Preface

Life (before) Philosophy

This is a preface to a book about three enthusiastic writers of prefaces and one who, it seems, undertook to compose them only for new editions of work she had published long before. For his part, Miguel de Unamuno was capable of appending many to his novels through the years, and in them he or a proxy welcomed, threatened, explained, and even "made believe." José Ortega y Gasset often attached "Advertencias" (Warnings) at the beginning of his books, letting the reader know the ways in which they were not really books but, rather, relatively incomplete and nevertheless coherent collections of occasional texts and lectures. Antonio Machado's prologues challenge his readers to discern the philosophical ambitions in poems that often dwell on his own personal experiences and surroundings. María Zambrano's prologues provide no more direct, programmatic guidelines to interpretation than her books offer, highlighting the extent to which they manifest a writing life that has moved on and will keep on the move. No such daring in this modest work of scholarship. Because the first two chapters serve, in different ways, introductory functions, I will be brief and conventional.

This Side of Philosophy weaves together three general themes whose urgency and interconnectedness I try to establish at the beginning of chapter 1. First, it treats the relationship of literature and philosophy by examining in detail a series of Spanish writers whose work is commonly interpreted as a particular, more or less unique configuration of this relation. In short, it is said that Spain's best philosophy is literary, its canon—from *Don Quixote* to the series of writers discussed in this book—joining philosophical thought with literature in a variety of ways. A narrative account of the emergence of this trend from debates in the nineteenth century, occupies much of chapter

1, where I begin to discuss my main protagonists: the novelist Unamuno, who also wrote essays and what appear to be philosophical treatises; the poet Machado, who created a series of fictional "poet-philosophers," complete with biographies, poems, and philosophical works represented by titles and extensive summaries; two very literary philosophers, Ortega y Gasset and Zambrano, with unique styles of writing, including autobiographical aspects and, in Ortega's case, fictional voices. As a prolegomenon to my more extensive assessments of the relation of literature and philosophy in their oeuvres, chapter 2 offers an overview of the contemporary academic field that has formed around this relation, along with detailed interpretations of four key moments: ancient Greece, Romanticism, Heidegger, and Derrida. By devoting independent discussions to these touchstones in the relation between literature and philosophy, I intend to provide a compelling assessment of the relevance of Unamuno, Ortega, Machado, and Zambrano beyond the borders of Iberian studies and the Hispanic world.

Second, I discuss the polemic about the exclusion of Spain from the philosophical canon and the consequent impression that Spanish thought does not measure up to philosophical standards. Such a problem occupies the writers and scholars I discuss in chapter 1, and in chapter 2 I confirm the marginal position of Spain even in the field that concentrates on the relation between philosophy and literature. One response—legible both in the primary authors I examine and in the scholars who study them—has been to argue that Hispanic traditions of thought and writing have always been more closely tied to individual lives and cultures than to the epistemic and ontological discourses that orient mainstream philosophy. That is, it is said that Spanish philosophy's literary character has rendered it *Lebensphilosophie*, before and after the heyday of that term in late nineteenth century Germany. The first two chapters document and discuss this exclusion and the particular impact it had in a major current of Spanish writing, the emergence of a tradition in which the relation between literature and philosophy took a central role as the formulation of a "feeling philosophy and philosophical aesthesis" (Unamuno), a fundamentally aesthetic philosophy (Ortega), a "poetic thinking" (Machado), and a "poetic reason" (Zambrano).

Third, I examine the conventional characterization of this sequence of writers, a portrayal that is often extended to Spain or a Spanish tradition in general. By reference to handbooks of Spanish philosophy and works of scholarship on the preeminent figures, I document the conviction that Spanish "thinkers" reconfigure the traditional relation of literature and philosophy, providing access to something more primordial or more fundamental than

what philosophy alone aims at and achieves. "This side" of philosophical knowledge or activity, previous to or behind scientific truth, rational argumentation, and things themselves, we can experience the sources of life, a locus of vitality associated with religion, love of others, appreciation for our mortal existence, and creativity. Furthermore, this "typically Spanish" mode of thinking depends on exposition in literary genres and poetic language, where engagement with idiom and emotion combine with communicative and argumentative functions of language to achieve ends that still might deserve to be called *philosophical.* It has had no shortage of recognition at home and abroad, in the original language and in translation, but often with a lingering doubt about its philosophical bona fides.

As my discussions show, I am not alone in hoping for something like redemption for the Hispanic perspective, and I would also agree with the many colleagues who envision disciplinary revitalizations coming via a reassessment of the relation between philosophy and literature, together with an expansion of the traditional notions of "Hispanic" to embrace formerly excluded subjects, peoples, and heritages. This book ventures a step in that direction by providing new interpretations of a series of texts and writers well known in the Hispanic world but somewhat unfamiliar outside of it, especially Machado's prose and most of Zambrano's work, of which relatively little has been translated into English. No other study has given these four writers equal weight in an assessment of their inquiries into the potentialities of a literary philosophy or a genuinely philosophical literature. All four figures are treated as part of a history of ideas in José Luis Abellán's and Manuel Garrido's encylopedic volumes, which I discuss in chapter 1. Abellán, Pedro Cerezo Galán, and Antonio Sánchez Barbudo have all produced separate book-length studies of three or four of these figures, including extensive discussions of the connection between the main figure and the others. A handful of prominent scholars have contributed articles and books to understand several of them together and in isolation; Roberta Johnson, Francisco Larubia-Prados, Janet Pérez, and Ana Bundgård have especially stood out for work that establishes coherence between them. I have learned much from these scholars and have tried to acknowledge how they point in the direction of my own contribution to these individual subfields and the relation of literature and philosophy.

It may be foolhardy to address a book to readers from such diverse spheres of study, thought, and life experience. Throughout this discussion I refer to indications that some philosophers mistrust literary scholars and writers, who not only have some antagonism between them, but sometimes

look upon the philosophers with suspicion, if not scorn. Novelists and poets, readers and scholars of Unamuno and Machado might take an interest in my observations and interpretations of novels, poems, and statements on poetics, even as they follow the discussions of philosophical themes and propositions, polemics and inquiries. If these discussions don't appeal to philosophers, Ortega and Zambrano's claims on that discipline might hold their attention. Given a persistent tension within philosophical institutions between Hispanist and generalist philosophy (discussed in chapter 2), I might hope to interest some philosophers with discussions of Plato, Schlegel, Hegel, Heidegger, Derrida, and others, with a commitment to reading primary texts and engaging traditions of interpretation of classics of "philosophical Hispanism." That philosophers and literati might lose interest as the focus of my discussions shifts from one topic or mode of discourse to the other is a risk I will have to run. In a book that takes as its primary topic the relation between philosophy and literature, that risk is both a theme and a reality.

Chapter 1 provides initial discussions of Unamuno, Ortega, Machado, and Zambrano. They are not summaries of later chapters. Rather, they set out to acknowledge the canonical and common interpretations of the relationship between literature and philosophy in the oeuvres. By close attention to texts, they also begin the process of loosening the grip of that representation, which, to my mind, often hypostatizes the relation of literature and philosophy, simplifying it, but, more importantly, reducing its potential to evoke the vital element that so interested these writers. Chapter 2's account of the relation of literature and philosophy demonstrates the extent to which Greek thinkers connect philosophy to the living, feeling human. Hispanists may also be surprised to find discussion of "poetic reason" and "poetic thinking" in the secondary literature on Romanticism and Heidegger. Finally, Derrida's notions of "some poem" (du poème) and "the poematic" will cast light on Machado's reflections on the temporal mechanisms of verse and the precarious poeticity of all thoughtful discourse. Chapter 3 interprets an episode in Unamuno's writing life that seems to set a unique configuration, the time of gestation and composition of *Niebla* (*Mist*) and *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (*On the Tragic Sense of Life*). This path leads from some of his statements on writing as an expression of Unamuno's singular existence to the lengths he goes to in order to imbue both novel and philosophical treatise with what he considers the essential characteristics of life.

Chapter 4 focusses on the most widely celebrated Spanish philosopher, the one most unambiguously accepted into the international philosophical community. In an interpretation spanning a wide range of Ortega y Gasset's

work, I follow him in seeking a consistent and comprehensive representation of his signature doctrine. I belong to a readership that is skeptical of Ortega's revolutionary claims to have definitively overcome a philosophical tradition that neglects the individual life of the "philosophizing philosopher." Nonetheless, the followers of Ortega seem to me to have failed to provide an adequate account of the mechanisms by which Ortega persuades readers of his own status, of what a person would have to accept in order to subscribe to his doctrine of ratiovitalism. Chapter 5 follows through Antonio Machado's oeuvre the claim to produce something like a living philosophical thought using literary resources. While announced in some ways in earlier poems and prefaces to his best known work—the volumes of poetry *Soledades* and *Campos de Castilla* (*Fields of Castile*)—this project mainly concerns "Cancioneros apócrifos" (Apocryphal songbooks) in which he created the characters Abel Martín and Juan de Mairena, and the series of articles he published as *Juan de Mairena*. In chapter 6, I approach María Zambrano's work by following the motif of the relation between philosophy and literature from the 1930s to some of her final writings in the late 1980s. As in my chapters on Unamuno and Ortega, I begin with some prefatory observations about reading Zambrano, following her more or less explicit prescriptions for making sense of her writing, and even for letting precise meaning escape or lie dormant. I trace the relation in more metaphysical texts like *Filosofía y poesía* and *El hombre y lo divino* (Man and the divine), before considering its appearance in the form of reflections on poetry in general and in the person of her friend, the poet Emilio Prados.

A final word about the dialogue I attempt to create between these Spanish writers and the philosophical canon. I do not perform some of the most familiar gestures that connect literature and philosophy: comparing ideas of one and another or finding theories that serve as lenses to clarify some relevant issues. Instead, after chapter 2's panoramic view of the field, my interpretation shows the philosophical prestige of the notion of life and related figures of tension and movement, so that their appearance in Spanish letters does not seem idiosyncratic or lead us exclusively to more intuitive, perhaps more familiar, figures of an organic, chemical, or personal nature. The philosophical digressions in chapters 3–6, in addition to an important one in chapter 1, sometimes have this function: by seeing a problem in a canonical philosopher, we are perhaps more likely to give credence to an interpretation that finds it in the marginal, Spanish writer. These philosophical discussions also serve other functions, and, in general, highlight the heterogeneity in the relation between literature and philosophy. For

example, in chapter 3, I show that, contrary to what Unamuno says, emotion, autobiography, and death have never been simply external to philosophy. In chapter 5, I elaborate on the theoretical implications and destabilizing effects of heteronymity, the displacement or erasure of the proper name. And in the chapter on Zambrano, I relate her mythopoetic narrative of poetry and philosophy to Nietzsche's and Rousseau's genealogies in order to hypothesize about her implicit methodological principles.

While the first two chapters gather together figures and motives into a coherent whole, chapters 3–6 place a greater emphasis on the uniqueness of each separate figure. I recognize the value of historical and sociological accounts of trends in intellectual history. Although my approach makes use of research with emphasis on concrete history—institutional histories, history of ideas, biographies, and public records—my approach focusses on the texts as sites of literature and philosophy's encounter, interaction, and transformation. Unamuno, Ortega, Machado, and Zambrano were concerned about philosophy and scholarship reducing the heterogeneity of real objects of experience. I share this concern at the same time that I try to work out both the ways in which it might be true and the ways in which they might overstate the case. In my interpretations I am sensitive to differences between these writers, between different phases of their work, and between distinct layers of meaning that might be found in the same works, even in the same words, elements that sometimes harmonize and sometimes clash. My readings also vary in degree of magnification and manner of approach, as they focus on expositions of ideas, narrative structures, poetic condensation and indirection, even on punctuation, pronunciation, the grammar behind phrases, and the spaces between words. While some of chapters 3–6 are devoted to making connections between the main authors and the philosophers discussed in chapter 2, I devote an epilogical chapter 7 to drawing some general conclusions about this series of thinkers and the three general themes mentioned above.

A final word on references to primary sources. I've made the effort to provide references to available English language versions of texts. Like other scholars in Iberian studies, I work primarily with Spanish originals; references to both versions, if possible, are indicated parenthetically. In the text, I cite in the original titles first, and provide an English translation afterwards in the first mention. If there is an English translation available, this is indicated by my using the punctuation for publications (italics or quotation marks), otherwise the translation of the title is mine. In cases of titles or phrases made up of cognates, I have omitted English translations

in order to avoid insulting the intelligence of my readers. Subsequent references to books and articles only available in the original Spanish will be in Spanish, although I refer to translated works with the English title. I follow the same practice in cases when I work from French, German, Italian, Latin, or Greek, although I sometimes work directly from English translations and, in that case, cite only the translation throughout. If there is no translation available, the English versions are my own. I prefer to cite specific works instead of general titles like *Complete Works*, so that readers can get a sense of the sources as discursive units that can be easily consulted in their own rights.

One of the reasons prefaces inspire such circumspection is the fear that the guidance for the reading of the following pages will preclude the need to continue reading. As we will see, Unamuno's many prologues plant questions that might draw a reader back after reading the work proper, but that also anticipate the affront to discursive conventions that he produces by playing with the border between the fictional characters' actions and worlds, on one side, and our apparently real discussion of them, on the other. The passage from Machado's or Zambrano's prefaces to the texts they introduce is rarely a simple one, requiring similar efforts of interpretation to those demanded by the multifarious texts that follow. For all its philosophical and critical allegiances, this book should not be assumed to be essentially different, at least regarding its relationship to literary and philosophical work. Just as a prologue is not intended to replace the book, the interpretations in this book do not intend to render redundant the reading of the texts. Instead, consider them invitations to read and reread, to translate and retranslate, to confirm and to dispute points about literature and philosophy and a trend in Spanish letters.