's subsequent stylistic changes. In 1923 he states that in all of his novels written after *Paz en la guerra* "no he querido distraer al lector del relato del desarrollo de acciones y pasiones humanas," and he therefore has created "novelas fuera de lugar y tiempo determinados, en esqueleto, a modo de dramas íntimos" (OC 2: 91). In contrast to the earlier novel, *Amor y pedagogía* is therefore written in the "vivíparo" mode, having been created, according to Unamuno, "a lo que salga" (OC 1: 1194-1204). In an abrupt, farcical style, the novel ridicules the beliefs of Avito Carrascal, a pseudo-positivist who proposes to bring out the genius in his son by raising him according to scientific principles. As in many of his works to follow, large sections of this second novel are written in dialogue form, and description is reduced to a minimum.

Although the concept of *intra-historia* is painstakingly developed in *Paz en la guerra*, and, in fact, is crucial to an understanding of Unamuno's pre-1900 thought, critics have generally ignored the specific role that it plays in most of his other novels. Some scholarly analyses of Unamuno's work, however, provide insight into the idea of *intra-historia* and demonstrate the need to reevaluate its role in his fiction. Since the 1959 publication of *El Unamuno contemplativo*, with its emphasis on themes and ideas relatively ignored in previous studies, certain critical approaches to Unamuno's work have predominated. There have appeared, for example, a number of publications concerning Unamuno's search for an acceptable interpretation of Spanish history, many focusing specifically on *intra-historia*.¹ In 1950 Sánchez Barbudo stimulated an interest in Unamuno's 1897 religious crisis, and further attention was given by Blanco; continued evaluation is demonstrated in Rivera de Ventosa's *Unamuno y Dios*.² Critics have also begun the systematic study of Unamuno's political views, analyzing the influences of various nineteenth-century European and Spanish philosophies and concentrating on his early socialist and Marxist leanings.³ Although these studies focus on different aspects of Unamuno's thought, they nevertheless have much in common: each stems from a fascination with his early work and reflects a desire to accept and then evaluate the apparent irreconcilability of his dialectics. The present study of *intra-historia* in Unamuno's novels

follows in this tradition.

The intent of this book is twofold: first, to analyze *intra-historia* in its theoretical state, and second, to evaluate the role this concept plays in the developing fictional world of Unamuno's novels. Chapter One examines *intra-historia* as presented in *En torno al casticismo* (1895), Unamuno's first collection of essays and the main source of his intriguing, albeit occasionally frustrating commentaries on the complex development of human history. This chapter highlights don Miguel's ambivalence in providing exact definitions of his terms, since even in these early years *intra-historia* is as much a metaphor—a poetic way of approaching life—as a historical or philosophical concept.

In the following three chapters I analyze the complicated, often contradictory roles *intra-historia* plays in three major novels: *Paz en la guerra*, *Niebla* (1914), and *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* (1930). By studying Unamuno's work from the perspective of the degree of determinacy in the text, an idea espoused by reader-response theory in general and Wolfgang Iser in particular, his novels can be conveniently divided into three distinct, although highly uneven groups, each represented by one of the novels to be discussed. Significantly, each of these stages displays a change in the fictional use of *intra-historia*.

The first period, of which *Paz en la guerra* is the sole representative, is characterized by an ambivalence concerning this determinacy that is not uncommon in the nineteenth-century novel. Commenting on the novel of this period in general, Iser notes: "The multiplicity of combinable positions continually detaches the reader from what he is familiar with, but his viewpoint is never allowed to rest in any one of these positions" (*Act of Reading* 206). This is indeed what Unamuno accomplishes in *Paz en la guerra* by contrasting *historia* and *intra-historia* and by showing the multiple perspectives from which history can be viewed. Iser continues: "This effect will be reduced if—as in the *roman à thèse*—the reader is presented with a program that seeks to close up an open world without his cooperation" (*Act of Reading* 206). As we shall see, the contradiction in *Paz en la guerra* between a relative narrative perspective and the objective presentation of absolute theories consistently undermines the artistic effect of the novel.

This first stage of Unamuno's novelistic endeavor also marks an overt acceptance of intra-historic peace and, through the character of Pachico Zabalbide, a struggle to maintain this peace despite personal psychological imperatives and the necessities of historical change. *Paz en la guerra* establishes the themes and terminology associated with *intra-historia* in later writings and provides the reader with Unamuno's only complete portrayal of intra-historic life.

Iser maintains that the degree of indeterminacy of the text increases with the development of the modern novel, and such is the case with Unamuno. This greater indeterminacy, or the appearance of more blanks that must be filled in by the reader, characterizes many of those novels written by don Miguel between 1902 and 1921. Gonzalo Navajas argues convincingly that Unamuno's own theories concerning the role of the reader actually stand in direct opposition to those proffered by affective theorists such as Iser. Ironically, this would contribute to the element of indeterminacy, for the reader would become appropriately disoriented. Navajas states that Unamuno's theory "tiene como premisa fundamental la minimización del lector, su reducción a un componente secundario y dispensable de la obra." Unamuno's writings are therefore "no abiertos sino en gran parte herméticos a la intencionalidad significativa del lector" ("El Yo" 513). Although don Miguel does not follow these precepts in *Paz en la guerra*, his creation of a more complicated, antagonistic relationship between himself, as author, and his readers is a significant part of his novels beginning in 1902.

It is not surprising that in the novels of Unamuno's middle period a depiction of the individualized struggles of particular characters partially eclipses *intra-historia*. Within the highly dramatized world of these novels, however, *intra-historia* still plays an essential role as a flexible, yet pervasive backdrop against which personal agonies can be measured. In two novels of this period, *Amor y pedagogía* and *Abel Sánchez* (1917), Unamuno accentuates his belief in the intrinsic need of male characters to live out their personal passions by establishing a contrast with female characters who personify intra-historic peace and continuity. In *Dos madres* (1920), *El Marqués de Lumbría* (1920), and *La tía Tula* (1921) he focuses on the pathology of an obsessive maternal instinct as the

ultimate female expression of the need for immortality. Deprived of the emotional bonds that anchor individuals to intra-historic continuity, the male characters of these novels also lead tormented lives. In *Niebla*, the mid-point novel upon which we will focus our discussion, Augusto Pérez is denied, against at least partially through the influence of female characters, both conscious self-awareness and unconscious peace. He must therefore struggle in an unconscious "mist" in which only surface characteristics of *intra-historia* remain.

Unamuno's final novelistic period includes those works published together in 1933 under the title *San Manuel Bueno, mártir y tres historias más*.⁴ While these writings seem to mark a return to the realism of his earliest period, the fact that the principal novel, *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, has elicited such diverse critical opinions seems to point to a continued lack of determinacy within the text. Iser notes that as the modern novel continues to develop, the blanks within the text increase, although frequently not in the way that one might expect. He explains:

Curiously, their multiplication is intimately connected to the ever greater precision of representation that marks the modern novel, from Conrad's *Lord Jim*, right through to Joyce. The blanks that arise out of the overprecision of representation cause the reader to become more and more disoriented. (*Act of Reading* 206-207)

Accustomed to an imprecision of language and proliferation of contradictions, readers are indeed disoriented by a possible lack of subterfuge in Unamuno's later tales. Nevertheless, the apparent simplicity of both *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* and *La novela de don Sandalio, jugador de ajedrez*, is highly deceptive, for both works lend themselves to complicated and revealing analyses.

In the novels of this last period the *intra-historia* of *Paz en la guerra* reemerges through the presence of nature and the *pueblo*, both of which essentially disappeared with the publication of *Amor y pedagogía*. The function of *intra-historia* within the developing narrative, however, has radically changed. In *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, the calculated juxtaposition of *historia* and *intra-historia* is

abandoned, for intra-historic unconsciousness and the agony of an individual *historia* are now presented side by side as part of a unified reality. While *intra-historia* was presented as a vital, dynamic force in *Paz en la guerra*, its role in *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* is essentially that of an "other" used by don Manuel for the solidification of his personal *historia*.