Critical Guides to Spanish Texts

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PÍO BAROJA

El mundo es ansí

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Prefatory Note

The interpretation of *El mundo es así* that the reader will find here is to the best of my knowledge an entirely new one. This Critical Guide has not been conceived primarily as a guide to existing criticism – criticism of specific novels of Baroja is in any case scant and *El mundo es así* is no exception – but has been born rather out of my own dissatisfaction with most existing criticism and out of my belief that if we abandon all critical preconceptions about Baroja's art and devote our energies instead to a close study of the novels we may yet see Baroja in a quite different light. Far from being a deadpan realist who should have been writing many decades earlier, Baroja was, I believe, acutely in tune with the major artistic preoccupations of his time and may well have been the most 'modern' of his generation of writers. Baroja was living at a time when the nature and function of the novel was under review, not just in Spain but in the whole of the Western world, and *El mundo es así* is, as I hope to show, very much a product of its age. I have therefore thought it necessary, before embarking on the study of *El mundo es así*, to inform or to remind the reader of some of the basic issues of early twentieth-century fiction.

The figures in parentheses in italic type refer to the numbered items in the Bibliographical Note; where appropriate, the italicised figures are followed by page numbers. Page references on their own refer to the edition of *El mundo es así* prepared by D. L. Shaw and published by Pergamon Press, Oxford, 1970. Quotations from other works of Baroja are taken from the *Obras completas* (8 vols, 1947–51) and are indicated by the letters *OC*, followed by volume and page numbers.

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sustained itself by its claim to follow the systematic and disciplined approach of science. But in the late nineteenth century the enthusiasm for science waned sharply: indeed it is no exaggeration to talk of a widespread collapse of confidence in the ability of science to offer satisfactory explanations of the questions that mattered most to man. The rapid decline of scientific rationalism had a deep impact on the world of the novel. "The very fact that naturalism had declared itself so unequivocally made its position untenable when the scientific substructure collapsed, and quickly led to the discrediting of the realist idea in general in so far as it depended on external philosophical support."[2]

But although the naturalistic brand of realism became rapidly discredited, realism itself was too deeply embedded in Western culture, counting too many great names among its followers – Stendhal, Balzac, Tolstoy – for the idea itself to be denounced. No writer would wish his work to be labelled unreal. What took place at the turn of the century was therefore not an abandonment of realism but its transformation; it was the nineteenth-century approach to fiction that was abandoned, not the idea of realism itself. Thus we find many novelists of the first half of the twentieth century claiming to be realists even though their approach is markedly different from that of nineteenth-century novelists.

It has become fashionable in some quarters to view the work of the new writers at the beginning of the century as a response to social and economic factors, but such an interpretation is incapable of accounting for many of the characteristics of this new literature. The crucial factors were philosophical and artistic rather than social or economic. Nineteenth-century realism was simply a convention of novel writing whose elasticity allowed for different approaches and styles. But it was built on the assumption that there existed an objective reality outside and independent of the work of art which the novelist could aspire in some measure to study and reproduce. Although few nineteenth-century novelists would accept that they were doing nothing more than copying reality, one can at any rate say that realism arose out of a belief in the evident

[2] Damian Grant, *Realism*, The Critical Idiom, IX (London, 1970), p. 44. This succinct study is the most lucid exposition I know of the whole question of nineteenth-century realism and its transformation in the twentieth century.

truth of the external world. It is this belief that was questioned and even rejected at the turn of the century. The philosophy of Kant, given a new lease of life by Schopenhauer, was revived: objective reality is unknowable since the human mind acts as a filter imposing its own structures on the objects it perceives through the senses, thus conditioning our entire knowledge of the external world. We cannot in point of fact know things directly; we always and necessarily see things through the distorting mechanism of the mind. There is no world independent of our senses; what we believe to be objective reality is only subjective reality: I see things not as they really exist but as my mind tells me they exist. The only authentic reality therefore is within and not without. Twentieth-century novelists implicitly, sometimes even explicitly, repudiate an approach to fiction which is posited on an objective concept of reality and replace this with an approach in which the reality depicted is seen as the creation of the artist's consciousness. The new novelists do not reject realism, nor do they reject the world; they merely reject a realism limited to the material world. They would claim that they have achieved a more genuine vision of reality: "What all the moderns have in common – perhaps the only thing they have in common – is an insistence on the fact that what previous generations had taken for *the world* was only *the world seen through the spectacles of habit.*"[3]

To understand the nature of the change that occurs in the art of novel writing at the turn of the century it is vital to recognize that the course of fiction is altered by a new vision of experience: the world may still be there, but it is no longer seen with the same eyes. It is the changing mode of our perception of the world that lies at the root of the new novel. Twentieth-century novelists are no longer content to see the novel as a realistic representation of life – things are no longer as they seem. There is a radical insecurity in man's perception of the world, and this leads novelists to question the basis of their art and experiment with new techniques. For if the novel is no longer a representation or an exploration of an objective reality, then what is it? For many writers the newly-found freedom from the – for them –

[3] Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book*, 2nd edition (London, 1973), p. xv.

straitjacket of the nineteenth-century realistic formula is a source not of rejoicing but of anxiety. They have to find a new justification for their art, and this is far from easy, given that "the subjective experience ... is the only objective experience".[4] For if anything I care to write is acceptable, then why write at all? Why is what I write important or meaningful if I could have written a thousand other things instead? Indeed it has been said that "a complete realism is indistinguishable from a complete solipsism, since I am not an object in the world but the limits of my world" (Josipovici, *The World and the Book*, p. 312). But the best writers steer clear of solipsism, that is, of the belief that the self is all one can know, though the surrealists do not always manage to avoid the danger.[5] The problem of the expression of reality is an urgent and pressing one for the twentieth-century novelist, and the technical innovation and experimental unorthodoxy that characterizes the work of almost every major novelist of the Western world in this century is but a search for a formula that will imbue the work with a coherent concept of its own nature, that will justify its existence. The question 'why?' turns into the question 'how?'. How can I as a creative writer best convey to my readers my own concept of the truth, of reality? The message becomes dependent on the medium to such an extent that the two are often indistinguishable, or to put it another way, the novel becomes an exploration of its own possibilities as an art-form. Indeed it is no exaggeration to say that the fictional world becomes more complex and ambiguous than the real one, not only because it is not just a supposed reproduction of a pre-existing reality, but also because it has become a mode of perception rather than an object perceived. A new contract is established between the novelist and the world: reality is still there, but not for the taking; it has to be created, because what counts now is not *what*

[4] Cited by René Wellek in his essay "The Concept of Realism in Literary Scholarship", in *Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven and London, 1963), p. 237.

[5] Surrealism aimed at expressing the subconscious side of man mainly by the use of unusual images and unexpected associations. Just as the naturalism of Zola was the terminal form of nineteenth-century realism, surrealism may be looked upon as the extreme form of early twentieth-century subjectivism. But by and large the novel avoids the surrealist mode.

one sees, but *how* one sees it. Malcolm Bradbury explains it this way:

> The novel – and realism – as Trilling defines these things, do not die out in our century. But they are qualified, and that is a reminder that realism is like reality – that is, not an *absolute*, but a mode of perception, which is subject both to historical change and to subjective interpretation. And novels tend to draw their notions of what is realistic from prevailing and influential views of what orders human experience. (The views of Darwin and the social determinists of early sociological thought lie behind naturalism; the views of Freud and Jung lie behind the realistic psychological novel, the novel of consciousness; the views of Heidegger and Sartre lie behind many of the modern novels which heighten realistic contingency into a philosophy of the absurd.) Certainly the novel does have an inevitable bias towards realism – because it uses the most literal of literary languages, prose; because it tends to emphasise the authenticity of individual and personal experience; because it tends to deal in human relationships; because it does not really have a predetermined form (as tragedy does) but can let the form emerge. But its realism can be expressed so variously that we can speak of realism as a changing attribute of the form, not as a definition of it.[6]

The alleged crisis of the novel in the early part of this century – to which one frequently comes across references in histories of literature – is not a crisis of the novel at all but a crisis of how novels should be written. The whole crucial question of the nature and perception of reality, when transposed into the realm of fictional writing, is subsumed in the problem of form. A new view of reality necessitates a new medium for expressing that view, and the new medium, precisely because it is born out of a new concept of reality, is in turn conditioned by that concept. But the new concept of reality is one that stresses the validity of the individual consciousness, that is, of your or my or anyone's perception of the world. Thus, while a new approach to novel writing is everywhere advocated, there are as many different approaches as there are novelists: Conrad, Faulkner, Gide,

[6] *What is a Novel?* (London, 1969), p. 29.

Hesse, Huxley, Joyce, Kafka, Lawrence, Mann, Sartre, Woolf – each one has his approach to the common problem of 'how shall I write?' Generalizations about the modern novel are therefore fraught with difficulties. But some attempt to understand the new fictional mode is essential if we are to approach Baroja – a product of the new generation of writers – in the right frame of mind. To study the modern novel, or any one of its many representatives, in the very terms of the nineteenth-century novel is to condemn oneself to superficiality and misconception from the start. We must abandon preconceived notions about such typically nineteenth-century values as plot, characterization, storyline, orderly exposition, climax, denouement and so on, if we are to give ourselves a chance of meeting twentieth-century fictional art on its own ground. At this juncture some generalizations are mandatory in order to place Baroja in the context to which he belongs.

Man's conviction that there is a world, Schopenhauer points out, lies within his own consciousness. It can never be proved that objective existence is independent of human cognition. Many twentieth-century novelists, accepting Schopenhauer's view, have come to believe that the only real existence lies within an individual's own consciousness. Events and objects in themselves cease to have any meaning; they are important only in so far as they are perceived by or have an effect upon a consciousness. The novelistic universe is not so much given as perceived by a character. And so it is that in many modern novels the reader finds himself peering all the time, in a manner that can sometimes become quite oppressive, into the consciousness of the central character. The extreme form is to be found in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, where we read the thoughts of the characters even before they have become normal speech. A more common reflection of the notion of seeing reality as the creation of a consciousness can be observed in one of Henry James's favourite techniques, that of using the mind of one character as a "centre of consciousness" through which all events are reflected. James thus renders his story, as he says, "not as my own impersonal account of the affair in hand, but as my account of somebody's impression of it". In

general terms it would be true to say that the modern novel deals not with events but with mental states. There is a strong interest in abnormal human types – the eccentric, the schizophrenic, the neurotic, the morbid, the perverse, the idiotic – and even normal beings tend to be seen from a pathological standpoint. Thus the emphasis on consciousness has carried with it a strong interest in personality.

The collapse of confidence in rationalism brings in its trail the abandonment of the idea that human beings behave rationally, or that their behaviour can always be rationally explained. By and large the nineteenth-century novel reflects a stable world, with man in control of that world. Most things were orderly and predictable, including the behaviour of the characters, whose consequentiality has been denounced in this century by André Gide as artificial (in *The Counterfeiters*). The behaviour of characters in the modern novel appears by contrast to be often surprising, inexplicable, contradictory, even pointless. The characters are restless, indecisive, moving from extreme self-assertion to gnawing self-doubt within a short space of time, an enigma to themselves no less than to the reader. At bottom lies the modern interest in personality. The nineteenth-century naturalists had portrayed the individual as being wholly determined by his background: it was the environment that formed personality. Twentieth-century writers on the other hand regard personality as something singular, unique, not so much predetermined as always in the making. The environment is still there, not as a formative influence but as one component of the world observed by the individual consciousness. It is much more a source of disconcertment than of illumination. Baffled and frustrated individuals are a commonplace in the modern novel.

Individual experience in real life is of course a continuing process: it can never be complete; it can end only in the death of that particular individual consciousness. Twentieth-century novelists have tried to reflect this in their work by refusing to present a closed experience in the manner of the nineteenth-century novelist. A climax, a denouement, a well-rounded conclusion to a well-contained action, a resolution of themes, a satisfying end: these conventions come under a mounting attack

towards the end of the nineteenth century and they soon give way to quite contrary practices.[7] In the modern novel the flux of consciousness ends in the experience of incompletion; the new way is to present a disturbing, expanding, unfinished experience. This openness of experience is well illustrated by such novels as Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, Kafka's *The Trial* and Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. Life is seen as having no design, simply an open form, an endless process. Within the events of the novel, a protagonist will indeed often attempt to resolve experiences, but usually with no final result. Many twentieth-century novels fail to resolve the problems posed and are left by their authors in a state of irresolvable suspension. This deliberate avoidance of any final resolution in the depiction of an experience is a narrative device intended to reflect a philosophical position: the belief that experience cannot be closed. " 'Might be continued' – these are the words with which I should like to finish *The Counterfeiters*", André Gide writes in his novel.

There can be no statement of completion in a world which is contingent rather than purposeful. The essential contingency of the world, with its concomitant moral and philosophical implications, is one of the major discoveries of the twentieth-century novel in terms of the impact which it has had on technique. Novelists have looked for different ways to order experience, ways which would avoid imposing a logical consistency and a causal relevance on the elements of that experience. For an individual, his existence is given, it is in no way necessary or logical: he simply has to accept the fact that he exists. In Sartre's *La Nausée*, the protagonist, Roquentin, puts it this way:

> The essential thing is contingency. What I mean is that, by definition, existence is not necessity. To exist is simply *to be there*; those who exist appear, *are encountered*, but their existence could never be deduced. There are some people, I think, who have understood that; but they have tried to overcome this contingency by inventing a necessary being as their cause. No necessary being, however, can explain existence: contingency is not a mask, an appearance that can be dissipated; it is something that is absolute, and therefore perfectly gratuitous. Everything is gratuitous, those gardens, this town and I myself.[8]

[7] "Hardy's sour refusal to make ends meet in his novels, and Conrad's appendages ('the end such as it is'), are moments in a gradual change in the temper of fiction which is clearly more than temperamental. In the twentieth century, fiction will create a new fable. It will soon be telling its readers that experience is unreduced and irreducible. The novel will soon not only refuse to be 'final', but insist on its right to be not even 'satisfying'" (Alan Friedman, *The Turn of the Novel* [Oxford, 1966], p. 105).

The view of existence as essentially contingent is reflected in the modern novel in the way the author puts his material together. The causally-linked plot, typical of the nineteenth-century novel, was the offspring of the concept of linear causation. By the end of the eighteenth century linear causation became the accepted method of explaining the relationship between sequential events, and it controlled systematic thinking in the physical sciences and in economics, something that can be observed in the new scientific and economic determinism that led in the nineteenth century to Darwinism and Marxism. Correspondingly, novelistic plots were organized according to the principle of linear causation, with the outcome seen as the inexorable result of the working of the machine set in motion by the author. The collapse of faith in scientific rationalism, the conviction that existence cannot be rationally explained, brings with it, in the realm of the novel, a change in the manner of plotting. Tightly-knit, causally-linked plots all but disappear. The emphasis is now on the accidental, the gratuitous, the farcical and even at times the downright absurd. In the search for what is purely contingent, the distinction between what is relevant and irrelevant is almost lost; because relevant or irrelevant to what? Since man is apparently not moving towards an intelligible goal, who can say what is relevant or irrelevant?

But a novel is a created world, and in art at least a world needs a creator, who will in the process of creation impose a pattern on the formless elements that constitute his raw material. Thus, while many twentieth-century novelists may reject the convention of the causally-linked plot where every part fits into another like the cog-wheels in a piece of machinery, they have needed to employ other principles of ordering. These have been

[8] Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Nausée* (Paris, 1938), p. 166.

many. Instead of being held together by a scheme of logical development, many modern narratives have only the continuous presence of a central character as the source of cohesion. Myth and symbol as points of reference to guide the reader are also employed with some frequency. A new concept of time sometimes displaces conventional chronology, giving the novel an unfamiliar but perceivable pattern. Or there may be an intensification of the depiction of a character's inner nature, thus affording the novel a psychological unity. Some authors – Huxley, Mann, Pérez de Ayala – have even attempted to transpose to the realm of the novel techniques used in musical composition. Thus, while many modern novels do not 'tell a story' in the traditional sense – and we are simply wasting our time if we read *Ulysses*, *To the Lighthouse*, *La Peste*, *La Nausée* or a hundred and one other novels just for the story – they do at any rate offer some other principle or method of cohesion. Ultimately what has happened as we have moved from the nineteenth- to the twentieth-century novel is that one set of criteria has been replaced by another, though the new criteria have turned out to be rather more complex and difficult than the traditional ones.

The breakdown of the traditional concept of reality as something absolute and unchanging leads to a relativistic view of life that brings to the novel a wave of experimenting with perspective. Truth is not absolute but relative to the observer. Many novelists cease to offer us *the* truth and offer instead the view of a particular mind. The angle from which the narrative is presented becomes of paramount importance; but the narrative need not be limited to one angle: many different points of view can be employed, and this is a technique known as perspectivism, a technique on which the variations are legion. Joyce's *Ulysses* has the triple vision of Stephen Daedalus, Bloom and Molly, Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* uses a different perspective for each of the four constituent novels, Faulkner's trilogy *The Village*, *The Town* and *The Mansion* shares out the narrative among different characters none of whom can tell the complete truth of the case in question, while Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* presents the interior monologues of six different persons. In these and many other cases unilateral vision is replaced by a multi-dimensional,

kaleidoscopic approach, and we the readers do not learn *the* truth but only differing versions of it. The technique of perspectivism may be seen as the expression of a world in which nothing seems solid, secure and enduring, a world threatened by a crisis of beliefs in many spheres, moral, social, political, and by the suspicion that one being may be unable to understand another. Just as Einstein taught us that our appreciation of the cosmos and of space and time is relative to our position in the universe, so the modern novelist contends that each individual's view of the world, of society, of other people, is dictated by his own peculiar and unique constitution. Instead of solving the secret of an existence or the behaviour of a character as the traditional novelist was wont to do, the modern novelist prefers to emphasize the mysterious and incomprehensible sides of human existence and the difficulty of meaningful communication between beings. The use of multiple perspectives is one of the most effective tools that the modern novelist can use in order not only to express the insecurity of human perception but also to convey that sense of confusion, of disintegration, of isolation, of alienation in modern man.

The realization that man occupies a marginal and insignificant place in the universe, that seen on a cosmic scale he is nothing but an irrelevance, and that he is at the mercy of forces over which he has no control, has led many writers to adopt an intensely ironic view of the human situation. What is ironic is that one side of man persists in looking for meaning and purpose while another side of him declares that his search is futile. "The metaphysical principle of irony ... resides in the contradictions within our nature and also in the contradictions within the universe or God. The ironic attitude implies that there is in things a basic contradiction, that is to say, from the point of view of our reason, a fundamental and irremediable absurdity."[9] The irresolvable tensions in modern man between reason and emotion, between freedom and discipline, between society and the individual, between the certainty of death and the biological will to live, between the huge increase in scientific knowledge and the realization that we are not one step nearer to providing satisfying

[9] Georges Palante, a French critic, writing in 1906. Cited in D. C. Muecke, *Irony*, The Critical Idiom, XIII (London, 1970), p. 67.

answers to the most basic questions, lead to the adoption of an ironic detachment as a last line of defence. "For him who sees no possibility of reconciling such opposites the only alternative is irony: a sense of irony will not make him any the less a victim of these predicaments but will enable him in some degree to transcend them" (Muecke, p. 77).

But it is not merely man who is trapped; the novelist *qua* artist too is trapped by the constraints of his art. For a novel purports to deal with a truth, a reality. It may be a fiction, but while we are reading it we are asked to treat it 'as if' it were true. Yet a novelist can make his novel seem true only by referring to the world we all recognize. At the same time most twentieth-century writers subscribe to the symbolist view that art is an order beyond and outside life, that it can never be an interpretation of the world. The novelist is landed with an intractable problem: the world of his book can only be the world of his own creative consciousness; yet he aspires to communicate his vision to other beings. This necessity of having to present as in some way an objective truth something that is nothing but an artifice leads in many cases to the novelist viewing his creation ironically, and communicating that irony to the reader by reminding him during the course of his work that he is reading nothing but a verbal invention. This type of ironic novel, common in the twentieth century, though not unknown in the seventeenth and eighteenth, is "literature in which there is a constant dialectic interplay of objectivity and subjectivity, freedom and necessity, the appearance of life and the reality of art, the author immanent in every part of his work as its creative, vivifying principle and transcending his work as its objective 'presenter' " (Muecke, p. 78).

The adoption of an ironic posture on the part of so many modern novelists strongly suggests that there exists a high degree of artistic self-doubt. In exploring a world that he regards as meaningless, the artist may easily come to doubt the meaning and purpose of his art. If life is a deception, then art may be an even greater deception. Life does not make sense to modern man, and yet within the realm of art it is given a type of meaning. The irony of art is that it is gratuitous, an order of beauty and meaning devised by man in a senseless universe. Most great artists

aspire to confront their age face to face and to convey its nature and complexities. But an irrational age puts the artist in an impossible position; irrationality cannot be communicated in a verbal constructon except by making it in some way rational. The modern reply to this, if it is a reply at all, is that art is one thing and life another, and each is independent of the other. Nietzsche went further, and in his work *The Will to Power: An Attempted Transvaluation of All Values*, proclaimed that art was of more value than reality: "Art is the great means of making life possible, the great seducer to life, the great stimulus of life."[10] This is echoed by a recent critic who proclaims the "artificiality of the real and the reality of the artificial", and who asserts the "paradoxical notion that we can truly experience life only through art".[11] But such energetic affirmations of the superiority of art over life sound hollow. They fail to dispel the gnawing doubts about the validity of art: in a meaningless universe, can art be anything but meaningless? If he knows not how life functions, can the artist know how art functions? Is the artist's belief in creative art as a means of self-realization a mere illusion that hides the simple fact that his work is but one more useless way of spinning out the tedious thread of time? Nineteenth-century novelists, whatever their shortcomings, had at any rate felt confident about their art and conveyed this confidence to their readers. After the collapse of confidence in rationalism and the abandonment of its novelistic offspring – realism and naturalism – the art of the novel continues to flourish, but it flourishes in an atmosphere of insecurity, disorientation and self-doubt.[12]

In Spain, the novelists who break with the nineteenth-century fictional mode are Unamuno, Valle-Inclán, Baroja, Azorín and

[10] Nietzsche, *Complete Works*, edited by Oscar Levy, Vol. XV (London, 1913), p. 290.

[11] Robert Scholes, *The Fabulators* (New York and Oxford, 1967), pp. 20–1.

[12] The student who wishes to read more on the early twentieth-century novel in general could consult J. Isaacs, *An Assessment of Twentieth Century Literature* (first published London, 1951, reprinted Port Washington, N.Y., 1968). Chapters 3 and 4 are on the novel. Also useful, if of uneven quality, is *Modernism*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury (Harmondsworth, 1976). Chapter 6 contains seven essays on the novel, some of them excellent.

Pérez de Ayala. They have more in common with those European writers mentioned earlier than they have with nineteenth-century Spanish writers. They are moved by the ambition to create a new type of fiction in which the external world will enter as one component rather than as the total substance. In their search for a fresh formula they strip the novel of its objective habits. They introduce philosophical ideas, poetic evocations, and the inner strivings of the self. The renovation of content is accompanied by a renovation of form, with the abandonment of the conventional causal plot and the adoption of techniques the variety of which is subsumed in the all-pervading question of the relationship of an author to his work.

Unamuno's fiction dramatizes his own anguished struggle between mind and heart, and even in those novels where this is not done in an overtly metaphysical framework, the metaphysical implications are nevertheless still there. This is the case of such novels as *Abel Sánchez* and *La tía Tula*, the protagonists of which engage in a search for a personal identity or role in life that will in some way enable them to transcend the limitations and finality of material existence. For Unamuno the novel is an exploration of and a meditation on the spiritual condition of man. But this meditation, to be valuable, to be alive, must be deeply rooted in the writer's self. "Toda novela, toda obra de ficción, todo poema, cuando es vivo es autobiográfico", he declares. Unamuno projects his own problems, preoccupations and anxieties, his own storm-tossed image of himself, in such a way that his works convey a powerful impression of the creative consciousness behind them. His occasional capricious and burlesque insertions, for which he is sometimes criticized, can be seen on one plane as an ironic comment on man's situation and on another as an assertion of the essential irrationality of the artist's task. For if true art is nothing but autobiography, then there is no art.

Unamuno's views on the novel are in several respects strikingly similar to Baroja's. Both of them make the following points: that the plot of the novel ("el argumento") is immaterial; that the creation of existential beings is the important thing; that the polished, well-finished, neatly rounded-off novel is an inferior, lifeless product; that the novel should aspire to be like life itself,

"organismo y no mecanismo" in Unamuno's words. It is interesting that both of these writers, whose products are seemingly so different, should appeal to life as the basis of their art and should react against the realistic art of the nineteenth century because they found it too mechanical. Clearly what these writers understand by 'life' in art is not the same as the nineteenth-century writers understood.

Valle-Inclán seems at first to be at the other extreme: that of rejecting life as the basis for art and advocating the beauty of art as an escape from the absurdity of existence. But Valle-Inclán's attitude is nothing like as simple as that. Even his early, 'aesthetic' work reveals an ironic view of the fictional characters and their world, a view that is by extension applicable not only to humanity but even to art itself: the hero of the *Sonatas*, for example, is deliberately made to adopt the pose of famous heroes from romantic fiction, so that the work rather than as an escape into a romantic dream-world can be seen as a parody of it, and therefore since the hero pretends to live in just such a world, as a parody of itself. Valle-Inclán's later work, built around the notion of *esperpentismo*, confirms that his art is much more existential than escapist, aiming at disturbing the reader rather than at providing artistic relief from the burdens of existence. The theory of *esperpentismo* (grotesque deformation) may be obscure and imprecise, but its practice leaves no doubt as to its significance: its distorting vision reflects perhaps better than any other literary phenomenon the breakdown of the traditional view of reality, a reality which it clearly invites the reader to re-assess. Valle-Inclán's novel *Tirano Banderas* is a masterpiece of *esperpentismo* in narrative fiction, in which the traditional unfolding action of narrative prose is replaced by a series of almost static frames each of which captures the characters in an absurd pose.

Fragmentation, incompleteness, suggestiveness, are the hallmarks of the novelesque world of Azorín, a highly personal world where real and fictitious planes meet in a tenuous framework of autobiography. In Azorín the narrative comes as close as possible to being static, as if the confrontation with reality produced a pained passivity in the observer, who can only stare, disconcerted. A marked quality of Azorín's narrative prose is its oscillation be-

tween photographic realism and sudden introspective plunges that verge on the solipsistic. The nature of the relationship between the inner world of the individual consciousness and the outer world of material objects is one that preoccupied Azorín intensely.

Yet another novelist who questions traditional realism in the novel is Ramón Pérez de Ayala, the most original experimenter of the Spanish novelists of that period and one who is often compared with Aldous Huxley and André Gide. Pérez de Ayala's over-riding concern in all his fiction is with perspective: it is a topic that crops up in every novel and which forms the subject of one entire work, *Belarmino y Apolonio*. Pérez de Ayala seeks a formula that will enable the novelist to convey effectively the sense of the disintegration of an objective reality into multiple individual viewpoints that is characteristic of the age, but without destroying the formal unity of a work of art. He wishes, as novelist, to look at the world with a stereoscopic vision that will embrace the multiplicity of existing viewpoints. How well he has succeeded in overcoming what he calls "the original curse of the novelist" – that is, having to describe reality instead of being able to apprehend it in three-dimensional vision – is a matter of opinion, but there is no denying his interest in employing new techniques to underline our shifting perception of the world around us. Indeed his interest in perspective is not just a matter of narrative techniques but is also reflected in his choice of material: most of Pérez de Ayala's novels involve the transformation of well-known literary themes which are now seen from an entirely new angle.

The search of these novelists for new forms is symptomatic of the new age ushered in by the twentieth century, an age in which a single, uncomplicated view of the universe can no longer be entertained. The pivot upon which the new art turns is the fundamental dualism in man: man as an object and man as a subject; man as a creature living in two worlds, the world outside him and the world inside him. This acute awareness of the two dimensions of man brings about a revolutionary change in artistic perception. The artist is no longer content with observing the universe but insists on observing himself observing the universe.

The novelistic universe is after all his own creation; it has only the reality given to it by the novelist; "la realidad circundante es una creación del artista", declares Azorín. This leads to the inevitable question: why do I as artist create this particular reality, and what is the relationship between this created reality and me? The novelist has caught himself novelizing. Self-consciousness becomes a characterizing feature to be encountered, to a differing but always significant degree, in all the five Spanish novelists mentioned, a feature which though manifesting itself in many ways is rooted in this fundamental question of the relationship of the creator to his own creation. We shall see how the dialectic creator-creation is at the very core of *El mundo es así*.

2 *Baroja's development as a novelist up to* El mundo es así

Together with Unamuno, Valle-Inclán and Antonio Machado, Baroja has passed into literary history as one of the four greatest literary creators that Spain has produced in this century. In Spain to-day he is generally regarded as the most important modern Spanish novelist after Galdós. If this is indeed so then he has been ill-served by scholars and critics, for the amount of serious critical study of his work is paltry in comparison with those of the other 'big three'. Baroja has certainly attracted a good deal of critical attention, but this has tended to be shallow and repetitious rather that illuminating, hostile or panegyrical rather than dispassionate, anecdotal and descriptive rather than analytical, concerned with ideologies rather than with art. As a result we know comparatively little of how Baroja functions as an artist, and this leads to a certain amount of puzzlement on the part of teachers and students who have to make something of Baroja without the benefit of informed criticism as a guide. This is well illustrated by the following passage from a recent and distinguished work of literary historiography:

> The reader of a typical Barojan novel has to abandon many of the principles by which he is accustomed to judge the excellence of prose fiction. The most important habit that has to be unlearnt is that of supposing that close reading of a novel, paying careful attention to the way things are said, will give a better understanding of its meaning and purpose than will a rapid and superficial perusal. The common idea that in a serious novel the characters and events are bound to signify something beyond their immediate relevance to the continuation of the narrative, and the common novelistic practice of using symbolic or allusive imagery in order to give body and feeling to the author's vision, are best forgotten when reading Baroja. Where such features exist, they seem to have crept in by accident, unknown to the author.[13]

[13] G. G. Brown, *A Literary History of Spain*, edited by R. O. Jones. *The Twentieth Century* (London, 1972), p. 33.

Can this view of Baroja be reconciled with his alleged stature as a novelist? Has Baroja perhaps been over-valued? Or is he more a victim of his critics' inadequacies than of his own? His fellow-writers Unamuno, Valle-Inclán and Machado have only relatively recently been the object of critical study of real distinction, and there are now signs that the quality of Baroja criticism is improving, so that we may hope to achieve a deeper understanding of his art than we have at present. In any case, and whatever the rights or wrongs of the view expressed in the passage just quoted, my own approach here will be informed by precisely the opposite belief: that a close reading of Baroja is absolutely essential if we are to identify and understand those significant features which, far from being accidental, have been consciously and deliberately included by the author as part of an overall pattern of meaning. Sixty years ago Ortega y Gasset declared that "Baroja es, entre los escritores de nuestro tiempo, el menos comprendido, tal vez por ser el que mayor actividad exige a sus lectores". Ortega clearly did not think that a rapid and superficial perusal was what Baroja's novels required. And Ortega was not only a very perceptive critic but also an intimate friend of Baroja's, well acquainted with the latter's work and artistic preoccupations, so perhaps it is as well to bear his words in mind.

The first difficulty the student of Baroja faces is the vastness and diversity of his output. Baroja's sixty-six novels evince such a variety of approaches that they defy generalized description of his work as a whole. He wrote adventure novels, philosophical novels, social novels, historical novels, poetic novels, psychological novels, dramatic novels, novels with complex plots and novels with no plots, novels full of description and novels without description, novels in dialogue form and novels bereft of dialogue, novels with a protagonist and novels without a protagonist. If we turn to his many writings on the subject of the novel we find that they do not permit us, any more than the novels themselves do, to pin down his concept of the art of fiction. His declared aesthetic theory can be reduced to the proposition that art should have a human value, a laudable sentiment no doubt, but an impossibly vague one. A corollary to this is his belief that a writer needs "el trampolín de la realidad para dar saltos maravillosos en el

aire" (*OC*, IV, p. 320). Imagination and reality, and the interplay between them, are thus the cornerstones of Baroja's novelistic art, just as they are of the art of most great novelists of any age. And even this undogmatic formula hides wide fluctuations, for a few of Baroja's novels are anodyne in their attachment to vulgar, everyday reality, while others are excessively novelesque.

The legitimate generalizations that can be made about Baroja's art as a whole are few, but three aspects which are of importance will be mentioned here. The first point that needs to be made is that Baroja's method is a very fluid one, and we encounter frequent changes in his approach as we move from novel to novel. There is certainly in all his work the indelible imprint of a strong mind with a particular vision of man and life, but there is no sustained application of a particular formula. Baroja himself realized this: "Un oficio en el cual no se emplea el metro es un oficio sin exactitud y sin seguridad. Ahora hay que reconocer que el oficio de novelista no tiene metro" (*OC*, IV, p. 324). This, then, is the first characteristic of Baroja the writer: his artistic eclecticism, his lack of a single, sustained aesthetic of the novel.

Baroja's versatility – his frequent changes of theme and technique – and his theoretical writings, with their endless insistence that there is no one particular technique in novel-writing, are strongly indicative of a fundamental insecurity about the nature of his art. To some extent this is true of most writers of the time and is of course due to their break with tradition and to their attempts at expressing a new view of existence. But Baroja was perhaps the most insecure writer of them all. When he writes about his art he is a mass of contradictions: he advocates a human art, yet he admits that "la novela es quizá lo que no debe ser como la vida" (*OC*, IV, p. 317); he believes that a writer has to search for truth, yet confesses that "he mirado también la literatura como juego" (*OC*, IV, p. 308); he reduces his art to the formula of imagination-rooted-in-reality, but then goes on to acknowledge that "no sé si puedo llamarme realista . . ., no sé lo que es la realidad" (*OC*, V, p. 414).

Anguished self-doubt is the second, and perhaps the dominant, characteristic of Baroja the artist, a characteristic that he infuses into the life of many of his characters, with their constant search-

ings, self-analyses and instability. Baroja is unsure of his role as a writer, of what he should write about and of how he should write it. His entire production is a sustained search for a more meaningful art. This is apparent not only in the tacit admission in his writings on the novel that he never found the right technique,[14] but also in the disparity both of subject-matter and of technique between novels. One cannot explain the existence of such disparate works as *Zalacaín el aventurero*, *El árbol de la ciencia* and *El nocturno del hermano Beltrán* – to name but three – unless one ascribes to the author a conscious desire to experiment and explore the possibilities of his art. There is also one other peculiar habit of Baroja that supports this view of him as a writer struggling with his art, and that is his use of the prologue as a justificatory or advisory device: in quite a number of novels the reader is confronted with a prologue which purports to tell him something, usually in an ironic, lighthearted or devious way, of the work he is about to read. Indeed Baroja seems to have been not just preoccupied with the question of how novels are written but veritably obsessed by it. When reading him it is sometimes difficult to avoid the suspicion that he is talking a secret language, and that when he writes about his characters and their problems he is cryptically referring to his role as a writer and to his struggles with his art.

The third major characteristic of Baroja the novelist is irony.[15] Right from his very first book, the collection of short stories entitled *Vidas sombrías* (1900), the ironic comment, the mocking tone, the taste for paradox, make their presence felt and will continue to do so to the very end of his career as a novelist. There is irony, too, in Baroja's attitude towards many of his characters, an attitude often characterized by a curious game of association-

[14] That he was preoccupied with the technique of the novel is explicitly stated by him, though the specific nature of this preoccupation is not explained: "Yo, desde hace tiempo, me hallo preocupado con esa técnica, no precisamente con la general, sino con la mía propia, y con la posibilidad de modificarla y de perfeccionarla" (*OC*, IV, p. 308).

[15] As with other aspects of Baroja, the existence of irony in his work has occasionally been acknowledged but hardly studied. The best critical study of this subject is in Hugh Probyn's unpublished M.Phil. thesis "Pío Baroja: Aspects of the Development of his Work 1900–1912" (University of Leeds, 1976).

dissociation between author and protagonist in which authorial involvement with the character is cut short by the adoption of a posture of ironic detachment; there is irony in the way small events happen or turn out in the novels; and there is irony in many of the titles Baroja gives to his novels. So all-pervading is the presence of irony in his work, that it could be reckoned to be one of the few fundamental principles of his art. Beneath his inclination to irony there lies an acute preoccupation with the apparently dualistic nature of reality, more specifically with the discrepancy between what one is conditioned to think and what one sometimes discovers, between one's intentions and the intentions other people ascribe to one, between one's intrinsic worth and one's position in society, between the goodness of a person's moral code and the inefficacy of his actions or vice-versa. This type of ironic contrast is extremely frequent in Baroja and stems not just from the philosophical view of man as a cosmic victim – he thinks he is in control but he is not – but also from the idea that man's own social world is based on contradiction and delusion: the ideals which we like to ascribe to ourselves as individuals, justice, love, probity, sincerity, magnanimity, self-sacrifice, are inoperative within the social structure. But there is also a less obvious type of irony in Baroja, for his ironic view of man and society encompasses the artist too. At times he erects an ironic membrane between himself and his work, he creates an ironic distance as he looks down half-mockingly at his own created world, as if to imply that this world is no more than a pretence. In a world built of subjective interpretations – and for Baroja as for many of his contemporaries objectivity is a fraud – confidence about its general validity is likely to wane, particularly when the artist realizes that his world is limited by his personality. Indeed there may come a point when the artist doubts the image which his own work projects of himself. "Cuando el hombre se mira mucho a sí mismo llega a no saber cuál es su cara y cuál su careta" (*OC*, V, p. 158), says Baroja, though the words could just as easily have been written by Unamuno, Azorín or Valle-Inclán.

El mundo es así, published in 1912, is generally regarded as closing the first phase of Baroja the novelist, a phase which began

in 1900. After *El mundo es así*, between 1912 and 1930, Baroja was to devote himself almost exclusively to a long series of historical novels which deal with aspects of Spain during the first half of the nineteenth century. The eighteen novels of the first twelve years of Baroja's career as a novelist all have either a later nineteenth-century setting or, as in a majority of cases, a fully contemporary one.

Baroja's first novel, *La casa de Aizgorri* (1900), is a little unusual in that it is in dialogue form (conceived originally as a play), but is more conventional in its use of a strongly dramatic plot based on social confrontation, with clearly implied good and evil factions, and with a carefully built-in love interest. The next novel, *Aventuras, inventos y mixtificaciones de Silvestre Paradox* (1901), is totally different: a plotless, unpredictable, humorous tale of an extravagant and eccentric character, punctuated with brief but telling observations on contemporary society. Five years later Baroja used the same eccentric protagonist in *Paradox, rey*, a strange and farcical tale of adventure the real aim of which is to satirize European civilization, and which is not far removed from the *esperpentos* which Valle-Inclán was later to create. Baroja's third novel, *Camino de perfección* (1902), generally regarded as an early masterpiece, is anything but humorous: here we meet for the first time the anguished hero of the twentieth century searching for some meaningful belief, relationship or goal in a world which he sees as alien, hostile and incomprehensible. For this novel Baroja adopts the simple quest pattern of primitive epic narrative, but in his next novel, *El mayorazgo de Labraz* (1903), he makes use of a much more novelesque, even romantic, type of plot; yet he also adopts an ironic stance which is noticeable in his use of paradox in both characterization and plotting, in the unconventional, unexpected and even aesthetically jarring ending (the complex and dramatic plot is left open), and more obviously in the way that, through a gentle and humorous parody of the traditional device of a source for the tale, he actually emphasizes its purely fantastic nature.

The next three novels to appear are those of the trilogy *La lucha por la vida* (1904–5), one of Baroja's most famous works and one of the most intensely realistic. Here he appears to sub-

ordinate the work of the imagination to the detailed observation of a concrete, external and identifiable reality, that of the underworld of Madrid. But the 'life-in-the-raw' approach hides a good deal of conscious contrivance and of the most deliberate kind of selectivity, and the occasional ironic intrusions of the author rather imply that Baroja is uncertain as to whether he wants the reader to take for real life what is after all a literary artifact. That Baroja likes to use a known, recognizable, real-life setting for a purely imaginative construction is fully confirmed by his next novel, *La feria de los discretos* (1905), in which the realistic and faithful description of the city of Córdoba, its inhabitants and its atmosphere is counter-balanced by a somewhat improbable tale of adventure and intrigue which reads suspiciously like a skit on Dumas and other nineteenth-century romancers. In his next novel, *Los últimos románticos* and *Las tragedias grotescas* (a single work in two volumes [1906–7]), the story-line is emptied of all drama; its simplicity makes possible the concentration of the novelist's attention upon the setting itself to such a degree that it is almost misleading to talk of a setting. The novel is rather an attempt to capture the atmosphere of Paris and the flavour of Parisian life, particularly for Spanish emigrés, in the 1860s and 1870s, during the last years of the Second Empire: the novel ends with the rising of the Paris Commune in 1871. In the evocation of an atmosphere of decadence, of immorality, of hypocrisy, the work is supremely successful, but the technique employed consists neither in grand description nor in naturalist dissection, but rather in a succession of vignettes which depict impressionistically a procession of picturesque types from all walks of life. But perhaps the most significant aspect of this work is in its protagonist, a gentle and kindly man who discovers to his amazement that he possesses his own inner reality which is independent of the events taking place around him and who is thus able to abstract himself from the sordid behaviour of his own family. At the beginning of the novel Baroja expresses clearly for the first time an idea that recurs in his work, namely that events have no meaning in themselves but acquire significance according to one's reactions to them: "En lo hondo de nuestro ser, todo el manantial de la felicidad o de la desgracia proviene de la vida orgánica, del último

resultado, enviado a la conciencia por los sentidos, no de los acontecimientos adversos o felices, sombras sin realidad, ni tampoco de las ideas, que son imágenes esqueléticas de las cosas" (*OC*, I, pp. 811–12).

Baroja seems to have found temporary satisfaction in the formula employed in *Los últimos románticos* and its sequel, for he adopts essentially the same procedures in his next work, again in two volumes, *La dama errante* and *La ciudad de la niebla* (1908–9): The inspiration – though not the principal event – is historical: the attempted assassination of King Alfonso XIII in 1906, and the city of the title is London, to which the heroine and her father, implicated by chance in the attempted murder, are forced to flee. Once more the effort of the novelist is directed towards the apprehension of a deeper reality than the merely physical or external, whether it be that of the city of London or that of the heroine struggling to assert her individuality in a world that in her eyes is demanding submission. To submit is what the protagonist of Baroja's next novel, *Zalacaín el aventurero* (1909), refuses to do. But this novel, though given a precise historical setting, that of the third Carlist war of 1872–4, is an escape from reality rather than an exploration of it: at worst a boyish, action-packed adventure yarn, at best a poetic evocation of Baroja's beloved Basque countryside full of literary reminiscences and mythical allusions, one of several lyrical interludes that occur in Baroja's long novelistic career.

The years 1910–12 see the publication of some of Baroja's best work. The intensity of production of these years, coupled with the problematic nature of both form and content, suggests a conscious experimentation on the part of the author and a preoccupation with certain aspects of his art. More specifically, what seems to be worrying Baroja is the relationship of his central characters to himself. Baroja's novels seem to be getting more and more autobiographical, finding their inspiration in personal reminiscences and experiences, and, what is equally significant, they appear to give a greater insight into the spiritual world of the author. But this turning inwards of the author is accompanied by a tacit or even explicit rejection of what the protagonist stands for. In no other novels (except just possibly *Camino de perfección*)

has Baroja been as spiritually close to his protagonists as in the novels of the years 1910–12; yet paradoxically never has he been artistically so far. He wilfully manipulates authorial distance to dissociate himself at intervals from those protagonists into whose anguished lives he appears to be pouring so many of his own ideas, attitudes and anxieties. It is as if he had come to doubt whether a writer could create autonomous characters and objective worlds and to suspect that the characters and the worlds were but projections of the writer. In the novels of this period he seems to be acutely aware that he is studying himself rather than the outside world. Yet Baroja as a person was certainly not an exhibitionist; and he appears to have reacted to the danger of being turned into one by retreating into irony, the clearest technique of which consists in creating for himself a second novelistic persona who will act as a foil to the protagonist.

César o nada (1910), counted among Baroja's half-a-dozen best novels, is a story of political ambition for which he drew heavily on his own experiences as a tourist in Rome and as a Republican candidate in the elections of 1909. The novel is also an analysis of the socio-political situation in rural Spain, and a political programme is put into effect during the course of the book. The use of the author's own experiences as part of the fictional protagonist's experiences, and the attempt to fashion a political ideology, might incline one to read the novel more or less as the author's political manifesto. In point of fact Baroja's technique makes such a straightforward reading quite impossible. The only authorial norm we can infer is that of irony. The writer has created a distance between himself and his protagonist, and this detachment with which he views his character periodically asserts itself in small but significant details of his portrayal. In addition, the story proper is prefaced by a curious prologue in which author meets fictional protagonist and engages in a political argument about issues that will reappear in the novel proper. The original version, published in serial form in a newspaper, also had a highly ironic ending in which the protagonist was finally shown to be a fake. Baroja's ambivalent attitude to his protagonist is further shown by the removal, in the book version, of this rather cruel epilogue and the substitution of an open ending in which no final judgment is passed on the protagonist.

Las inquietudes de Shanti Andía (1911), usually coupled with *Zalacaín el aventurero* as the best examples of Baroja's adventure novels, is more of a book of authorial reminiscences with a sea yarn at its centre. There are reminiscences of Baroja's childhood, of his family and acquaintances, of his native Basque region, and above all reminiscences of a literary kind: *Las inquietudes de Shanti Andía* seems to evoke the memory of his readings of Poe, Mayne Reid, Captain Marryat and Stevenson. The eponymous hero of the novel is not an adventurer at all, but simply the author's narrator-agent, not unlike Conrad's Marlow. Indeed an identification author-protagonist is implied in the opening pages where among other things the narrator calls himself "un tanto novelero". But even Shanti does not seem to provide the necessary shelter behind which the author can safely manipulate his material, and the central part of the tale recedes as other narrators take over (four other characters in addition to the protagonist participate in the narration). There are also periodic shifts in time as the narrative moves from the time of the events to the time of redaction, which itself takes place at different moments, as Shanti himself warns. Again it seems as if Baroja is mirroring in his tale the creative process itself as the author moves back and forth from his real world to his fictional world. At any rate it is obvious that by this time he was incapable of sitting down and simply getting on with telling his story in an uncomplicated, straightforward manner: the preoccupation with the authorial origins of the story and with its narration had become too strong to be suppressed. "El ver mis recuerdos fijados en el papel me daba la impresión de hallarse escritos por otro, y este desdoblamiento de mi persona en narrador y lector me indujo a continuar" (*OC*, II, p. 997), says Shanti, providing a sudden insight into the core of Baroja's aesthetic preoccupation: a narrator is but a reader of himself. It is this limitation which Baroja had been striving to overcome, but which in the final years of his first period, as his novels grow more introverted and autobiographical, threatens to undermine his art.

El árbol de la ciencia (1911), arguably Baroja's greatest novel, is also the most strongly autobiographical one. It is a deeply philosophical and moving story which vividly sums up an entire age and crisis in the history of Western civilization: the collapse of

confidence in scientific rationalism at the end of the nineteenth century. But this for Baroja was not just a cultural phenomenon: it was a highly personal matter as well. He was a scientist by training and by inclination, but he was a failed scientist. Baroja had graduated in medicine, had done research for a doctorate, and had practised as a physician but only for a limited period. He never offered any very clear reasons for abandoning his medical career, but temperamental unsuitability and a lack of faith in his own profession had a great deal to do with it. Both his scientific inclinations and his eventual recognition of the limitations of the scientific view of life are novelized in *El árbol de la ciencia*. The experiences of Andrés Hurtado as a medical student and later as a young doctor were Baroja's own experiences; his hopes, ideals and anxieties must have been to some degree Baroja's hopes, ideals and anxieties, and his frustrations and disillusions Baroja's frustrations and disillusions.[16] Hurtado's suicide at the end of the novel, though not brought about by purely philosophical reasons, comes nevertheless immediately after his realization that science has failed to save his wife and child when nature might have succeeded, and thus symbolizes the failure of the scientific outlook on life that the protagonist has so ardently defended during the course of the novel. The closing words of the book, "había en él algo de precursor", are obscure, and could contain an oblique reference to Baroja himself. But Baroja is not content to write about himself in the guise of a fictional character: at certain points he abandons the subjective identification with his protagonist and adopts an external, objective viewpoint. The *desdoblamiento* which Shanti Andía speaks of as he sees himself objectivized in the pages he has written occurs here as well. This time Baroja's technique consists in creating a second character to whom the protagonist can expound his scientific philosophy of life but who picks holes in his arguments and who puts forward a counter-philosophy based on traditional utilitarianism which seems ultimately to be the more correct. Though their philosophies are incompatible, the two characters are not antagonists; indeed there is a bond of mutual respect and understanding between them. Neither of them on his own can be taken as the author's mouthpiece; but together they represent an authorial conflict. Looked upon as a statement of Baroja's own philosophy, *El árbol de la ciencia* is insurmountably ambiguous, for if a philosophy is built up, it is also pulled down. All of which of course goes to make of Baroja a contradictory but deeply human writer, caught in the turmoil of his own doubts and disorientation, his search for truth frustrated by the limitations of his own mind and feelings, hope countered by despondency and protest by resignation.

[16] He said rather curtly that he had included in this novel "mis preocupaciones de médico" (*OC*, VII, p. 800).

By the time of *El mundo es así* Baroja's preoccupation with his art had reached the point of obsession, but he was no nearer to answering his own question. And the question was whether his novels were truly studies of the outside world – as he liked to think and more than once declared – or whether they were merely studies of himself. Could a writer create autonomous characters and objective worlds, or should he face the truth that those characters and those worlds were merely projections of himself? *La lucha por la vida* had stood for an art that looked outward, an art in which the writer recognized the forces at work within society and within the world and struggled to incorporate them in his own imaginative vision. But the personal nature of this very struggle could in turn become the art itself. Comparing the novels of 1910–12 with *La lucha por la vida*, it is easy to see that Baroja has become more introverted, more self-conscious, less certain what he is about. His novels are threatening to become studies of the artist's self; in some respects Baroja is getting close to the threshold where art ceases to be art and becomes a purely personal document. Baroja appears to accept, yet at the same time does his best to transcend, what for many writers is an inescapable constraint upon artistic creation: that the artist's quarry is ultimately himself. Baroja's efforts are thus frantically directed towards giving an appearance of objectivity to what is an intensely subjective world. It is this oscillation between subjectivity and objectivity which gives rise to a paradox in Baroja: the more autobiographical the novel, the more difficult it is to infer the authorial norms. The closer the protagonist moves to the author, the farther the author appears to the reader. It is in his

more markedly autobiographical novels that Baroja appears to be at his most reticent and ambiguous. He was so intensely affected by the problem of pouring himself into his work that already during or even before the redaction of *El mundo es ansí* he had decided to abandon the problematic subjectivity of his recent novels and branch off into a more objective and less agonizing form: the historical novel. *El mundo es ansí* was to be the last novel of Baroja's artistic crisis, but it was to be the most problematic of all. Up to now the problem had revolved around the question of whether Baroja was writing about himself or about the world outside, or indeed whether he could do both at the same time. *El mundo es ansí* goes further, and is about that very problem itself.

3 El mundo es ansí: *ideology of the work. The protagonist*

Like the novels immediately preceding it, *El mundo es ansí* contains a great deal of material taken straight out of Baroja's own experiences and converted into the experiences of the fictional protagonist. His visit to Switzerland in 1907 and his stay in Florence in that same year provided useful material for establishing the settings of the novel.[17] So much so, that when Baroja came to write his book of essays on Italy, *Ciudades de Italia*, in 1949, he felt no compunction about copying numerous passages from Part II of *El mundo es ansí* almost verbatim:

El mundo es ansí

Esta mañana he salido un momento sola a contemplar Florencia. Toda la noche ha llovido abundantemente; el Arno corre turbio, amarillo; el campo está empapado de agua; una bruma ligera empaña el aire. En las colinas del Belvedere y de San Miniato los árboles brillan con un verde húmedo y obscuro; sobre ellos se destacan con un color delicado los grupos de adelfas en flor. En el cielo, gris y muy luminoso, veo como se perfilan, con una línea muy clara, los contornos de las colinas cercanas, con sus iglesias, sus torreones y sus cipreses. El deseo de pasear sola me impulsa a alejarme de la ciudad. He salido a un descampado, dejando a la derecha la calle que se llama de la Cuesta Scarpuccia, y he pasado por debajo de un arco donde hay un prosaico fielato de consumos. Me encuentro al pie de un cerro, a cuya cumbre sube en espiral un camino y en línea recta una escalera larga con varios rellanos. A un lado hay una fila de altos y obscuros cipreses. Esta fila de cipreses, que avanza trepando por el montecillo, hace un efecto de procesión formada por frailes sombríos y tristes. (p. 104)

Ciudades de Italia

Esta mañana he salido para echar un vistazo al pueblo. Toda la noche ha estado lloviendo; el río Arno está turbio, amarillo; el aire, empañado por la bruma. En las colinas del Belvedere y de

[17] See Shaw (*11*, pp. 16–17) for further details.