

Department of Modern Languages

Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

Graduate Lecture Series

“En el (nuevo) torbellino”

Miguel de Unamuno and Historical Memory in Contemporary Spain

Lecture by Dr. Leslie Harkema

Thursday, February 4, 2021 | 4 PM | Zoom Videoconference



Leslie J. Harkema is Associate Professor of Spanish and director of the Division of Spanish and Portuguese in the Department of Modern Languages and Cultures at Baylor University. A specialist in Iberian literatures and cultures of the 19th and 20th centuries, she is the author of *Spanish Modernism and the Poetics of Youth: From Miguel de Unamuno to La Joven Literatura* (Toronto Iberic, 2017). Her articles on various aspects of literary and cultural modernity in Spain have appeared in *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, *Modern Language Notes*, *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos*, *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, and elsewhere.

Miguel de Unamuno is one of the most prominent figures of twentieth-century Spanish literature, known worldwide for his novels and philosophical essays including *Niebla* (*Mist*, 1914) and *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (*On the Tragic Sense of Life*, 1912). Traditionally associated with the cultural response to the loss of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Unamuno is a deeply canonical author whose work has been studied and commented upon by numerous writers and critics in Spain and abroad for more than a century. Over the past several years, however, the figure of Miguel de Unamuno has received renewed attention in Spanish cultural life as the subject of films, dramatic works, and public debates. The most recent examples of this phenomenon are Alejandro Amenábar’s full-length feature film *Mientras dure la guerra* (*While at War*, 2019) and the documentary *Palabras para un fin del mundo* (*Words for an End of the World*, 2020), directed by Manuel Menchón.

For these cinematic works, and contemporary cultural discourse on Unamuno more broadly, the year of interest is not 1898, but 1936—specifically, the last six months of the writer’s life, which coincided with the first six of the Spanish Civil War. As contemporary Spain confronts the rise of the extreme right in Europe and continues to wrestle with its own history of fascism and dictatorship, scholars and artists have returned to unresolved questions about Unamuno’s relationship to the Nationalist uprising against the Second Spanish Republic that occurred in July of 1936, his denunciation of the Nationalist cause in a storied encounter with General José Millán-Astray on October 12th, and his death under house arrest on the last day of the year. In this presentation, I will offer an overview of this current wave of Unamuno-mania, and demonstrate how today’s battles over Unamuno reflect and contribute to ongoing debates about Historical Memory and the nature of Spanish Democracy after Franco.

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