Dagmar Vandebosch

**Unamuno y Jugo, Miguel de (1864—1936)**

Miguel de Unamuno is a Spanish writer and philosopher whose work includes essays, novels, poetry, drama, and journalism. He is considered to be one of the leading members of the Generation of 1898, a group of canonical writers championing the political and cultural regeneration of Spain in the early 20th Century. Recurrent themes in his oeuvre are the struggle between reason and faith, the question of mortality, and the search for identity (of both individuals and nations). His narrative oeuvre breaks away from the model of 19th Century realism by focusing on the inner life of the protagonist and introducing metafictional devices.

Born in the Basque city of Bilbao, Unamuno studied at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy of the University of Madrid. In 1891, he obtained the chair of Greek Philology at the University of Salamanca. Ten years later, he was appointed rector of this university. In 1924, Unamuno was banished for six years due to his opposition to the dictatorship of general Primo de Rivera. On his return in 1930, he welcomed the Second Republic but soon was disappointed by it. After the outbreak of the Civil War, he first supported the Francoist rebellion but ended up condemning it publicly shortly before his death.

Unamuno’s most important essays address issues related to national and individual identity. In *En torno al casticismo* (*About Casticismo*, 1895) Unamuno sets out to define Spain’s uniqueness while stressing the importance of its relation to the European tradition. Later works, starting with *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho* (*The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho according to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra,* 1905), focus on the defence of Spanish character. *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (*The Tragic Sense of Life,* 1913) shows a shift of interest to existential problems and doubts of the modern individual. The most suitable genre to treat these existential questions, according to the author, is the novel. In *Amor y Pedagogía* (*Love and Pedagogy*, 1902) and later in *Niebla* (*Mist,* 1914), Unamuno refines his concept of the novel –ironically baptised ‘nivola’ (‘nivol’) instead of ‘novela’ (‘novel’)– as a narrative of the ‘inner reality’ of the character. Unamuno’s rejection of realism also implies an innovative use of metafiction: in *Mist*, for instance, the protagonist starts a dialogue with the author. *San Manuel Bueno, mártir* (*Saint Emmanuel the Good Martyr*, 1930*)*, often considered Unamuno’s best novel, tackles the spiritual crisis of a priest who has come to doubt the existence of life after death but keeps up appearances so as not to prejudice the faith of his parishioners. In the last two decades, criticism has taken an increased interest in the discursive aspects of Unamuno’s narrative work (Vauthier, Zavala), while Unamuno’s plays and his poetry –which differ considerably from Spanish ‘modernismo’, e.g. in the use of rhyme– have received less critical attention. Unamuno’s philosophical versatility finds an echo in a literary style characterised by a strong taste for paradox, irony and neologisms.

**Selected works**

Novels

*Love and Pedagogy,* 1902

*Mist,* 1914

*Abel Sanchez and Other Stories*, 1917

*Saint Emmanuel the Good, Martyr,* 1930

Essays

*En torno al casticismo (About Casticismo),* 1895 (not translated)

*The Life of Don Quixote and Sancho according to Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra,* 1905

*The Tragic Sense of Life, 1913*

Poetry

*Poesías (Poems),* 1907 (not translated)

*The Christ of Velazquez,* 1920

Drama

*Fedra (Phaedra),* 1910 (not translated)

*El otro* (The other), 1920 (not translated)

*El hermano Juan* (Brother John), 1934 (not translated)

**References**

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Paratextual Material

Pictures Unamuno:

* Pictures Unamuno 1, 2:

<http://www.biografiasyvidas.com/biografia/u/unamuno.htm>

* Pictures Unamuno 2, 3, 4:

<http://www.fundacionunamuno.org.ve/>

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