

A COMPANION TO
MIGUEL DE UNAMUNO

Edited by
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and
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* *Translated by Julia Biggane*

Foreword

JULIA BIGGANE

This *Companion* offers a survey of the enormous body of work produced by Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936) in various genres over the course of almost half a century, from the 1890s to the eve of the Spanish Civil War. No single-volume study could hope to be exhaustive in its study of such a prolific writer, yet at the same time, because Unamuno's work explored fairly constantly certain themes and certain fundamental questions about existence and identity (both individual and national) over many years, the risk of repetition in tracing its trajectory is always present. This *Companion* attempts to address both challenges by dividing its study of Unamuno's work into two parts: the first charts Unamuno's work chronologically, analysing major developments and turning points or breaks as well as continuities; the second part studies selected central themes and pre-occupations in his writing.

Because Unamuno's fundamental concerns were examined across a range of media, the second part of the volume mostly eschews a genre-based approach, focusing instead on a different key aspect of Unamuno's thought or creative practice across a range of his works. Sandro Borzoni examines Unamuno's existentialism and his complex views on religious faith; C. Alex Longhurst explores Unamuno's linguistic philosophy, and his views on language and its relation both to community and to the individual self; Alison Sinclair focuses on the ethical dimensions of Unamuno's work; Gareth Wood examines the painfully intertwined ontology of self and other in Unamuno's fiction and drama; Julia Biggane's chapter analyses the changing representation of gender and sexuality in his work during a period of important social change in Spain and beyond; J.A.G Garrido Ardila and Julia Biggane's chapter focuses on the enduring intertextual engagement with Don Quixote in Unamuno's essays, fiction and drama. Dividing the volume into two parts in this way aims to help the reader acquire a more comprehensive and substantial sense of the fundamental continuities and changes in Unamuno's thought and creative work than a purely chronological, or genre-based approach would allow. The only exception to this

approach is the final chapter, in which Ramón Llorens focuses on Unamuno's travel writing—a much neglected aspect of Unamuno's *oeuvre*. Broadly speaking, the study privileges his narrative fiction over other literary genres, as this has proved to offer the most substantial, nuanced and varied, enduring vehicle for the exploration of his key preoccupations. There is, nevertheless, substantial coverage of his major essays and dramatic works too.

A further major challenge faces any serious reader of Unamuno: in addition to the daunting quantity of his own work is the vast amount of critical study it has attracted over the years. A journal devoted exclusively to the study of his work has been in existence since 1948; scores of monographs and many hundreds of articles have been published since his death. Indeed, Unamuno criticism has its own history, and has constructed many different – at times contradictory – Unamunos. Of course this is a phenomenon affecting many prolific authors with long careers, but is perhaps particularly marked in Unamuno's case because his thought drew on such a vast and eclectic range of philosophical, theological, political and literary sources, and because his political beliefs and affiliations shifted profoundly over the course of his career. A concentration on the Hegelian aspects of Unamuno's thought and literary production (as explored in Regalado García's 1968 monograph, for example, or in parts of Wyers' 1976 study), risks underplaying the irrationalist, anti-systemic elements of his thinking. Conversely, an emphasis on Kierkegaard and Cervantes as influences on his work can overshadow Unamuno's sustained engagement both with contemporaneous developments in the natural and social sciences, both of which also played a part in his understanding of individual existence (see, for example, Sinclair (2000) or Johnson (1989)).

Anyone studying Unamuno's work would be well-advised to keep uppermost in his or her mind Unamuno's own description of his position on many issues: 'alterutalidad' [alterutrality], which sought not the distortions of a smoothly synthetic or superficially coherent neutrality or middle ground between polar differences, but sought to keep opposing positions in dynamic, constructive tension, avoiding complete identification with any one of them. It is in this way that we should understand his most fundamental thinking as laid out in *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*: Unamuno is not a confident atheist, detached agnostic or untroubled believer, but sought ways of living with the uncertainties that the rejection of all these positions entailed. It is in this manner that we should understand his post-1897 political thought too. His brief support for the military uprising against the Second Republic in 1936 must be set against his previous sustained opposition to the proto-fascist Primo de Rivera dictatorship just a few years before, for example, rather than being seen as the simple culmination of a shift to the right after his earlier socialist campaigning. His views on the Castilian language can smack of cultural imperialism, particu-

larly to contemporary readers, but should be considered within a broader context of his enduring opposition to the various imperialisms (cultural and military) of institutions such as the Church and armed forces, and to the more conservative elements of the post-1875 Restoration regime. Nor should the irreducibility of Unamuno's position on most matters of substance to any single easily identifiable philosophical or ideological position be confused with simple contrarianism, for all that he, at times, succumbed to polemicising; Unamuno was genuinely and consistently concerned to find ways of productively thinking through and living with uncertainty and multivalence. It is this quality of his work that continues to make Unamuno 'good to think with', even for readers who disagree profoundly with some of his assumptions and conclusions.

In an attempt to avoid offering a reductive or monolithic view of a complex and rich body of thought and literary production, this *Companion* invited contributions from a range of distinguished scholars with very different approaches to and views on Unamuno's work: even when texts or themes are discussed in more than one chapter, varied perspectives are brought to bear upon them. All authors have aimed to offer not just incisive analysis of the texts or topics studied, but also a balanced overview of issues and debates arising in Unamuno studies. The further reading recommended at the end of each chapter attempts to offer additional guidance through the very dense thicket of scholarship on Unamuno, but ultimately, the reader will have to exercise his or her own critical judgment about the more ambivalent, ambiguous or otherwise challenging aspects of his work. Unamuno, would, of course, approve: so much of his work, fictional and non-fictional, aimed precisely to create critical, engaged, *active* readers.

This *Companion* aims to be accessible and useful to advanced undergraduates, graduate students and scholars in Hispanic Studies and other disciplines across the humanities. All Spanish quotations and terms are followed by a parenthetical English translation except in a very few instances where the Spanish is immediately comprehensible even to those not versed in the language. In many cases where the precise formulation/diction of the Spanish is not germane to the analysis, only the English translation is supplied, but references to the two established *Obras completas* editions are provided to allow consultation of the Spanish if desired. Published English translations are referenced where feasible. In order to avoid excessive repetition between chapters, the titles of Unamuno's major works referenced in this volume are not translated in-text; translations are provided in the 'Note on editions used and translations of Unamuno's works' at the beginning of the volume.

This foreword must end on a deeply sad personal note: John Macklin was not able to contribute to this volume in the way he wished to before his untimely death in 2014. This *Companion* would not have existed without him, and it is to his memory that the volume is dedicated.