

*The Modern
Spanish Novel
1898-1936*

By Ricardo Landeira
University of Wyoming

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Chapter One

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez: The Naturalist Novel

By the early 1880s realism had run its course not only in Europe but also in Spain. The writings of the French novelist Emile Zola (1840–1902) and the commotion brought about by his publication of *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), along with other novels that typify the brutality, fatalism, and scatology of naturalism, dealt a death blow to realism's long-lived preeminence in European literature. Such works ensured that Zola and the theories and techniques of naturalism were at the heart of most literary polemics throughout Europe. Few people in Spain had heard of the French writer prior to 1877 and even fewer had read any of his books, but in the wake of *L'Assomoir* (*The Dram-Shop*, 1877), *naturalism* became a literary buzzword in Spanish newspapers and magazines.¹ Although one of his short stories ("The Attack of the Windmill") had been translated into Spanish in 1879, it was not until one year later that the novels *The Dram-Shop*, *Nana* (1880), and *Une Page d'Amour* (*A page of love*) were made available to Spanish readers. They met with unqualified success, if one may judge by the three translations done of both *Nana* and *The Dram-Shop* within one year of their Spanish publication. Establishment critics in Spain were not enthusiastic over this irreverent and often obscene fiction, but Zola found unstinting support among the younger writers. His true apologist, the one who most vigorously defended him, was the Countess Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851–1921), herself a budding novelist who by 1883, the date of publication of her book on naturalism titled *La cuestión palpitante* (*The burning question*), had written no fewer than six books, both fiction and criticism.

Naturalism in Spain

In the preface of her early novel, *Un viaje de novios* (*A honeymoon*, 1881), Pardo Bazán began her campaign in favor of the new French

school, essaying some naturalistic techniques in the work itself.² It was not until 1883 that she devoted herself in earnest to Zola's theories in a series of newspaper articles in Madrid's *La Epoca* that were later collected into a volume, the above-mentioned *La cuestión palpitante*. The slim tome was prefaced by Leopoldo Alas "Clarín" (1852-1901), author of the single most perfect example of the nineteenth-century Spanish novel, *La Regenta* (The regent's wife, 1884). In these essays, Pardo Bazán produced a perceptive and well-reasoned critique of naturalism. To be sure, *La cuestión palpitante* gave rise to numerous attacks not only upon Zola and naturalism but also upon Pardo Bazán and her "advanced" ideas.

Emile Zola's brand of naturalism was a pseudoscientific approach to literature, specifically the novel, wherein direct observation substituted for creative imagination. Philosophically it drew a great deal on August Comte's (1798-1857) positivistic theories and Adolphe Taine's (1828-93) deterministic ideology. Zola derived naturalism's objectivist and imitative tenets from the methodology of experimental medicine advanced by the physician Claude Bernard (1813-78). Psychopathological and undesirable behavior patterns such as incest, alcoholism, and other depravities, which Zola and his school took to be lower social-class phenomena, anchored naturalist narrative fiction in the guise of documented treatises. Gone were man's ideals, spiritual dimensions, and optimism. These, together with the novelist's right to a lyrical style, were displaced by base instinct, materialism, determinism, and behavioristic, coarse, and minute descriptions. In Zola's conception of the new novelistic mode, instruction, not diversion, was the goal. The typical scenario of the naturalist novel, then, pits characters devoid of spiritual convictions, poor, uneducated, burdened with numerous children, cursed with alcoholism or other debilitating illnesses (tuberculosis was another favorite) against the indifference of nature (or society), putting beyond their reach the means by which to overcome their plight or the serenity necessary to cope with their lot.

Such base and redemptionless principles ran counter to the religious beliefs held by most Spaniards living in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Even the usual liberal intellectual groups, including many writers, found such crude and fatalistic thinking unpalatable. Complete denial of a spiritual dimension in man was for them simply unacceptable. Thus, naturalism in crossing the border into Spain underwent a radical amputation and became a

technique without an ideology—no Spanish novelist had the stomach for the strong stuff that made up Zola's godless and pessimistic determinism. But, if on the one hand the ultimate damning of man is hard to find in the Spanish novel of this period, on the other hand, themes, characters, settings, descriptions, and techniques bearing Zola's undeniable stamp of the sordid and the materialistic, by their profligacy, attest to the deep and lasting influence of French naturalism in the writings of not only Pardo Bazán, but on those of Leopoldo Alas "Clarín," Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920), Armando Palacio Valdés (1853-1938), José María de Pereda (1833-1906), and Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867-1928). Such elements extend well into the twentieth century in the works of Felipe Trigo (1865-1916) and Emilio Carrere (1880-1947), in Azorín's (1873-1967) *La Voluntad* (Willpower) written in 1902, and in two early novels of Ramón Pérez de Ayala (1881-1962), *Tinieblas en las cumbres* (Darkness on the heights) and *Troteras y danzaderas* (Mummers and dancers) dating from 1907 and 1913 respectively. Thus, none of the best of the turn-of-the-century novelists escaped naturalism's spell.

Naturalism, then, lasted in Spain from the 1880s³ until its waning in the 1920s as a recognizable force, though it survives as an identifiable trait to this date in such writers as Camilo José Cela (1916-). It coexisted with the Generation of 1898, antedating it by a few years much as does its greatest practitioner in the Spanish novel, Vicente Blasco Ibáñez. Blasco should have belonged to this famous group of "ninety-eighters" by age and ideology, though his literary bent and political activism differ from theirs, as does his temperament for being a man of action, not contenting himself as Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) and others did with merely writing and speaking about reform. Blasco is the most visible bridge between the nineteenth and twentieth century in Spanish letters because, while never throwing aside the fundamental rules of Zola's naturalism, he produced a fiction that at the same time was popular, innovative, diverse, and of lasting interest.

The Picturesque Life of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez was born in the Mediterranean coastal city of Valencia on 29 January, 1867. His parents, Gaspar Blasco Teruel

and Ramona Ibáñez Martínez, a prosperous middle-class Aragonese couple, first sent him to a religious convent where the young Vicente lasted only a few months, being expelled for his censurable behavior in the school's chapel. This incident of rebelliousness marks the beginning of a chronicled biography that reads like an adventure story worthy of Blasco the novelist. Pranks such as the one that caused his expulsion from elementary school made Vicente popular with his classmates, though other pursuits endeared him equally with his superiors, activities that early on pointed to his future as a writer. The most notable of these, begun while still in grade school, consisted of writing a newspaper made up of several stapled pages filled with short stories and brief news items. This news sheet was circulated among his young friends and celebrated by those fortunate enough to get a chance to read it.

As a high school student Blasco showed no better than average diligence, preferring to wander the streets of his hometown rather than to sit in a classroom, and to consume books on travel and adventure instead of those texts assigned by his teachers. A lack of interest in formal studies prompted him to devote his time to doing what he liked best—writing for publication. He began collaborating in a small local weekly of known liberal leanings, *El Turia* (named after Valencia's river), which further stirred in him a desire to take part in the city's political intrigues of the day. When Blasco entered the University of Valencia to study law at the age of fifteen he already had a minor reputation as both a writer and a revolutionary. Behind him were several published short stories, the first of which, "La torre de Boatella" (The tower of Boatella), had been written in the Valencian dialect,⁴ and one novel titled *Carmen* on whose back cover the enterprising author advertised forthcoming volumes.⁵ At the university Blasco continued to follow his habit of absenteeism from classes, choosing instead to maintain a largely bohemian existence of frequenting political meetings and producing commentaries and stories for newspapers. Aided by a prodigious photographic memory, he would busy himself with the course texts a few weeks prior to final examinations, a system that never seems to have failed him.

No longer satisfied with a schedule that most young men would find overwhelming, Blasco ran away to Madrid on 8 December, 1883, leaving a farewell letter to his parents informing them he was leaving for Barcelona—a ruse that worked for a time. In Madrid,

living in a fleabag boardinghouse and doing without more than just a few meals, he met with constant failure. Unable to secure a position as a reporter in any republican (i.e., liberal) newspaper, he chanced upon the position of secretary-amanuensis to Manuel Fernández y González (1821-88), the old and now sickly purveyor of romantic potboilers. During his brief stint as Fernández's aide, more often than not, Blasco (finding that the old man had fallen asleep while dictating) would finish the installment novels himself. When on 2 February, 1884 his father's friend, the newsman Peris Mencheta, ran into Blasco at a political rally, the young man was dragged back to Valencia, thus ending his alliance with the old and impecunious Fernández, and just in time, as it turned out, for him to participate in that year's student riots at the university. Though during his early years Blasco despised literary gatherings, thinking them effete circles, and being drawn instead to heated political meetings, he liked very much to listen to classical music. As often as he found the time, he attended opera performances and symphony concerts. Blasco's idols in this curious passion were Wagner and Beethoven, whose marble busts were placed alongside those of Cervantes and Victor Hugo, his literary heroes, in his various homes.

By the time he had graduated from law school in 1888, Blasco's literary undertakings were considerable. On a regular basis he wrote for the paper *El Correo Valenciano* where among his best stories to date were: "Fantasías" (Fantasies), "El Conde Garci-Fernández" (Count Garci-Fernández), "Romeu el Guerrillero" (Romeu the guerrilla fighter), "El adiós de Schubert" (Schubert's farewell), "Made-moiselle Norma" (Miss Norma), and "Caerse del cielo" (To fall from heaven). Madrid magazines and other regional newspapers were also likely to carry pieces by Blasco on any given day. On a par with his belletristic prowess was his political activism, intended always to further a liberal cause. A fiery speech of his in late December 1889 aroused too many antimonarchical sentiments among a sizable crowd to go unnoticed by the police, and Blasco was sought for days by state authorities determined to throw the agitator in jail. He fled the country, crossing the border into France where he settled in Paris for almost two years. His return to Spain was carried out under an 1891 amnesty decree handed down by the government.

In November of the year of his return to Valencia, Blasco married his first cousin, María Blasco del Cacho. This change of civil status, however, did not translate into an ideological or political mellowing

for him. On the contrary, his pen became almost exclusively a political weapon. The volumes *Historia de la revolución española, 1808-1874* (History of the Spanish revolution), *¡Viva la República!* (Long live the republic!), *Los fanáticos* (The fanatics), *La araña negra* (The black spider), and *El juez* (The judge), published between 1892 and 1894, all excoriate the monarchy, its supporters, and the ultraconservative Catholic church and its ideologies. The last title belongs to a drama that enjoyed some public acclaim. Blasco, unfortunately unable to savor this success due to the death of his mother on the night of the premiere, never wrote another line for the theater. More and more his interests seemed to be wholly political, taking over the sphere of earlier purely fictional writings. He opened a publishing house called "La Propaganda Democrática" where the first book issued was a translation, done by Blasco himself, of several of Voltaire's works and featuring a prologue by no less a figure than Victor Hugo. As if this political arm were not enough, perhaps because he felt the need for a more direct voice, Blasco poured every cent he had into the founding of a morning newspaper, *El Pueblo*, which began publication on 12 November, 1894. This daily, written almost single-handedly by Blasco, also carried short stories by Emile Zola and Guy de Maupassant (1850-93) as well as serialized versions of his own first five novels. The most immediate results derived from this new venture were the long hours that Blasco had to spend writing, composing, editing, and advertising the paper, and the mounting fines that nearly each edition garnered from the municipal authorities. On almost all counts, *El Pueblo* repeatedly bordered on extinction in its period of infancy. Finally Blasco went too far when toward the end of 1895 he endorsed the plan of Francisco Pi y Margall (president of the first Spanish Republic who lived from 1824 to 1901) to grant political autonomy to the insurgents of the Spanish colony of Cuba. In *El Pueblo* universal conscription for military service, freedom of speech, political assembly, and numerous other libertarian causes were stridently advocated, leading to riots and police barricades in the streets of Valencia. As a result Blasco had to go into hiding and flee Spain for the second time in four years. Once again he went to France but did not stay there, proceeding to Italy where he lived in Genoa. As he had done in Paris (producing the collection of essays *París, impresiones de un emigrado* [Paris, impressions of an exile] in 1893), in Italy Blasco wrote

the travel sketches *En el país del arte* (*In the Land of Art*) in 1896, which first appeared in *El Pueblo*.

Upon his return to Spain Blasco was sentenced to several years in prison and actually served over twelve months of incarceration. According to his own count, this was but one of over thirty jail sentences he received for political reasons during his lifetime. His release from prison (after the sentence was commuted through influential political and family friends) moved Blasco to run for the office of congressional representative from Valencia for the national legislature (the Spanish *Cortes*). If elected, this office would give him political immunity from the type of offense he had so often been charged with. Blasco not only succeeded in being elected to six consecutive terms, but in the end he bowed out, having grown tired of the post after constituting his own party of political followers—the Blasquistas.

Famous and rich from the earnings of his books, Blasco built an ostentatious neo-Greek mansion, complete with marble columns, called "La Malvarrosa" (The Pink Hollyhock), where he welcomed other writers and students of literature. He made trips to South America as a guest of heads of state, toured Argentina where he founded two cities that he named Cervantes and Nueva Valencia, and for six years stopped writing novels altogether, devoting himself to lecturing, traveling, and exploring parts of the world he had not seen before. He returned to France at the beginning of World War I and in Paris wrote what was to become his most celebrated work, *Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis* (*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*), in support of the Allied cause in 1916. His fame seemed to grow with each of his books, several of which were made into Hollywood films, and foreign governments conferred honors and decorations upon him. He came to the United States in October 1919 and remained in this country until the following July. During those months he was received into the U.S. House of Representatives, was presented with an honorary doctorate from George Washington University, and made an extensive lecture tour throughout the eastern United States.

In his late fifties Blasco's work began to slowly lose its vigor and literary worth, yet he could not bring himself to stop writing even when supposedly resting. When on 23 October, 1923 he embarked on a six-month cruise around the world, the end result, as usual, was a book, a three-volume work appropriately titled *La vuelta al*

mundo de un novelista (*A Novelist's Tour of the World*). Immensely wealthy from his writings and film rights, and once again at odds with the Spanish government, Blasco bought a large estate in Menton, on the French Riviera, where he lived the last years of his life. He died there on 28 January, 1928, one day before his sixty-first birthday, as he worked on a sequel to be called "The Fifth Horseman of the Apocalypse." His second wife, the Chilean aristocrat Elena Ortúzar Bulnes, survived him for many years, dying in the mid-sixties.

The Art of Blasco Ibáñez

Although by 1898 he was widely known and more famous than any other living Spanish author, save perhaps for the popular Benito Pérez Galdós whose star had begun to wane, Blasco's best work was still to come as were those later novels that would extend his fame across the world and make him wealthy. Blasco boasted of being the least literary of writers,⁶ considering himself a man of action who wrote impelled by an unshakable need. He combined the stamina of the first with the *furor poeticus* of the second to produce an astonishing volume of prose—over one hundred tomes have been published, not including Blasco's thousands of pages written in newspapers and magazines. Of those hundred-odd volumes, some thirty are novels. In a letter written in 1918 to his friend Julio Cejador y Frauca (1864–1927), a major critic of the time and author of the fourteen-volume *Historia de la lengua y literatura castellanas* (A history of the Castilian language and literature, 1915–20), Blasco wrote: "I carry a novel (sometimes two or three) in my head for a long time, but when the moment to externalize it arrives I work feverishly, I live an existence that you might call subconscious, and I write the book in the amount of time that it would take an amanuensis simply to copy it."⁷ Writing at a ten-hour pace each day, Blasco normally managed to finish one of his novels in approximately three months.

He was a great narrator and expository writer, and such a masterful literary painter of landscapes that he has been compared often with his friend the Valencian impressionist artist Joaquín Sorolla (1863–1923). Blasco's descriptive passages of his native region, the faithfully reproduced dialogues of local speech in their idiomatic nuances, make for vivid and powerful stories set in exuberant backdrops where

no levity or relief of any sort exists to soften a world of powerful instincts, sensations, and violence. Inextricably lost in these primeval scenarios are Blasco's characters, pitiable creatures whose physiological traits operate in detriment of an already atrophied spiritual dimension—such is the imprint of Zola's influence. And yet the weight of Maupassant, Flaubert (1821–80), and Anatole France (1844–1924) cannot be wholly dismissed, for they too left an impression on the young Blasco, as a reader, which later surfaced in his careful crafting of narrative structures and in his unforgettable gallery of individualized personages.

In the same letter to Cejador cited earlier, Blasco classified his novelistic output into the following divisions: regional novels, thesis novels, psychological novels, cosmopolitan novels, historical novels, American novels, and novels of adventure. Most of them have a true biographical ring, especially his Valencian or regional novels. The settings of the Albufera and the Huerta, as well as many secondary characters such as Copa, Pimentó, Cañamel, Morte, and even some of the buildings described, down to Barret's shack, really existed and were recognizable to people in the area.⁸ Blasco himself lived through many of the adventures unfolded in his books of fiction.

The Regional Novels

Blasco's "Valencian novels" are disturbing tales of elementary passions (greed, lust, hate), of primitive forces (hunger, poverty, sickness, fear, death), and of the overpowering dominance of nature, at once beautiful and awesome, a threatening and all-controlling background against which characters are dwarfed or altogether disappear. All of these novels have a foreshadowed end from the very outset, an inevitability that is tragic in a classical sense—though a flaw damages the characters both from within (classical hero) and from without (romantic hero); they are doomed by their own deeds but also by an indifferent and, at times, malevolent environment (e.g., nature, fate, society). Blasco has stacked the deck against them in a throwback to the naturalist aesthetic. The settings are full-color portrayals of true Valencian land- and seascapes, exaggerated and stylized to conform to the milieu of the story at hand. At times they are violent, at others subdued. Sometimes they threaten and, though peaceful at given intervals, they are always disquieting.

The spectrum is wide because context often requires it, but the fundamental fidelity with which it is reproduced remains constant.

The novels that most endear Blasco to the critics and assure his place among the best fiction writers of the turn of the century are those he wrote first, these so-called regional novels. They are *Arroz y tartana* (*The Three Roses*, 1894), *Flor de mayo* (*The Mayflower*, 1896), *La barraca* (*The Cabin*, 1898), *Entre naranjos* (*The Torrent*, 1900), and *Cañas y barro* (*Reeds and Mud*, 1902). Two books of short stories, *Cuentos valencianos* (Valencian tales, 1896), and *La condenada* (The condemned woman, 1900), plus a period novel, *Sónnica la cortesana* (*Sónnica the Courtesan*, 1901), set in the Valencia of the Carthaginian conquest (219 B.C.), complete Blasco's regional cycle. Among these, undisputably his best works and perhaps the only novels recognizable as uniquely Blasco's, three tower above the rest: *The Three Roses*, *The Cabin*, and *Reeds and Mud*. They alone possess a permanent human and literary worth.

The Mayflower depicts the toils and misery of a small town's waterfront inhabitants, the fishermen and their families. In sharper focus, it views the lives of two brothers of opposite character, Pascual and Toner, who end up dying (fratricide and suicide) as a result of envy and marital infidelity. Brutal in its drama and emotions, *The Mayflower* (named after Pascual's boat) falls squarely in the Zolaesque mold of dark and pessimistic naturalism. *The Torrent*, set in the midst of a fragrant citrus orchard, stands as Blasco's most passionate love story. Here Rafael Brull, the rich scion of a politically influential family, falls in love with an opera diva, Leonora Brunna, only to see the relationship spoiled by his authoritarian mother, Ramona. When Rafael later attempts to win back Leonora, she spurns him for his lack of resolve. In *The Torrent*, the impact of naturalism is lessened by the love sentiment and the sensual synesthesia of the orange grove setting, though the factors of heredity and environment result in an expected determinism. The Greta Garbo film of *The Torrent*, adapted liberally from the novel, was the first of many motion pictures derived from Blasco's works. *Sónnica the Courtesan*, also set in Valencia along with *El papa del mar* (*The Pope of the Sea*, 1925), and some three others, belongs to the realm of the historical novels because of its chronologically removed plot—the siege of the city of Sagunto by Hannibal in the year 219 B.C. This heroic chapter in the history of the Valencian city caught up in the Second Punic War between Carthage and Rome (ending in the mass suicide of

its inhabitants who refused to surrender after being encircled for nine months) owes less to any literary aesthetic than to a novelistic vogue of the times. Flaubert's *Salammbô*, (1862), Pierre Louÿs's (1870-1925) *Aphrodite* (1896), and Henryk Sienkiewicz's (1846-1916) *Quo Vadis?* (1896) are but a sample of the archaeological-historical novels being written at the time Blasco published his *Sónnica the Courtesan*, though he claimed that his had been inspired by an obscure verse composition belonging to the Sevillian poet Silio Itálico (25-100 A.D.).⁹

The Three Roses, the first of Blasco's regional novels, remains, in spite of the many to follow it, one of his masterpieces. It is thoroughly naturalistic in its choice of characters (petite bourgeoisie), themes (poverty, degradation, envy), and tone (pessimism and impending doom). Setting the story in the almost contemporary Valencia of the late 1800s, Blasco narrates the miserable existence of a lower middle-class family, the Pajares, which, impelled by the wife Manuela's desire to emulate the richer Valencianos, comes to a shameful end through financial ruin and death. Taking his cue and title from the popular air "Arrós y tartana, / y rode la bola / a la valenciana" ("Rice and a carriage, / and let the ball bounce / in a carefree fashion"). Blasco rails mercilessly against the petite bourgeoisie who, like Manuela, live for today beyond their means, not caring for tomorrow's consequences or for those who will ultimately suffer for it all. In the case of the Pajares clan, the villain is Doña Manuela who deliberately chose not to marry for love the first time around, doing it instead for money, only to have her former lover and second husband later spend all of her inheritance and plunge the family into monumental debt. When even her son Juanito is compelled to have his girlfriend gamble with her life savings in order to provide funds for Doña Manuela's extravagances, the reader truly begins to gauge her insane profligacy. And yet not content with everyone's economic ruin, the self-centered Doña Manuela sinks further into her own moral degradation by prostituting herself to a shopkeeper in order to obtain money with which to buy another carriage horse to replace their dead one, thus avoiding the necessity of strolling through the Valencia boulevards on the weekends, and instead, riding like the moneyed aristocrats. Sadly enough, the death of the carriage horse represents the climax of *The Three Roses*, symbolizing emptiness and lack of meaning in an existence of ostentation, pretentiousness, and envy. On the other hand, the

deaths of the young Juanito and of the old Don Eugenio, both succumbing indirectly as a result of Doña Manuela's impecunious taste for the good life, are hardly essential to the development of the narrative. As in most naturalistic novels, there are only victims; *The Three Roses* is a profoundly deterministic work in which egoism, greed, and hate triumph at the end. Only the beautiful *costumbrista* (local color) scenes depicting the 19 March celebration of the Valencia *fallas* (fireworks celebration on St. Joseph's day), Christmas time, the St. Vincent patron-day feast, the holy processions of Corpus Christi, and other pagan (bullfights) as well as Christian holidays offer the reader a mild relief from Blasco's depressing Zolaesque catalog of human wretchedness.

Together with the birth of the poet and playwright Federico García Lorca (1898-1936), the single most important event for Spanish letters in 1898 was the publication of *The Cabin*. This novel, which conferred upon Blasco international renown, almost did not succeed in being published. Its genesis, as the author recalls it in a later (1925) prologue, constitutes a fascinating narrative in itself. The events that led to Blasco's having to flee Valencia around the middle of 1895, it will be remembered, were a result of his active part in demonstrations seeking independence for Spain's American colonies. While hiding in the attic of a tavern owned by a republican youth and his mother, in wait for a ship that was to take him to Italy, Blasco read several books but soon grew tired of inactivity and asked for writing paraphernalia. Provided with pen, ink, and three small notebooks, he wrote a short story titled "Venganza moruna" (Moorish revenge) in two afternoons. When the night of his departure came, in the rush to get away, Blasco left everything including the notebooks completely filled with writing on both sides of the pages. Almost two years later at a political rally, Blasco, by then an elected representative, recognized the young man who had given him refuge in his house. The two returned to the tavern where the faded pages of "Venganza moruna" together with everything else forgotten were given back to their owner. Rather than publishing it in its original form—his confessed first inclination—Blasco decided to expand it into a full-length novel.

Since in those days his newspaper, *El Pueblo*, took up most of Blasco's time, work on the future novel was truly a labor of love. "I have never worked while so physically tired nor with such a concentrated and determined enthusiasm," he subsequently de-

clared.¹⁰ From two o'clock until five in the morning Blasco wrote as in a frenzy until the ten chapters were finished, changing the title to *The Cabin* and saving the earlier one of "Venganza moruna" for another story. He serialized *The Cabin*, as he had done with previous novels, in *El Pueblo*, but apparently few readers took notice of it. Its second showing, in book form, was equally inauspicious. Published by his friend Federico Sempere in an edition of seven hundred copies, *The Cabin* sold no more than five hundred copies, most of them in and around Valencia. The total profit came to seventy-eight pesetas, which had to be split between author and publisher. These meager proceeds might have sealed the novel's future if Professor Hérèlle from the Lyceum in Bayonne had not picked up the book at the San Sebastián railroad station while waiting for his train back to France. So impressed was Hérèlle with *The Cabin* that he wrote several unanswered letters to its author asking permission to translate it into French, and Blasco eventually gave his consent. It was many months later when reading his morning paper in Madrid that Blasco found that *La Cabane*, as it was called in France, had met with not only critical but popular success in Paris. As a result, *El Liberal* (which subsequently serialized it) and other Madrid dailies echoed the French press's enthusiasm for the novel, causing sales to soar in Spain. *The Cabin*, between its 1898 introduction and the cited 1925 prologue, had sold over one million copies worldwide. It was perhaps the first time a Spanish author had enjoyed such a best-seller in his lifetime.

The Cabin is a relentless and cruel rendering of the lives of the laborer Batiste, his wife, and four children as they strive tirelessly to survive in the fields deserted by Tío Barret—a plot of farmland accursed by the murder of its usurious owner Don Salvador at the hands of the former tenant Barret. The straightforward narrative (its simplicity due in part to its origins as a short story) depicts the unrewarding struggle of Batiste and his family to overcome the arduous labors of working the soil and rebuilding their cabin, in addition to facing the prejudices and enmity of the neighboring villagers. The local warden, Pimentó, embodies the hatred of the local inhabitants as his actions victimize every member of the struggling family. Their irrigation rights are taken away on trumped-up charges, the daughter Roseta's romance is broken up, five-year-old Pascualet dies as a result of being pushed into an infested stream, their plow horse is stabbed to death, Batiste is shot in the back,

and finally the cabin is set on fire together with all of the grain from their first harvest.

Set in the real village of Alboraya, *The Cabin* is devastating in its portrayal of injustice, man's inhumanity to man, and human powerlessness to overcome obstacles that life presents as a matter of course, either as a consequence of the evil character of others or as a result of nature's own indifference to humanity's plight. Murder, robbery, and deceit on one side and drought, fire, and hard labor on the other, conspire in the inevitable doom that preys on Batiste and his brood. Try as they might, they can do nothing to change the outcome that fate reserves for them.

With the publication of *Reeds and Mud* in 1902 the regional cycle is brought to a close. This novel was justly regarded by Blasco as his most solid and accomplished work.¹¹ It represents not only the best among the Valencian novels but also the one on which most critics lavish their praise. *Reeds and Mud* epitomizes Zola's naturalism blended with Blasco's own regional *costumbrismo*, the power of which is sufficiently enduring to arrest even today's reader. The brutality and determinism of the earlier regional works persist in this one, but in addition there appears a stylization of color and landscape bordering on the poetic. The changing settings of the Albufera with its island village of El Palomar, its marshes of La Dehesa, and its impenetrable forests—all in different seasons and at different hours of the day—have no equal in Spanish literature. The plot of *Reeds and Mud* is more diverse than that of *The Cabin*, but fundamentally its tenets are the same: man's struggle against his own nature, against other men, and against the circumstances that surround him. The setting has not changed much either: a village of thatched-roof huts built of "reeds and mud." And neither have the characters who personify manifold evils: adultery, gluttony, indolence, murder, poverty, and usury. The strongest forces of sex, instinct, and a sinister nature once again prevail over the main characters in a foreseeable ruin. In *Reeds and Mud* Tio Toni cultivates his rice fields while the son Tonet whiles away time flirting with Neleta, wife of the rich and sickly bar owner Cañamel. Fortune smiles upon the lazy and shameless Tonet who becomes Cañamel's business partner, availing himself not only of his wines and food but of his wife as well. Formerly childhood sweethearts, Tonet and Neleta, even after Cañamel's death (from obesity, alcoholism, and idleness), cannot marry, forbidden by the dead man's will, which stipulates she

must remain single in order to inherit his wealth. Furtively attracted by lust, but legally kept apart by greed, Neleta and Tonet continue their covert affair from which a child is born. A victim of his own weaknesses, Tonet agrees to Neleta's order to drown his own son, but later shoots himself in remorse. In this ambience of marsh fever, of slimy eels, of reeds and mud, lust displaces love, blind ambition becomes greed, and malice darkens every sentiment. In *Reeds and Mud* the characters, in spite of an individuality underscored by baseness, pale beside the awesome nature which surrounds, oppresses, and ultimately destroys them. The import of their flaws only serves to accelerate their tragic ends. Again in this case, nothing and no one—least of all themselves—can stave off final destruction.

The Doctrinal, Psychological, Cosmopolitan, Historical, and American Novels

Following the regional novel cycle, Blasco undertook the writing of another series, which he labeled "thesis novels." These four works show the author's social, religious, and political ideals, to the detriment of their fictionalized content. All carry an explicit message that damages to a large extent the illusion of a self-contained narrative microcosm. The characters seem to be no more than flat icons, motivated principally by concerns of reform or progress. In *La catedral* (*The Shadow of the Cathedral*, 1903), Blasco's anticlerical bent offers up a story of the revolutionary Gabriel Luna who dies a failed man while trying to safeguard the jewels of the Virgin in the Cathedral of Toledo. *El intruso* (*The Intruder*, 1904), also in a religious vein, comments on the power of the Society of Jesus over the Catholic church in Spain, particularly in the Basque region where its action takes place. *La borda* (*The Mob*, 1905) has as the main theme social inequality and as its protagonist a cynical Madrid newspaper reporter, Isidro Maltrana, hardened by constant exposure to the city's lower classes and criminal elements. *La bodega* (*The Fruit of the Vine*, 1905), set in the southern city of Jerez de la Frontera, famous for its sherry wines, rails against the ills of drinking. It also analyzes the political and social conditions in the Andalusian region, which—in view of Blasco's socialist ideology—warrant all of the anarchist propaganda spread by the agitator Fernando Salvatierra against the prosperous landowners and vintners. The four novels represent, at best, the subgenre sometimes called *engagé* literature, wherein its

author artistically (i.e., implicitly) shows a commitment to a cause he feels worthwhile and which does not detract from novelistic plot, characters, style, themes, or structure. At their worst, *The Shadow of the Cathedral* and remaining thesis novels come across as a propagandist's doctrinal ax-grinding. Often, it seems, Blasco forgot that a novel may contain sociology, philosophy, history, or any other discipline insofar as it does not become so saturated with them that it then turns out to be a sociological, philosophical, or historical treatise and stops being an autonomous piece of fiction.¹²

The next series, appropriately "psychological novels," offers character studies. In them Blasco placed his protagonists in chosen ambients and then developed and observed their existence. There are usually thought to be five works in this cycle. *La maja desnuda* (*Woman Triumphant*, 1906), titled after Goya's masterpiece canvas, narrates the life of the famous painter Mariano Renovales, the undoing of his wife resulting from his marital infidelity, and Mariano's own death from remorse. *La voluntad de vivir* (*The will to live*), though written and abortively published in 1907, was not issued in a second edition until 1953, two years after the death of its heroine since, fashioned as a roman à clef, Blasco felt that both of its protagonists, if identified, could suffer needlessly. The entire first edition (12,000 copies) was destroyed in Valencia at Blasco's expense and behest. *La voluntad de vivir* recounts the passionate love affair between an older man, Dr. Enrique Valdivia (patterned after a well-known Madrid University professor), and Lucha (modeled after a foreign siren), a young Valenzuelan girl. Lucha's promiscuity and Enrique's violent jealousy lead to his suicide and her final repentance. *Sangre y arena* (*The Blood of the Arena*, 1908), often derided as a mere portrayal of the "typical" Spain depicted in bullfight and tourist travel posters, really comes across as the best example of an admittedly none-too-laudable subgenre. It recounts the rise and fall of the fortunes of the bullfighter Juan Gallardo (modeled after Antonio Fuentes) who, though wealthy and married, aspires to the love of the aristocrat Doña Sol. Against a well-documented backdrop of the art of taurromachy, Blasco portrays the struggles of Gallardo as he tries to win the favors of Doña Sol and the applause of the crowd, a double quest that brings about his death when he is gored by his final bull of the afternoon.

The title *Los muertos mandan* (*The Dead Command*, 1909), reveals the theme of this novel, in which a young and penniless nobleman

is prohibited by the traditions and beliefs of his dead ancestors from seeking love and happiness in a life of his own. Conceived as a two-volume work, this novel, set in the Balearic isles of Mallorca and Ibiza, explores the theme of interfaith marriage between a Catholic and a Jew with the triumph of personal choice over established, outmoded, and prejudiced norms. *Luna Benamor* (1909), a *nouvelle* whose title derives from the name of its female protagonist, plumbs once more the question of marriage between people of different faiths. Here, the Spanish diplomat Luis Aguirre falls in love in the city of Gibraltar with the granddaughter of a rich Sephardic Jewish banker. While Aguirre succeeds in making Luna fall in love with him, the grandfather Aboab and the rest of the family refuse to give their permission for the wedding. In these five novels Blasco pitted his protagonists against the odds that their circumstances represented. In only one, *The Dead Command*, did the hero Jaime Febrer triumph over his dilemma, forcing his will (search for love and happiness) to triumph over adversity (poverty, tradition, and ancestral obligation). In *Woman Triumphant*, the painter Mariano Renovales succumbs to adultery and causes the death of his wife as well as his own. In *La voluntad de vivir*, Enrique Valdivia pays with his life for his sexual excesses and jealousy. Again, illicit love and unbridled ambition are the undoing of the bullfighter Juan Gallardo in *The Blood of the Arena*. And in *Luna Benamor* Blasco shows another resolution to the question of intermarriage where though love may conquer, its victory cannot do away with ancient tradition. Whereas these psychological novels did little to advance Blasco's literary standing, they continued to buttress his popular and Hollywood fame—*The Blood of the Arena* will be remembered mostly as Rudolph Valentino's famous film debut.

The publication of *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* in 1916 ended a six-year silence for Blasco the novelist and marked the beginning of a new cycle of novels, a trilogy called the "cosmopolitan novels." With the other two, *Mare Nostrum* (*Our Sea*, 1918) and *Los enemigos de la mujer* (*The Enemies of Women*, 1919), they are also known as the "European novels" because they concern themselves with World War I. Whether taken singly or as a trilogy these works have little literary merit, but for a time they (especially *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*) were Blasco's most widely read works, responsible for his growing worldwide fame. The 1921 film version of this novel (remade in 1962 with Glen Ford and Charles Boyer)

made a star of Rudolph Valentino, much the same as the 1923 screen version of *The Enemies of Women* did for Lionel Barrymore. *Our Sea* (as the Romans called the Mediterranean) was also filmed twice, in 1926 in the United States and in Mexico in 1948. Today it is hardly believable that such attention and importance should have been attached to these works. *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, a vague attempt to portray the whole of World War I, comes across as little more than a work of propaganda for the Allied cause, thus giving credence to the story of French President Poincaré's personally asking Blasco to use the Battle of the Marne as an inspiration for a novel depicting the ravages of war. The novel does focus on the comings and goings of Paris intellectuals, the moneyed, and the armed forces, showing how wartime affects them all from the vantage point of an emigrated Argentine family. It is a pessimistic outlook on humankind. *Our Sea* shifts the scene of the conflict from French soil to the underwater action of submarine warfare, dramatizing vividly the terrible evils of the modern war machine, which causes so much death and destruction, exemplified by German submarines. *The Enemies of Women* transports the reader to the glittering world of Monte Carlo where the aristocratic set, a group of jaded and pleasure-loving characters, seeks to insulate themselves from the 1914-18 conflict. Given the statement "I produce my novels according to the milieu in which I live,"¹³ this last novel speaks eloquently as to Blasco's elevated position in European society.

The largest group of novels to come from Blasco's pen was that of "historical narratives." His first work of fiction belonged to this category, as did most of his last ones (some posthumous). Blasco's historical novels bracket the rest of his production. There are, then, two historical epochs. The first one is made up mostly of short novelettes published in the years 1888-92, written in the manner of Fernández y González's potboilers, meant to entertain their readers and sell newspapers befitting their nature of serialized novels. These romances, not unlike present-day comic books or soap operas, contain plenty of action, romance, and intrigue. Historical settings and events fall victim to more appealing heroes and their improbable deeds. *El conde Fernán González* is the first in this group of some twenty volumes which not even Blasco himself wanted preserved for posterity—they have been duly excluded from every complete works edition. The second epoch of historical novels differs from the first in that history no longer appears romanticized. Blasco in

this second part of the series endeavors to reconstruct historical episodes and reevaluate characters seeking to bring to light, through painstaking documentation, new and interesting facets heretofore unknown or untold.

Almost every one of the four books that comprise the cycle strives for the revindication of notable historical figures who in some way had been vilified in the past. In *The Pope of the Sea*, the spotlight is on Benedict XIII, Avignon pope during the Church schism. *A los pies de Venus* (*At the Feet of Venus*, 1926) chronicles the papacy of the Borgias, the Valencian family (née Borja) of notorious Catholic leaders, thus in a sense continuing the saga of *The Pope of the Sea*. *En busca del Gran Kan* (*Unknown Lands*, 1928) tells of Christopher Columbus's mistaken notion of his reaching China and India in his first voyage of discovery of the Americas. The last work of this group, *El caballero de la Virgen* (*Knight of the Virgin*, 1929) recalls the adventures of the conqueror Alonso de Ojeda who died alone and a pauper after having provided land, people, and untold riches for Spain. There exists a thread of narrative progression running through all of these novels. Chronologically, beginning in 1394 when Pedro de Luna became Pope Benedict XIII through the death of the explorer Ojeda in 1519, Blasco takes the reader on a historical tour of Spain, the Catholic church in Europe, the voyages of Columbus and his lieutenant Ojeda, and the latter's wanderings on the new continent. The breadth of this panorama, as well as its carefully researched background, more than makes up for the oft-cited museumlike tone that for some critics damns these historical narratives.

Equally lengthy but grander in scale was to have been another series of novels projected by Blasco, but World War I cut it short after only one volume had been issued, *Los Argonautas* (1914). After the conclusion of the war, Blasco's own death again reduced it to two volumes, *La tierra de todos* (*The Temptress*, 1922) and *La reina Calafia* (*Queen Calafia*, 1923). This series, to be called "American novels," was inspired by Blasco's six-year adventure in South America, where he did everything from delivering speeches to climbing mountains and founding colonies at the behest of foreign governments. A man of action, Blasco perhaps fantasized on becoming a conquistador of history and legend. Economic turmoil and the advent of World War I, however, put an end to the city settlements of Nueva Valencia and Cervantes in the Argentine *pampa*, forcing

Blasco to return to his reality as a writer. Nevertheless, he wished to immortalize not so much what he himself had done in America but the deeds of his ancestors and to glorify the beauty and the grandeur of the new continent. His epic of the Americas was begun by *Los Argonautas*, a long drawn-out account of the coming to Buenos Aires of Fernando de Ojeda and his travels through South America. A sequel to this work was never finished; instead he wrote *The Temptress*, set in a newly colonized region of Argentina and centering on a femme fatale who, having destroyed countless lives as the dominant force in Río Negro, ends her days as a streetwalker. Aware of his deftness as a novelist, Hollywood producers could not pass up such a melodramatic plot and it was made into a film vehicle for Greta Garbo in 1926. *Queen Calafia*, a story set in California that loosely parallels in a modern setting the apocryphal account of the queen of the same name in the knight-errant book *Las sergas de Esplandián* (*The exploits of Espandián*) written by Garci Ordóñez de Montalvo in 1510 and one of Don Quixote's favorites, puts an end to the American novels. Blasco had five and perhaps six more narratives in mind when death overtook him on 28 January, 1928. The titles he had planned were "La ciudad de la esperanza" (The city of hope) about Buenos Aires, "Los murmullos de la selva" (The murmurs of the jungle) about the uncivilized territories, "El oro y la muerte" (Gold and death) about Perú, and two, possibly three, more devoted to the Chilean region.

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's considerable novelistic output is diverse, popular, and literarily meritorious and influential. His best came at the beginning with the works grouped under the heading "regional novels." Later on, even if he fell out of favor with critics of literature on account of his facile, propagandist, and melodramatic writings, Blasco was adopted by the largest readership any modern Spanish author had known in his day. He is probably the first Spaniard to become an international best-seller and certainly the only one whose books were widely transformed into motion pictures. To this day Blasco remains one of Spain's greatest storytellers and a figure often larger than life.

Chapter Two

Miguel de Unamuno: The Existentialist Novel

The year 1898, date of Spain's defeat at the hands of the United States and the loss of her last colonies, signals the beginning of the country's modern era. So, even though historically and politically 1898 is highly significant, in the realm of letters—with the exception of the publication of Blasco Ibáñez's *La barraca* (*The Cabin*)—strictly speaking the year holds no special importance for Spanish literature. In a broader context, however, the date marks the birth of a group of writers who in the next quarter century would produce a body of literature so new and varied that it rivals Spain's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Golden Age.

The Generation of 1898

The members of this most famous generation in Spanish literature are Ramón María del Valle Inclán (1866–1936), José Martínez Ruiz, better known as "Azorín" (1873–1967), Pío Baroja y Nessi (1872–1956), Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo (1864–1936), Ramiro de Maeztu (1874–1936), and Antonio Machado (1875–1939). The acrostic VABUMM!, made up from the initials of their last names, constitutes onomatopoeically the impression they sought to convey to their contemporaries—a big bang. Theirs was a rebellious attitude voiced in protests and in their stand against traditional ways. At the inception of the Generation its closest members, politically speaking, were Unamuno, Azorín, Baroja and Maeztu, but as they matured, all esprit de corps vanished, and the original political focus gradually changed to a literary one. Their disbandment occurred around 1905 although the label "Generation of 1898" did not appear until 1913. Azorín popularized the designation in four articles, titled "La Generación de 1898," written for the Madrid daily *ABC* in February of that year, so that its conscious naming came long after its factual dissolution. Spain's immediate political and social

Chapter Three

Pío Baroja: The Pure Novel

Basque, like Miguel de Unamuno and Ramiro de Maeztu, Pío Baroja y Nessi is the last of the great novelists belonging to the grand tradition of the genre, much as Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), Fyodor Dostoevski or Charles Dickens (1812–70) were in their time. Generally acknowledged as a direct descendant of Benito Pérez Galdós and Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Baroja did little else in his life except to write novels—two per year in his prime. He held no other occupation, with the result that his complete works approach the century mark.¹ Of these, more than half are novels.² This writer, to whom Ernest Hemingway (1898–1961) paid homage as a disciple on his deathbed,³ may be considered the greatest novelist not only of his own Generation of 1898 but, indeed, of the whole of twentieth-century peninsular Spanish literature.

The Life of Pío Baroja

Pío, the youngest of three sons, was born in the Basque city of San Sebastián on 28 December, 1872. The family's comfortable middle-class existence, afforded by his father Serafín Baroja's profession as a mining engineer, changed locations several times during young Pío's early years. The constant moving from city to city (San Sebastián to Madrid in 1879, Madrid to Pamplona in 1881, back to Madrid in 1886, to Valencia in 1891, permanently back to Madrid in 1893) was traumatic enough to prompt Baroja to recall in later years that his childhood had been an unhappy one.

Neither his secondary nor his university education seems to have had much of an impact on Baroja, who admitted in his *Memorias* (Memoirs) to having been a mediocre student.⁴ He was disenchanted with most of his teachers throughout his career, a contempt that shows clearly in the initial chapters of his 1911 masterpiece novel *El árbol de la ciencia* (*The Tree of Knowledge*) and which almost caused him to fail his third year medical school examinations at the University of Madrid. The move to Valencia in 1891, then, appears to

have been a propitious change since Baroja successfully completed his studies at the university there. In October 1893 he finished his thesis, "El dolor: Estudio psicofísico" (Pain: a psychophysical study) and received his medical doctor's diploma. Having recently lost his oldest brother Darío from an illness, Baroja wanted to get away from the family home, so he took a job as a country doctor in the small Basque town of Cestona in August 1894. Alone there, he found unwanted competition from another established physician, hostility and ignorance from the villagers, and a decided lack of vocation on his own part to endure a life of service to others and many discomforts to himself. Baroja resigned at the end of thirteen months and returned to Madrid where, together with his brother Ricardo, he took over the running of his aunt Juana's bakery. This business venture turned out to be no more successful than his previous foray into medicine, but it did not matter much; for by the time their bakery went bankrupt, Baroja had begun writing and publishing on a regular basis in several Madrid newspapers and magazines.⁵

Though by no means rich from his articles and short stories, Baroja saw that he could live modestly from his writings and thus he decided to make a career out of it. His parents had bought a two-story house, number 34 Mendizábal Street, and there the whole family lived until the Spanish Civil War in 1936, including his brother Ricardo's wife and his sister Carmen's husband Caro Raggio, who would become Pío's publisher. In time a third floor was added onto the house where the novelist lived with his parents. His father died in 1912, but his mother lived until 1935 when Baroja was in his sixties.

Baroja never married because he never needed a woman to look after him. Basically a shy man, his mother, sister, sister-in-law, and a servant made things easy for him. It is not even certain that he ever had a serious love affair. The life of a bachelor suited him admirably. Baroja was free to do as he pleased when he pleased, though it appears that his worst vice, if it can be labeled thus, was traveling. Like his fellow "ninety-eighters," Baroja journeyed throughout all of Spain by coach, train, and often on foot. Many of his novels, especially the early ones, such as *Camino de perfección* (*The righteous path*, 1902) and *Zalacaín el aventurero* (*Zalacaín the adventurer*, 1909), recount in artistic form these wanderings. He also traveled to many countries in Europe. To Paris he went no less

than a dozen times; he also visited London, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Belgium, and Holland, and particularly liked Rome, Florence, and Milan in Italy.

In 1900, the year he made the first of his trips to the French capital, Baroja's life as a novelist began in earnest. His first books *Vidas sombrías* (Somber lives) and *La casa de Aizgorri* (The House of Aizgorri) appeared in print then, although Baroja had to underwrite the costs of the publication himself and the works sold less than a couple of hundred copies. No matter, critical reaction was favorable, and he was determined to make a go of it. Baroja's life was one of habits that changed little, save for the forced three-year hiatus (1936-39) of the Spanish Civil War, until he died two months before his eighty-fourth birthday. He customarily rose at eight in the morning and sat down to write at nine, a task that lasted until lunchtime at one o'clock. The midday meal was followed in later years by a nap and then a walk, usually alone, through the neighborhood and Alcalá Street (a main thoroughfare), which included visits to secondhand bookstores or to the newsroom of some daily to pass the time and see acquaintances. Baroja normally had dinner early and then went to bed where he read until well past midnight. Such was the routine, tranquil life of the man whose characters are notorious adventurers and daring men of action.

In 1912, seeking to regain some of his Basque heritage so distant in Madrid, Baroja bought the old manorial house of Iztea in Vera del Bidasoa, northern Spain, that—once restored—became his favorite residence. He moved there all of his books and paintings given to him by the contemporary artists Darío de Regoyos (1857-1913) and his brother Ricardo, and there spent the better part of the year. As soon as he had finished his book and turned the manuscript over to his publisher in the early spring, Baroja would journey north to Iztea and there remain until late autumn, bringing a new novel back with him to Madrid to Caro Raggio. In 1912, the year *El mundo es así* (The way of the world) was published, his father died and his younger sister Carmen married.

The years went by uneventfully, Baroja never deviating from his bourgeoislike habits, his fame increasing noticeably to the point where his novel *Zalacaín el aventurero* was made into a film "with Baroja himself in one of the minor roles."⁶ In 1934 he was selected as a member of Spain's most prestigious and exclusive literary association, the Royal Academy of Letters. The following year, on

the afternoon of 12 May, he read his entrance speech, "La formación psicológica de un escritor" (The psychological makeup of a writer). His mother died at that time. One year later while in his summer house at Vera, Baroja had an unpleasant and—he felt—dangerous encounter with a regiment of soldiers, which prompted him to flee, on foot, his country's civil war. He remained in France until 1940, having unsuccessfully attempted a trip to South America earlier that year, when he returned to Spain.

The Barojas had lost everything during the strife. Don Pío, in his seventies and past his creative zenith, saw himself forced to write once again in order to survive economically. Thus, fighting an incipient cerebral arteriosclerosis, the old man began putting together his *Memorias* and a last handful of novels. A new edition of his complete works was savagely cut by the Franco censorship. Trials such as these, together with the deaths of Ricardo and Carmen, probably made the last years of Baroja's life unhappy. Only the company of his nephew, the anthropologist Julio Caro, and the presence of younger novelists such as Camilo José Cela (1916-) and José Luis Castillo Puche (1919-) enlivened his waning years in the daily *tertulias* at his new apartment on Ruiz de Alarcón Street near Retiro Park. He died on 30 October, 1956 and was buried the following day in Madrid's civil cemetery.

Ideology, Style, and Structure of Baroja's Novels

If Baroja was successful as a novelist, not only from literature's lasting vantage point but even in his own time, it is because he discovered very early in his writing career an approach to fiction so perfectly suited to his ideas about life and literature that he never needed to agonize over literary creation once he had written his first best-seller, *Camino de perfección*, in 1902. After this novel—his third—Baroja wrote steadily for half a century, unconcerned with method, aesthetics, or theories regarding the novel. Years later, looking back in 1947 in his memoirs *Galería de tipos de la época* (Portrait gallery of contemporaries), Baroja confessed that he had always been the same, that his ways at the age of twenty remained unchanged when he was past sixty: "I have not found anything in my existence to make me change my mind ever."⁷

The uncomplicated existence of this "humble wanderer," as Baroja liked to refer to himself, runs a parallel course in his literary production. Baroja disliked innovation of any type, at least the conscious or artificial kind. He wrote to earn a little money, he said, and to keep himself entertained.⁸ His greatest fear when writing was the possibility of boring his readers; consequently his narratives all strive to tell a story in engaging fashion. He uses a style that communicates in plain language, giving his short paragraphs a directness and clarity that reflect an aversion to words he had not heard or were not used around the house by his parents or someone in his family.

The sole impediment to a total enjoyment of Baroja's works by a mass readership can probably be blamed on the undying pessimism that clouds all of his writings. By temperament Baroja was a skeptic with little faith in man's innate goodness or in society's ruling principles. Even though his closest friends referred to him as a gentle and unassuming individual, those who knew him less well, either as casual acquaintances or in professional dealings, invariably characterized him as unsociable, gruff, and unapproachable. Significantly, no one ever referred to Baroja as a friendly, cheerful, or even a considerate man. His hospital training and later his practice as a physician, both depressing and unrewarding experiences, further contributed to convince Baroja of life's unrelenting misery and lack of lasting happiness. A voracious reader, Baroja during his youth and through his adulthood pored over social and philosophical treatises that by his own admission he probably did not fully understand. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and the Germans Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) all left an impression on him, easily traceable throughout most of his works. Fueled by these readings, Baroja's lack of faith in God or in a religion of any sort, his mistrust of society and government, and his conviction that man was innately evil color his fiction in dark, pessimistic, and often bitter tones.⁹ At times anarchistic, at others nihilistic, always agnostic, the totality of Baroja's production is a catalog of human flaws and life's pitfalls.

And yet, in spite of his varying philosophical notions of doom, Baroja managed to make his fiction entertaining, popular, and lasting. He accomplished this difficult feat time and again by his unequalled ability as a great storyteller. His protagonists are all sincere, iconoclastic individuals whose idealism is invariably neu-

tralized by their inability to act in defense of their beliefs. Society is indifferent to their plight or else life in its fatalistic dimension manages to snuff them out. The settings are by and large urban, either recognizable sites such as Madrid and its lower-class outskirts, or travelogues through the Castilian or Basque regions. This technique of focusing on detailed, known locations probably held a great deal of appeal for his readers who could easily identify them. The plots develop rapidly and in straightforward fashion; several events seldom take place at the same time in Baroja's fiction, unlike Valle Inclán's or Pérez de Ayala's late novels. Action centers almost exclusively on the protagonist; rarely does anything happen when he or she is not present.

The narrative structure is very much open-ended, a characteristic that can arguably be ascribed to Baroja's lack of a premeditated or fully developed outline: "I write my novels without a plan. . . . I need to write paying attention to details."¹⁰ This loose-ends plot yields a porous format where characters appear, disappear, and reappear sometimes in the same work, sometimes years later in other works as secondary figures or protagonists. Much as in real life, Baroja's slices of life show an incompleteness and lack of total meaning that is both disturbing and appealing in its familiarity. The struggle for life—an expression that serves as the title for one of his best-known trilogies—is his most constant theme and the one with which his readers can identify best. In spite of his pessimism and of his indefensible—though not humorless—anti-Semitic and antifeminist attitudes, Baroja has remained as much a favorite of readers as of scholars. However oblivious he may have professed to be to the two camps, Baroja has been well treated by both. In his lifetime, the sales of his books allowed him to live with few economic worries, and the way he wrote them elicited the most renowned treatise on the genre in Spanish from the pen of the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, *Ideas sobre la novela* (*Thoughts on the Novel*) in 1925.

Nature and Classification of Baroja's Novelistic Output

Aside from one book of poems, *Canciones del suburbio* (Songs of the outskirts, 1944), memoirs, biographies, and collected essays, Baroja wrote a total of sixty-seven novels between 1900 and 1953,

dates of publication of *La casa de Aizgorri* and *Los amores de Antonio y Cristina* (The loves of Antonio and Cristina). Initially Baroja began publishing his novels as separate works without paying much attention to how they related to one another in a larger context. Then, as he began returning to certain themes or characters, it occurred to him that he could group most of them into divisions to facilitate matters for his readers and for himself. He put into practice this idea when writing *La busca* (*The Quest*) in 1904, a novel so long that no publisher would take it until Baroja divided it into three books, the other two being *Mala hierba* (*Weeds*), also issued in 1904, and *Aurora roja* (*Red Dawn*) which appeared the following year. He subtitled the ensemble "La lucha por la vida" (*The struggle for life*). Thereafter, some times with more justification than others, and even retrospectively, Baroja grouped his novels—except for perhaps a dozen—into trilogies, a classification that, though at times inexact, has been accepted by critics and readers alike as a reasonable way to organize such a prolific output. While Baroja wrote novels well into his eighties, as the dates of *Las veladas del Chalet Gris* (Evenings in the Hovel Gris, 1952), and *Los amores de Antonio y Cristina* attest, his best work ends in 1936 with *El cura de Monleón* (The priest of Monleón). Indeed, many critics agree that Baroja's freshest, most innovative, and vigorous work was over by 1913, the year wherein concurrently with his novelistic chores he began writing the twenty-two volumes of the *Memorias de un hombre de acción* (Memoirs of a man of action).¹¹ Little that is new appeared thereafter.

Because of constrictions of space it would be impossible and often unprofitable, due to unevenness of merit, to discuss all of Baroja's novels. What follows is a listing of his best-rated trilogies and a subsequent discussion of a select number of works that in the general critical consensus are representative of Baroja's novel overall. The nine trilogies, two of which contain four instead of three novels, are in chronological order: (1) "Tierra vasca": *La casa de Aizgorri* (1900), *El mayorazgo de Labraz* (1903), *Zalacain el aventuro* (1909), and *La leyenda de Jaun de Alzate* (1922). (2) "La vida fantástica": *Aventuras, inventos y mixtificaciones de Silvestre Paradox* (1901), *Camino de perfección* (1902), and *Paradox, rey* (1906). (3) "La lucha por la vida": *La busca* (1904), *Mala hierba* (1904), and *Aurora roja* (1905). (4) "El pasado": *La feria de los discretos* (1905), *Los últimos románticos* (1906), and *Las tragedias grotescas* (1907). (5) "La raza": *La dama errante* (1908), *La ciudad de la niebla* (1909), and *El árbol de la ciencia*.

(6) "El mar": *Las inquietudes de Shanti Andía* (1911), *El laberinto de las sirenas* (1923), *Pilotos del altura* (1929), and *La estrella de Capitán Chimista* (1930). (7) "Agonías de nuestro tiempo": *El gran torbellino del mundo* (1926), *Las veleidades de la fortuna* (1927), and *Los amores tardíos* (1927). (8) "La selva oscura": *La familia de Errotacho* (1931), *El cabo de las tormentas* (1932), and *Los visionarios* (1932). (9) "La juventud perdida": *Las noches del Buen Retiro* (1934), *El cura de Monleón* (1936), and *Locuras de carnaval* (1937).

The Basque First Steps

A few months after the appearance in 1900 of the thirty-five short stories written between 1892 and 1899, and gathered in the volume entitled *Vidas sombrías*, Baroja published his first novel, *La casa de Aizgorri*. Chronologically the inaugural work in the trilogy "The Basque Country," this novel was conceived initially as a dramatic piece and written in its entirety in dialogue form with a few asides and descriptive or situational annotations.

Being a first novel, in many ways it is atypical. Its dialogued structure appears only two more times in all of Baroja's production, in the fourth volume of this initial series, *La leyenda de Jaun de Alzate* (The legend of Jaun de Alzate), and in *Paradox, rey* (*Paradox, King*), which belongs to the second trilogy called "The Fantastic Life." *La casa de Aizgorri*'s positive love ending is an infrequent occurrence in Baroja's fiction. Only in "The Struggle for Life" do we find another instance of a happy couple at the conclusion of a trilogy. And finally *La casa de Aizgorri* lacks the censorious tone with which Baroja typically addresses the middle-class bourgeoisie in the bulk of his later works.

Recognizably Barojian, however, is this novel's fast-paced plot, entirely contained in the dialogue. Reminiscent of the nineteenth century's social realism, *La casa de Aizgorri* pits an industrious liberal element (represented by a generation of young aristocrats and professionals supported by the old noble caste who are fighting for progress and some sort of social justice) against an entrenched, devious group of foreign profiteers, anarchists, and striking workers. These characters also foreshadow Baroja's later personages in the directness of their speech, the strength of their convictions, and their readily identifiable goodness or evilness. The narrative structure likewise reminds the reader of Baroja's preference for an open-ended fictional

account where characters come and go and incidents can be added or deleted, allowing for change but without detriment to the organic nature of the work.

In addition to those elements that may be more or less characteristically Barojian, *La casa de Aizgorri* possesses certain unique features that make it notable. Foremost among them are the theses of renovation, progress, and the lessening of human suffering. Hastily and perhaps even a bit single-mindedly, Agueda Aizgorri, aided by her resourceful suitor Mariano Unzueta, attempts to turn her father's poisonous (in the economic, medical, moral, and even ecological senses) liquor distillery into a hospital. In order to prevail they must overcome the sabotaging tactics of the distillery's foreman who is also in love with Agueda, her father's alcoholic inertia, and her brother's lack of willpower. Mariano and Agueda's triumph is manifold, resulting in their union as lovers, in the discontinuance of the distillery's pernicious influence as it burns down to make room for the promised hospital, and in the infusion of new life into the bloodline of the old and declining but noble Aizgorri family line with Mariano's industrial and professional resources.

The symbolism in *La casa de Aizgorri* is no less transparent than its good versus evil character plot, but no less engaging either. The Aizgorri family dog, Erbi, growls at Díaz, the treacherous foreman, and at Alfort, the French profiteer, but licks the hand of Mariano or wags its tail at Julián, the family doctor. When a character speaks Castilian, his accent will remain recognizably Basque if he is allied to the good cause, or be mistaken for an ordinary Spaniard if his allegiance is suspect. *La casa de Aizgorri*, though lacking in greatness, represents an admirable first effort by a young novelist—Baroja was twenty-eight at the time of its publication. Its nineteenth-century ascendancy shows, but equally recognizable are some fundamentally Barojian future traits.

The four novels of this series—*La casa de Aizgorri*, *El mayorazgo de Labraz* (The lord of Labraz), *Zalacáin el aventurero* (Zalacáin the adventurer), and *La leyenda de Jaun de Alzate*—have in common a similar dialogued narrative structure shared by the first and the fourth ones, the Basque settings common to all, and the Basque ancestry of its main characters. In little else do they resemble each other. Given the twenty-odd year lapse that separates the writing of the first from the last, it is not difficult to apprehend the heterogeneity of the foursome or the growing merit accorded especially

to *La casa de Aizgorri* and *Zalacáin el aventurero* over the others. The latter work is justifiably celebrated because its background (the Carlist Wars), its structure (the journey), its plot (adventure followed by adventure), and its protagonist (a wandering young nonconformist) all represent what in the minds of many typifies the essential Baroja. It is true: *Aventuras, inventos y mixtificaciones de Silvestre Paradox* (Adventures, inventions and hoaxes of Silvestre Paradox) and *Camino de perfección*, above all, as well as many of Baroja's other novels, combine the same narrative, structural, and character parameters exhibited by *Zalacáin el aventurero*.

The Quest for a More Perfect World

Aventuras, inventos y mixtificaciones de Silvestre Paradox (1901), *Camino de perfección* (1902), and *Paradox, King* (1906) of the series "The Fantastic Life," together with the three novels belonging to "The Struggle for Life," are all read with equal frequency, and both groupings represent Baroja's most successful trilogies.

The three novels belonging to the trilogy "The Fantastic Life" share to some degree in the Generation of 1898's concern for reform in a Spain that—though stagnant—rejected new ideas or methods, in the interest that all of the "ninety-eighters" had in the Spanish landscape, in the journey as a narrative and structural device, and in the reappearance of several of the same characters in all the novels.¹² Silvestre Paradox and Diz de la Iglesia are the main characters in both *Aventuras, inventos y mixtificaciones de Silvestre Paradox* and *Paradox, King*; Fernando Ossorio, the protagonist of *Camino de perfección*, appears briefly with his nymphomaniacal Aunt Laura in the last scenes of the first work of the trilogy.

Aventuras, inventos y mixtificaciones de Silvestre Paradox introduces the character of the same name who wanders through Spain and France frequenting taverns and boardinghouses while accompanied by his sidekick Avelino Diz de la Iglesia. Their lives of travel and constant disorder are filled with numerous meetings with comical, almost caricaturesque, personages. As eccentric as the two are, these encounters in diverse places, which constitute most of the novel, result in chaotic and always humorous incidents. A lack of plot frees Baroja's hand to have these characters roam from place to place following their whims in a search whose motives remain unclear

until their story is taken up once again five years later in *Paradox, King*.

By the time this work appeared in print in 1906, Baroja was already thought of as the premier novelist of his generation. He had written seven other novels, among them the early masterpiece *Camino de perfección*, and now the public eagerly awaited the sequel to the earlier popular *Aventuras . . . de Silvestre Paradox. Paradox, King* picks up the thread of Paradox and Diz de la Iglesia's lives in Valencia where they were last seen and resumes the farcical tone of their story. Soon, and for the remainder of the new work, however, the tones become more somber and the tale takes on the characteristics of a black comedy. The initial and most noticeable difference between the two works is the use of dialogue to tell the story. The technique, already used in *La casa de Aizgorri*, contributes greatly to the more accelerated narrative tempo of *Paradox, King*. It is as though Baroja were ridding himself of all encumbrances to facilitate the telling of his heroes' adventures.

Inevitably—even though the novel is divided into chapters—due to the exclusive use of a dialogue format, one tends to regard it almost in terms of acts, a notion that Baroja may have anticipated by splitting it into three parts. Unity of space would seem to dictate and vaguely correspond to the scenarios of the work. The first, which takes place in Spain and Tangiers, reveals Paradox's intent to travel to a remote part of Africa to colonize a nation. The second part follows Paradox and his friends on their maritime voyage as they fight storms and a mutinous crew aboard the "Cornucopia," ending up shipwrecked on the African coast. The last segment focuses on the founding of a new nation where primitive black people and "civilized" white men coexist precariously under the elected monarchical rule of Silvestre Paradox. The utopian enclave comes to an end when a French regiment overruns the settlement and further "civilizes" it by bringing syphilis, alcoholism, gambling, murder, and other telltale advancements of Western European culture. Baroja's bitter and satirical recriminations against society's ills are all too clear in *Paradox, King*. Here they involve not only Spain's but, given the international make up of the cast—English, French, Jewish, Italian, etc.—a universal malaise which he regarded as inescapable. This novel no longer qualifies as one of characters, but is instead a social novel. Its theme can be summed up almost aphor-

istically by saying that Baroja believes civilization to be the mother of all vices and the father of all ills.

Although the three works of this trilogy are equally celebrated by the reading public, an overwhelming critical consensus has assigned to *Camino de perfección* a superior literary worth, in fact labeling it Baroja's earliest masterpiece and one of the two or three best works to come from his pen. Its title and the subtitle, "Pasión mística" (Mystical passion), taken from Santa Teresa of Ávila's homonymous autobiographical work, are nothing but an ironic twist on the reality of the novel and its protagonist, Fernando Ossorio, who forever strays in a fruitless search to find a way of life with a meaning and a purpose. Widely considered a novel of ideas that best voiced what the Generation of 1898 meant to say, *Camino de perfección* may very well be the most representative of the novels to come not only from Baroja but from the rest of his contemporaries as well in its embodiment of all of their social and existential concerns: a cry for reform, a look at the most somber aspects of Spanish life in cities and villages, an accusation of lack of willpower (*abulia*) on the part of Spaniards in all classes, and an admiration for the untainted beauty of the landscape. Diffuse in plot and structure—to a greater extent than any other Baroja novel—*Camino de perfección* follows a narrative format along the footsteps of its protagonist as he walks through Madrid, Colmenar, Manzanares, Segovia, Toledo, and other towns and cities in Castile encountering deviousness, mistrust, and unsociability more frequently than not.¹³

This critical panorama of Spain, a look at its people—where and how they live, what they do, and what they are like—is less a novel than a loosely conceived narrative of philosophical judgments and opinions structured around a protagonist who is not always the most important character in scenes along his treks. At times *Camino de perfección* resembles a travelogue, at others a catalog of faults, and yet at others a gallery of personages of all ilk. For the most part, they are rogues who personify the lack of sociability Baroja felt typifies most Spaniards. Ironically, all the men and women from the upper classes exhibit nothing more comforting than contempt for Ossorio and his guest; only the most humble (a garbage collector) or nonnatives (Max Schultze) show any sympathy for the hero. The character of Fernando Ossorio differs from those of Paradox and Zalacain, especially the latter, in the voluntary choice of a life of adventure and wandering. The former two had both been obliged

to become vagabonds as a result of dire economic straits. Fernando abandons his sedentary life in Madrid only because he feels at a dead end. Troubled by the lack of meaning in his life, he sets out in a search for a better, more peaceful and meaningful existence. His character is nurtured by a strong idealism that blindly tries to find true, absolute, and pure values in human existence. Unable to find them anywhere in Spain or in any of its people, the hero reconciles himself to this earth and looks instead for consolation in his marriage to a simple girl named Dolores (Spanish for "grief" or "pain"), with whom he lives an uncomplicated existence in a small coastal village. Baroja's alternatives become once again clear in the choice that his protagonist has made: to be aware of life's full reality is to suffer and be desolate; if one wishes to survive, it is necessary to anesthetize oneself to those harshest realities and lead the life of a petit bourgeois.

From the Picaresque to the Bourgeois

When Baroja began the serialization of *The Quest* in the Republican newspaper *El Globo* in the year 1903, he realized that the novel was much too long to be issued as a single work. He therefore rewrote *The Quest* as a two-part work and added to it further, necessitating a third volume. Baroja titled the new books *Weeds* and *Red Dawn*. All three were published as separate volumes (in 1904 the first two, and in 1905 the third one) but in a trilogy form entitled "La lucha por la vida" (The struggle for life). In fact, however, from the point of view of structure, plot and characters, *The Quest*, *Weeds*, and *Red Dawn* are but one work. The three parts may be a typographical or an editorial convenience, but from an intrinsically literary point of view, each represents no more than a stage in the protagonist Manuel Alcázar's life as he grows from destitute orphan, to *pícaro*, to petit bourgeois. This progression serves Baroja to paint a kaleidoscope of contemporary life in Madrid that, though impressionistic, manages to cut a wide swath across all social strata: from prostitutes to prosperous businessmen, from shoemakers to tavern owners, from garbage collectors to sculptors, from boardinghouse dwellers to grand hotel guests, and from thieves to assassins to messianic anarchists. As he had done in the two *Paradox* novels, *Zalacáin* and *Camino de Perfección*, Baroja utilizes his protagonist not only in his role of principal character but also as the center of the plot and the delineator of the narrative. Consequently, the narrative structure is again dis-

perse and nearly plotless, resembling a juxtaposed succession of vignettes or daily occurrences in the life of Manuel and those with whom he comes into contact.

The Quest thematically, structurally, and protagonistically is a typical picaresque novel. Manuel worries about nothing but food and shelter, having to live by his wits. At times he has neither, and his struggle is so difficult that he ends up with nothing more than a meal or a cot. The quest announced in the title symbolizes Manuel's unrewarding job-to-job search for economic, social, and sentimental stability. Instead he reaps a painful, intimate, and lasting knowledge of Madrid's lower working and criminal classes. His "struggle for life" extends to the menial and sometimes unlawful occupations of errand boy, baker's apprentice, photographer, typesetter, junk collector, petty thief, confidence man, and jailbird. The last few of these experiences carry Manuel into *Weeds* where the focuses of his existence gradually expand from the previous preoccupations of food and shelter to the less despairing choice of where to work and in what capacity. The turning point in his aimless existence comes when, caught sleeping with a group of vagrants in the city's outskirts, he halfway understands one policeman say to another: "These [bums] are no longer redeemable."¹⁴ Realizing that all he has to do to fall into a life of misery, poverty, sickness, and early death is to continue as he has been, Manuel—with the providential aid of his friend Roberto Hastings—actively opts for a change. The most telling sign of Manuel's stepping into the establishment side of life is his collaboration with the policeman Ortiz to capture his one-time friend "El Bizco" wanted for yet another murder. There is a final hopeful—though weak and almost dream-like—note in *Weeds* when Manuel and his friend Jesús contemplate a starry sky while they stroll aimlessly in the suburbs of Madrid, musing aloud about a brighter future. This wistful ending sets the tone for the last installment of "The Struggle for Life."

Red Dawn, a title that both threatens and bodes well, alludes to the promise of a new life, but also warns of the dangers involved in the excesses that anarchy and other revolutionary ideas can wreak upon everyone. Touched by them, Manuel's brother Juan, an ardent and idealistic anarchist, becomes a victim of his own ideological fervor; a similar fate overtakes other friends, among them Jesús. Ironically, the latter's sister, Salvadora, unable to "save" her own brother, manages to intercede on behalf of Manuel's spiritual well-

being, thus rescuing him from the dangers that had engulfed the rest. Manuel's marriage to Salvadora and the ownership of a printing shop complete his transformation from a displaced indigent to an established petit bourgeois.

Overly laden with ideological commentary, the narrative structure of *Red Dawn* turns from disperse to discursive. The tempo slows to a crawl when ideology and action are merely discussed and argued about by the proponents and opponents of differing factions. In the end Baroja need not have gone to such lengths, since he implicitly managed to discredit spokesmen of all persuasions (anarchists, socialists, monarchists) through their caricaturesque behavior. Besides, though Baroja—like Manuel—may have seen little harm in talking revolution, he also saw little benefit in participating in it. Manuel's marriage results in relative economic prosperity but intellectual discontent—a balance that probably struck Baroja as the only compromise that life willingly extends to most individuals.

Resignation from Life

Only one gesture binds the three diverse novels in "La raza" (Race), *La dama errante* (The wandering lady, 1908), *La ciudad de la niebla* (The city of fog, 1909), and *El árbol de la ciencia* (The Tree of Knowledge, 1911), into a trilogy—the nexus being that all center on a physician: the first two on the same character named Enrique Aracil, the third on a totally different person, Andrés Hurtado. The tenuous connection between *La dama errante* and *La ciudad de la niebla* is maintained only insofar as both works have as a historical basis the assassination attempt by the anarchist revolutionary Mateo Morral against Spain's King Alfonso XIII on his wedding day, 31 May, 1906.¹⁵ Further similarities are nonexistent both between these two works and also when compared with *The Tree of Knowledge*. The latter truly stands alone, not only in terms of subject matter, structure, and characters, but also by reason of its merit as an autonomous work of art. *The Tree of Knowledge*, Baroja's own favorite novel, was written at the height of his intellectual powers and represents the zenith of the genre as practiced by the Generation of 1898. It is, at the same time, recognizably Barojian, individualistic, and generational. Of undeniable narrative interest, *The Tree of Knowledge* also contains a profoundly philosophical commentary, presented in the long dialogues between Andrés Hurtado and his uncle Dr.

Iturrioz, which is so perfectly integrated into the novel that without it the protagonist's future existence and death would be incomprehensible. *The Tree of Knowledge*, first and foremost, is a novel of character and thesis, which takes philosophy—mostly Schopenhauerian pessimism—to mean not only a manner of thinking, but also a way of acting out—that is, living—these notions. Besides being a work of a truly original nature, it is notable for its autobiographical content, since, although Baroja was similar in personality to many of his protagonists, he came closest in age, temperament, occupation, philosophical outlook, and even place of residence to Andrés Hurtado.¹⁶

Of generational interest in a critical sense, *The Tree of Knowledge* touches upon nearly all of the dimensions that Unamuno, Valle Inclán, Baroja, Azorín, and Maeztu customarily depicted as lacking in Spanish society. Criticism of life in the big city has as its backdrop Madrid, where Baroja does not neglect any social, economic, or political aspect deserving of a chastising note. On the entertainment scene, he rails against the bloody spectacle of bullfighting where masses are concerned and the casino where the idle and the rich drink, plot, and gamble. Neither institutions nor professions escape Baroja's wrath: universities and professors, hospitals and doctors, the armed forces and military personnel, government and state officials, theaters and dramatists, newspapers and the press corps; all of these and other lesser culprits in Spain's downhill slide toward the morass that had already begun to envelop the country come in for repeated and direct criticism. Set precisely in the years contemporary with the Spanish-American War, part 6, "La experiencia en Madrid" (The experience in Madrid), exhibits an unbiased estimation of Spain at the turn of the century through the clinical eyes of Dr. Iturrioz, who (having earlier been in America) forecasts accurately for his nephew Andrés the sure outcome of the uneven conflict between Spain and the United States. In contrast to the doctor's sobering and cynical appraisal, Baroja tells—from Andrés's ingenuous point of view—of the prevailing Spanish attitudes that, fueled by the rhetoric of a bombastic press and an ineffective government, mislead Spaniards into thinking that the United States forces lack the will to fight. The outcome, as predicted by Dr. Iturrioz, reinforces Andrés's admiration of his uncle and makes him the only man from whom Andrés seeks counsel and friendship thereafter.

Completely steeped in this background of generational and historical concerns, man's existential predicament is embodied in the life of Andrés Hurtado. As expected, in Baroja's fiction character dictates narrative structure and *The Tree of Knowledge* is no different. The protagonist's actions, thoughts, and words prescribe the route of the novel; nothing happens without Hurtado around. His outlook on life reflects faithfully the pessimistic ideas of the philosopher Schopenhauer, especially those found in his 1819 treatise *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (*The World as Will and Idea*). Baroja, who owned a copy of it in French and who had read it many times, fictionalized a great many of its contentions in this novel, among them the argument that knowledge meant suffering. E. Inman Fox, quoting, from book 4 of *The World as Will and Idea*, writes: "the more distinctly a man knows, the more intelligent he is, the more pain he has; the man who is gifted with genius suffers most of all."¹⁷

The central idea around which Baroja erected the narrative and structural framework, as well as the changing character of his protagonist Andrés Hurtado, is the age-old *sic et nunc* (yes and no) debate between action and thought. Andrés, when finally prepared to posit this dilemma on his own—life or reflection?—hears his oracle uncle Iturrioz tell him that only two choices remain open to him. Either he does nothing and adopts an indifferent attitude toward life or he can choose to act but with the following caveat: he must limit the radius of his actions lest he become ineffective in accomplishing them.¹⁸ Andrés, with some exceptions (he marries against his uncle's advice), chooses the second option and begins to act within a well-defined and narrow scope.

Andrés's desired success, which he may have unconsciously targeted as *ataraxia* (a state of peace or contentment without religious or even ethical overtones insofar as the Greeks defined it), does not come about any more than it had up to this decisive moment in his life. Each of the successive stages in Andrés's existence constitutes a failure, from the time he is first seen as a teenager until he takes his own life at the end of the book. As a son he fails in his intolerance of his father's vices and extravagant attitudes, symbolically seeking isolation and refuge from his family in the home's attic. He fails as a student because, though intelligent and caring, he does not apply himself and has to resort to Dr. Iturrioz to intercede with the professors he hates in order to pass his courses. He fails as a practicing physician because, unwilling to compromise his principles, he be-

comes increasingly unsociable and alienates himself from his patients and colleagues alike. He fails as a husband because he considers love and sex the price that he must pay for the companionship he seeks in the marriage. Ultimately Andrés fails as a man because, though operating within a reduced scope—symbolically, he has ordered most of the walls in their married apartment torn down so that there is one large main room where he works, eats, sleeps, and carries out most of his activities—he cannot either act in his capacity as the healer of others (he is reduced to translating and eventually writing essays for a medical journal) or go on living when his wife and son die at childbirth.

As an admirer of Espronceda,¹⁹ Andrés shared the great romantic poet's vital dilemma: his ideals were out of tune with life's baser reality. Life, for both, could never measure up to what either wanted it to be. This irreconcilable difference led Espronceda to dwell poetically on the only solution—death, or the peace of the sepulcher as he put it.²⁰ Andrés imitated him, but in a very real sense, by injecting himself with an overdose of a morphine derivative. When life's burden of awareness became too painful for Andrés to bear alone, he simply chose to withdraw from it. He may have been a precursor of a better life as Baroja wrote in the last paragraph, in the sense that he was at least able to achieve an ephemeral *ataraxia*—the very brief weeks of a precariously content marriage.²¹

The End of a Road

The trilogy "Las Ciudades" (The cities) incorporates the most heterogeneous group of Baroja's novels. Only a studied search for links among *César o nada* (*Caesar or Nothing*, 1910), *El mundo es así* (*The way of the world*, 1912), and *La sensualidad pervertida* (*Amorous Experiments of a Simpleminded Man in a Degenerate Age*, 1920) divulges a slight similarity in the misfortunes of each of the protagonists and in the widening span of Baroja's narrative geography. In "The Cities" the fictional horizon shifts from small towns not only to the large Spanish capitals but also to the great cosmopolitan cities of Rome, Florence, Paris, and Geneva. And yet, whether the plot unfolds in a European setting or in a rural Spanish province, Baroja's pessimistic outlook on life remains unchanged. The failed political ambitions depicted in *Caesar or Nothing* are echoed in the personal and senti-

mental frustrations that Luis Murguía and Sacha Savaroff endure respectively in *Amorous Experiments* . . . and *El mundo es así*.

El mundo es así is the last of Baroja's narratives to take place in a contemporary setting; henceforth they focus on the past. This novel also concludes his initial period of innovation and growth in the art of storytelling; later works show no new techniques and no significant departures from the writer's methodology, which had matured in the years 1902 to 1912. As if to signal an end to his novelistic experimentation, in 1912 Baroja began to work in earnest on the twenty-two-volume series of the *Memorias de un hombre de acción*.

Referred to by one critic as "his most consistently pessimistic novel,"²² *El mundo es así* offers Baroja's readers a more ample vision, both in terms of characters and locations, than *The Tree of Knowledge*. In this new work the protagonists travel throughout most of the European continent, not just through Spain. Its plot develops almost entirely in a grey and melancholy autumn, consonant with the empty and sad lives of men and women existing on the fringes of communal society, whose destiny alternately showers cruelty, egotism, and harshness upon them. The novel begins in medias res, as the protagonist Sacha, a young Russian divorced from a wretched Swiss Jew, remarries the Spanish painter Juan Velasco, a bon vivant whose only goal is to turn life into a party. The marriage predictably fails. Sacha, once again alone and totally abject, returns to her native country. She realizes in time, however, that her flight to Russia has meant a hurt for someone else in turn, José Ignacio Arcelu, the man who had shown her unrequited love.

A series of repeated sentimental disillusionments, quite similar to the above cited, make up the narrative linear structure of this novel. Its title comes from the legend Sacha found in a coat of arms carved in stone, showing three daggers gripped by as many clenched fists arranged in the shape of a cross and stabbing three hearts. An old stone house in the Basque location of Navaridas where Baroja really did discover the downed coat of arms in 1909, along with his trips to Italy, Switzerland, and France between 1907 and 1909, place author and character much closer to one another than would seem likely at first. Sacha, a medical doctor like the novelist himself, betrays in her hyperaesthetic spirit a kinship to Baroja's own sensibilities. In *El mundo es así* it is easy to discern how, in Baroja's eyes, the ways of the world amount to little more than cruelty,

grief, and ingratitude. A climate of bitterness and desolation permeates the whole of a work whose title becomes a constant reminder on the lips of Sacha. In a lyrical, melancholy, and disillusioned final paragraph the female protagonist complains: "Yes, everything is violent and cruel in life. So, what to do? One can't stop living, one can't stop, we have to keep going until the very end."²³

"Such is life," then would seem to be the inescapable concept that Baroja has of society as a whole. And while these may be discouraging words by which to characterize not only *El mundo es así*, but the bulk of Baroja's novels, neither their universality nor their timelessness can be appealed. The Irish novelist and playwright Samuel Beckett echoed them a quarter of a century later in *The Unnamable* (1949) in which the final lines read: "Where I am, I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on."²⁴ Baroja's undeniable pessimism, an even attitude throughout his novelistic production, so clearly voiced in the *homo homini lupus* (man is a wolf to his fellowmen) stance of Dr. Iturrioz in *The Tree of Knowledge*,²⁵ brings forth a body of fiction with few heroes, and little idealism or drama. For Baroja, life can be endured provided one is lucky. Thus, only a numbered few of his protagonists survive unscathed.