

# Exploring Self and Emotion: Unamuno's Narrative Fiction as Thought Experiment

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**ABSTRACT** This paper explores Unamuno's narrative fictions as thought experiments regarding the self and the emotions. It begins by developing a notion of thought experiment consequent with his understanding of philosophy as a form of literature. Next, it focusses on the philosophy of the emotions implicit in his major essay *Del Sentimiento trágico de la vida*. The third section offers a case study in the form of envy in the novel *Abel Sánchez*. The final section addresses different forms of knowledge about the emotions conveyed by Unamuno's fictional works.

**Key Words:** Miguel de Unamuno, phenomenology, emotion, envy, knowledge from literature

## 1. Literature as Thought Experiment in Unamuno

This paper provides a novel interpretation of Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936), framing him as a thinker who developed a philosophy of the emotions in literary form.<sup>1</sup> Besides his major essay *Del Sentimiento trágico de la vida* where he sketches his core ideas about affectivity, it was in his narrative fictions (novels, novellas, short stories, dramas, etc.) where he neatly addressed questions concerning the human heart. According to Unamuno, rather than being appraised from a hypothetical view from nowhere, emotions are better understood as embedded in their specific contexts, and engaged in the wider complexities of human condition. As I will argue in this paper, the Spanish writer uses narrative fictions in order to raise and scrutinize essential questions about self and emotion – providing us with new insights into the nature of human affectivity.

For the development of my argument, I will depart from an idea already formulated in Julián Marías's influential book *Miguel de Unamuno*, which holds that Unamuno's novels should be regarded as a "method for obtaining knowledge".<sup>2</sup> In putting us in contact with a concrete aspect of life, Unamuno's narrative fiction constitutes a first step towards an existential analysis or an ontological study of existence (Marías, p. 73). Indeed some specificities of

Unamuno's creative praxis support Marías' claim. His "nivolas" ("nivols" rather than "novels") – a genre he invented which focuses on monologues and dialogues rather than on descriptions of time and space or on the development of a complex plot– aim to explore the psychology of the characters and unearth hidden aspects of the human experience. Nivolas are written without following a plan, and Unamuno seems to be much more interested in their cognitive content rather than in their aesthetic value.<sup>3</sup> Applying this interpretative path inaugurated by Marías to the case of the emotions, Unamuno's narrative fictions may be regarded as a means of obtaining knowledge about the affective life. More specifically, as I will propose, they can be regarded as sophisticated thought experiments about the intricacies of the human existence.

However, this interpretation of Unamuno's writings as analogue to thought experiments requires the addition of two caveats. First, the focus of this paper on the cognitive aspects of his literature does not exclude that his narrative fiction has also aesthetic and moral value. Unamuno's writings are aesthetically meritorious and they also manifest ethical attitudes, even though these will not be discussed here. Second, the notion of the "thought experiment" employed to explain the cognitive value of his writings can be interpreted in a strict sense or a metaphorical sense, leading to two different readings of his work. If we interpret the analogy in a strict sense, we might regard his writings as a way to prove specific hypotheses about human nature, and as arguments for or against certain philosophical positions. For instance, we can see *Amor y Pedagogía* as a way to argue via a *reductio ad absurdum* against the pedagogic ideas of the Pestalozzi school or against eugenics. From this perspective, literature would be a thought experiment in which variables would be selected in order to test specific hypotheses. It is also possible – as this paper will show – to interpret the analogy in a metaphorical sense.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, Unamuno's chief aim was not to write philosophical statements, nor was his intention to persuade the reader for or against a specific claim. In fact, his literature seeks not to provide strict rational argumentation, but rather to represent the possibilities inherent to the human being. Its cognitive value as a thought experiment thus consists in illuminating an aspect of life – and in doing so, offering the reader the possibility of engaging in a situation, which, despite being fictional, may both enlarge her experiential horizon and enrich her imaginative capacities. Literature presents us with experiences of life that are too rich, too subjective, and too complex to be reduced to a propositionally conceptualized form.<sup>5</sup>

This metaphorical use of the concept of thought experiment is in accordance with Unamuno's own understanding of literature as a form of philosophy. In his view, there are aspects of the human experience, to which the feelings belong, which are better understood through their vivid representation in novels, short narrations, and dramas, rather than through

constructing complex philosophical systems. For Unamuno, reflection, introspection, and contemplation tend to disguise the phenomena we are trying to understand, and may easily lead to self-deception. Rational argument may lead us to overlook essential aspects of ourselves, misinterpret our feelings and desires, and falsely attribute to us traits we do not possess. In this regard, literature appears to Unamuno as the best way of doing philosophy, especially when dealing with questions regarding the self and the emotions.<sup>6</sup> The complexities and anxieties of existence can be better approached from the perspective of feeling, a perspective that he sees as being intrinsically linked to literary praxis.

This conception of philosophy as a form of literature places Unamuno within a long tradition of thinkers of “poetic reason”. For him, though, poetic reason is complementary to rational argument. The complementarity is to be thought of as a complementarity of two forms of reason and of doing philosophy, rather than as a complementarity of philosophy and literature.<sup>7</sup> Unamuno regarded the variety of genres and styles he cultivated as forms of doing philosophy (in addition to novels, dramas, novellas, and short stories, he also wrote treatises, essays, memoirs, and articles). He felt free to employ different narrative devices as “methods” of philosophical inquiry. Moreover, behind the use of these different genres is also a question of communicability: they are seen as having different opportunities for reaching his public and engaging the readership.<sup>8</sup> If his narrative fictions are to be understood as thought experiments, then it is not in the sense of them being a vehicle for philosophical claims or a tool with which to test a hypothesis, but rather as a complex device that helps us to both exercise our imagination in multiple ways, and enlarge our knowledge of ourselves. Against this background, our affectivity as a mode of existence appears as a main object of scrutiny.

## **2. The “Man of Flesh and Bone” and the Emotions**

The relevance of affectivity as a key aspect of the human being is already set out in his major essay *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida* (1913). The main idea behind this book is that we are “men of flesh and bone” and that our capacity to think and reason is tied up with our embodied existence: knowledge does not exist without feeling.<sup>9</sup> Rather than an abstract entity, we are beings that suffer and feel, who are bound up with our historical, spatiotemporal environments, and who inhabit a social and cultural world. In this work, the human being is presented as one who yearns for immortality, yet whose hunger for eternal life conflicts with persistent ontological uncertainty as to what happens after death. This longing, this hope that our memory may be rescued from oblivion, is the source of many of our passions: it arises in forms of envy, jealousy, hatred, and herostratism (the desire to become acknowledged for morally wrong

actions), as well as our capacity for artistic creativity, social recognition, procreation, and love. On the view presented here, all are the expression of our spiritual hunger for survival (*TSL*, pp. 55–56).<sup>10</sup>

The picture of affectivity developed in this 1913 essay is more radical than it seems. Emotion and reason are presented not as diametrically opposed, but rather as intimately intertwined. The rational dynamics inherent to emotion can be stated in at least four respects: 1) First of all, Unamuno considers feelings to be a proof of our existence. The ontological insecurity and the consequent longing for immortality assail us in a way that leaves no room for doubting that we exist. In this regard, he proposes substituting the Cartesian *cogito* with a feeling being. 2) In addition, feelings give us information about ourselves and about the world, i.e. they inform us about our momentary state of being, and they direct us towards what we value. Thus, the anxiety provoked by the awareness of our finitude provides us with a very basic form of knowledge of the self (it indicates that our existence is marked by a preoccupation with our finitude), and it works as an indicator of the value we attribute to our life. 3) Unamuno identifies a fundamental form of feeling that is all-encompassing and that works as a determinant of our existence. This feeling is rooted in deeper strata of our self, and it is responsible for the world appearing to us in a certain light. He interprets this feeling as a “tragic sense of life”: a permanent preoccupation with our finitude. This anxiety concerning both our yearning for immortality and the uncertainty related to it constitutes, in his view, the most basic tenor of our existence. 4) Finally, according to Unamuno, our emotional life serves as a basis for both our cognitions (thoughts, judgments, beliefs, assumptions, etc.) and actions. The hunger for immortality may lead to wishful thinking, as when we believe ourselves capable of surviving death, or it may motivate actions of physical or spiritual immortality (procreation, herostratism, etc.). In each of these four regards, affectivity appears as a key feature of the human being, one which, following its own reasons, structures our engagement with the world. In Unamuno’s own words: “Reversing the terms of the adage *nihil volitum quin preacognitum*, I have told you that *nihil cognitum quin preaevolitum*, that we know nothing save what we have first, in one way or another, desired; and it may even be added that we can know nothing well save what we love, save what we pity” (*TSL*, p. 137).

To understand the novelty of these views, we have to place them within two larger contexts. Historically, Unamuno’s claims were developed independently but in consonance with the phenomenological tradition, which at that time was advancing a new paradigm for understanding the emotions. I have in mind here not Heidegger, whose commonalities with Unamuno have been the object of several studies, but Max Scheler. Scheler was extremely

influential in his time as a result of developing the phenomenological movement. It was Scheler's view that: "Man, before he is an *ens cogitans* or an *ens volens*, is an *ens amans*".<sup>11</sup> In this claim, we can identify the primacy of affectivity over cognition and will, as well as the embedding of the emotions within the paradigm of rationality, two aspects that are also evident in Unamuno's thinking. Nevertheless, a clear difference remains, for whereas Unamuno points to a "tragic sense of life" as a fundamental anxiety concerning human finitude – in a sense reminiscent of Heidegger's notion of "Angst" as a fundamental mood – Scheler underscores the function of love as the most fundamental aspect of our affectivity. Thus, unlike Unamuno and Heidegger, Scheler interprets the basic tenor of our existence as positive, as marked by love and openness, rather than as something troubling and threatening. The second context in which to locate Unamuno's work is the contemporary philosophy of emotions. Seen from the current perspective, the novelty of Unamuno's and the phenomenological accounts consists in explaining affectivity as a mode of being intentionally directed towards the world and disclosing its features. In other words, emotions are not merely felt qualities of our experience, but intentional states directed towards features of the world, which both provide information and help structure our engagement with reality. These claims prompted a paradigm shift in our understanding of affectivity, which remains dominant within the contemporary philosophy of mind. In this regard, one of the representative figures of the current debate, Peter Goldie, understands the emotions as a "feeling towards" concerning specific objects that involve a special way of thinking about the object of the emotion.<sup>12</sup>

Unamuno's general views about affectivity as portrayed in his major essay reappears in fictionalized form in his literary writings where he was more concerned with specific emotional modes of existence. The main protagonists of his narrative fictions are lonely, conflicted, and self-divided figures, marked by the anxieties of existence, the longing for survival, and extreme forms of emotion. A brief overview of some of Unamuno's writings is revealing in this regard. *Amor y Pedagogía* (1902) presents the reader with the topics of sham feelings, herostratism, self-deception, and the intricacies of love and desire. Hatred, envy, and jealousy, as well as combinations of these extremely negative emotions and their relation to love, are the main concern in *Abel Sánchez* (1917), *La Tía Tula* (1921), and *El Otro* (1926). Also in *San Manuel Bueno, Mártir* (1931), the author explores the intricacies of love, self-deception, and self-image. These few examples suffice to give an idea about the importance of the emotions in Unamuno's work. To flesh this out, in the next section, I will focus on one single emotion as developed in the novel *Abel Sánchez*: envy. I take this emotion to be representative of his philosophical thought, insofar as envy, among all other passions, reveals with utmost clarity the conflictual

nature that holds between a person's reality and her expectations or desires (between the ontological insecurity that marks human existence and the longing for immortality). Indeed, as Unamuno himself writes: "Envy is a thousand times more terrible than hunger, for it is spiritual hunger" (*TSL*, p. 55).

### **3. *Abel Sánchez*: A Thought Experiment on Envy**

*Abel Sánchez* (1917) is a striking novel. It narrates the vicissitudes of the interwoven lives of two friends who have known each other since birth: Joaquín Monegro and Abel Sánchez. The industrious Joaquín studies medicine, while the creative Abel becomes a painter. Hidden behind this friendship, however, we find the story of a "sombre passion": Joaquín envies Abel. Already as a child, he was envious of Abel's talent, as well as the popularity and recognition he gained so effortlessly. This envy becomes even stronger when Abel marries Helena – Joaquín's beautiful cousin with whom he was also in love – and becomes a famous painter. After his marriage with the devoted Antonia, Joaquín becomes father to Joaquina, but he feels envious of Abel because of his son, Abelín. Later on, Abelín will follow Joaquín's path and become a doctor, marry his daughter, and give Abel and Joaquín a common grandson: Abelín. Abelín's preference for Abel leads to a violent fight in which Joaquín grabs Abel who subsequently dies from a heart attack. At the end of his life, with the clear awareness of his enviousness, Joaquín writes his "Confessions" and dedicates them to his daughter.

Already the naming of the protagonists evokes the myth of Cain (*Joaquín*) and Abel, and confronts the reader with the idea of fratricide. However, what Unamuno offers goes beyond the Old Testament myth. Rather than opposites, he presents both characters as complementary and mutually dependent, as Longhurst notes (*UTN*, p. 136). In addition, he inverts the relation between victim and tormentor: Joaquín appears to be the victim of Abel. At first sight, it may be surprising that the novel title takes the name of the envied protagonist (Abel), even though it is written from the view of the envious one (Joaquín). On closer inspection, however, this decision evinces the chief topic of the novel: Joaquín's existential envy towards Abel. Abel is Joaquín's obsession; in the idea of taking Abel's place, Joaquín finds his own peculiar mode of survival. But given that this kind of "identity theft" is impossible, this leads him to suffer and to attempt, in vain, different strategies to overcome this passion.

*Abel Sánchez* is a complex and rich novel, and is of course open to different readings and interpretations. In what follows, I will offer a philosophical reading according to which the novel might be interpreted as an insightful thought experiment (in the metaphorical sense stated

above) about envy. Three main aspects will be examined: a) the ontology of envy and its relation to other nearby feelings; b) the phenomenology of envy and the world of its objects; and c) envy's self-reflexivity.<sup>13</sup>

### a) The Ontology of Envy

*Abel Sánchez* has an implicit ontology of envy, which is not found in the form of explicit theoretical statements. Rather it appears as vivid descriptions that challenge the reader to come to her own conclusions. The exploration of envy's associated feelings and hybrid forms may serve as bases to discover its key features.

As with the *feeling of inferiority*, in experiencing the sense of envy we feel somehow inferior to others. However, whereas the feeling of inferiority may lead to a range of positive and negative reactions – admiration of the other, shame towards her, sadness, resignation, etc. – in envy the reaction towards its object is entirely negative.

A close neighbor of envy is the *feeling of injustice*. When as a result of our given circumstances (birth, social class, resources, etc.) we are at disadvantage, we feel unfairly treated by our destiny. Repeatedly, Joaquín's complaints take the form of a feeling of injustice: "Why did they reject me? Why did they prefer the more frivolous one, the fickle one, the selfish one? All of them, all of them embittered my life. And I understood that the world is naturally unjust and that I had not been born among my own. It was my misfortune not to have been born among my own. I was destroyed by the baseness, cruelty and vulgarity of those around me".<sup>14</sup> These reproaches, however, do not reveal a desire for a better world; rather, they disclose a desire for a world in which Joaquín occupies a privileged position. A similar self-oriented perspective may also be found in *arrogance*, an emotion that is often connected to envy. On some occasions, Joaquín experiences a hybrid the two: he is able to perceive Abel's qualities and achievements only insofar as these features concern him. His explanation of Helena's decision to marry Abel as her desire to torment and humiliate him in front of his rival should be interpreted in this sense: "It seemed to me that Helena had simply wanted to put me down, that she had kindled Abel's love to spite me, that she was incapable, lump of flesh in a mirror that she was, of loving anybody" (*AS*, p. 47).

Envy is also related to *rivalry*. Joaquín sees Abel as his rival. However, he is also aware that Abel enjoys an advantageous position: he already has what Joaquín so desires. In this context, envy exhibits strong commonalities with *jealousy*. In both states, the subject judges her own value in relation to the target. However, whereas the envier's attention is focused on the person who possesses what she desires, with this person forming at the same time the object of

comparison: in jealousy the object of attention is the person who the jealous one wants to possess, but the object of comparison is the one who plays the role of the rival. Hybrid forms entailing both emotions are common. Joaquín's jealousy towards Abel after he marries Helena fuels his hatred and works as a trigger of his envy. But he is not always jealous of Abel on account of Helena; at times he envies Abel without Helena playing a role.

*Revenge*, "*Schadenfreude*", *contempt* and *Ressentiment* are also in the same neighborhood as envy. Revenge aims to re-establish a hypothetical objective order, which, in the eyes of the envier, has been damaged by the envied person. This impulse is the expression of envy's inherent destructive intention. In this regard, "*Schadenfreude*" as the experience of joy in learning of the troubles of another may play an interesting function: when something bad happens to the envied unexpectedly, the envier feels that some sort of cosmic justice has been performed.<sup>15</sup> Envy may also lead one to focus on the negative traits of the other and foster contempt. This focus on negative features of the target, however, may be motivated after a process of obfuscation for positive values and an inversion of positive features into negative ones has taken place. When this happens, "*Ressentiment*", as the emotional attitude that leads to devaluate what one cannot achieve, may be at play. This strategy to deal with the feelings of inferiority and impotence has nothing to do with the emotion of resentment which arises when an injustice is perceived. The intertwining of envy, contempt, and "*Ressentiment*" is at work in Joaquín: sometimes his envy towards Abel unfolds into contempt towards him and Helena; while at other times, full of "*Ressentiment*", he interprets Abel's positive features as having a negative value. Both moves are strategies to diminish the excruciating pain produced by his repeated episodes of envy. The differences between the three emotional complexes remain: in envy, we are aware of the positive features of the other of which we are desirous; in contempt, we focus on her faults; while in "*Ressentiment*", an inversion of values has taken place, meaning that positive features are interpreted as lacking value.<sup>16</sup>

*Hatred* is often another key ingredient of envy. It gives envy its corrosive energy. Nevertheless, while in hatred we are convinced that our object is morally bad, in envy we remain aware of its positive values. Joaquín's existential envy towards Abel is strongly marked by his hatred. Thus, it has its roots in the deepest levels of his personality and it functions as a formative element of the self.

As a result of these variations in the imagination enabled by the novel, envy is presented as a whole (or *Gestalt*, rather than a basic emotion) that emerges when different affective (1), cognitive (2), and volitional (3) experiences appear interrelated in a unique way. (1) In envy other emotions such as jealousy, rivalry, contempt, *Ressentiment*, and hatred appear as

ingredients, even though envy cannot be reduced to any one of them in isolation. It also implies the painful feeling of being unfairly treated by others and by fate, and a feeling of powerlessness to change the situation. (2) Envy presupposes we are aware of the value of the other and that an evaluation of one's own value in comparison to that of others takes place. And (3) it motivates the symbolic or real destruction of the other, in addition to actions that may lead to the restoration of a desired order, in which we no longer feel inferior and powerless.

### **b) Phenomenology and Object of Envy**

The vicarious experience of envy that one undergoes when reading the novel enables a focus on two essential aspects of any emotion: its qualitative feel, i.e. the way it is phenomenologically experienced; and the world of the objects towards which envy is intentionally directed.<sup>17</sup>

To develop the first aspect, attention to an acute episode of envy is necessary. After discovering that Helena will marry Abel, Joaquín writes: “in the days following the one on which he told me that they were getting married [...] I felt as if my whole soul were freezing over. An icy coldness ate into my heart. I felt like flames made of ice. I had difficulty breathing. My hatred for Helena and above all for Abel, because it was really hatred, a cold hatred whose roots reached down into my soul, had become hard as rock. [...] It was as if my soul had become totally frozen within that hatred” (AS, p. 53). A threefold perspective on the experience of envy is offered in this passage. 1) In virtue of its *intrinsic quality*, envy is an extremely unpleasant emotion. Joaquín describes a narrowing in his chest, which is painfully experienced as being restrained. According to his description, envy is felt as “flames made of ice”, i.e. it is a combination of warmth (as in anger) and coldness (as in sadness). To describe its mixed form, Unamuno makes use of the vocabulary of the senses. This can be regarded as a literary resource to help grasp the complexity of the phenomenon in question, but it might be also an indicator that our language is not rich enough to capture the nuances of our emotional experiences with single terms. 2) As far as the *mode of givenness* is concerned, envy may be experienced as an acute episode (as in the passage above), but it is also possible that this emotion becomes an enduring disposition in reaction to specific objects. In this last case, envy is an all-encompassing mode of existence, it resembles a character trait and it becomes part of our personality. 3) Finally, envy's corrosive and destructive energy determines an inner attitude of disapproval and separation between subject and object. Its *implicit action tendencies* are marked by the annihilation of its target, which may be either real or merely symbolic (Elster, p. 246). Joaquín's first thought after seeing the ill Abel is: “And what if he were to die?” (AS, p. 59). This

destructive tendency may affect not only the target but also all that is related to him. Thus, when Joaquín refuses to help at the birth of Abel's son, his refusal is motivated by the fear to strangle the newborn. In the face of all of these different forms of negativity, it is not surprising that the envier will experiment with different strategies in the hope of overcoming such passion.

Regarding the intentional objects of envy, a distinction between formal and material objects is necessary.<sup>18</sup> At the formal level, envy is directed towards things that matter to us, things that are important to us and that we *value*. Envy is, therefore, intentionally directed towards things we deem to be good. At the material level, envy is directed towards personal entities, and it presupposes a net of beliefs. To begin with, we must be able to *identify* a significant other (1). The person with whom we identify must be similar and familiar to us, and they must be close enough to foster a comparison. On the one hand, we do not compare ourselves with those who are socially, culturally, emotionally, etc. too distant from us, but rather with those who we feel belong to a same or at least similar group. On the other hand, we do not envy those with whom we feel in unity: we feel joy towards their achievements, but not envy. Envy is directed towards another who is close enough to be member of an in-group, but distant enough for us not to share in their achievements as if they were our own. Following the identification of a significant other, a *comparison* with salient aspects of the other is necessary for envy (2). In principle, there is nothing odd about comparing our value to that of others. The aim of making comparisons is often to acquire a degree of self-knowledge: becoming aware of who we are. We try to be realistic in our comparison, and so we compare ourselves with others who are similar to us and with whom we may identify.<sup>19</sup> The problem begins, however, when, during this comparison, we feel at a disadvantage and inferior to the other. A third necessary condition for envy is the belief in one's own *inferiority* (3). This condition is not sufficient on its own, for this belief may also give rise to resignation or sadness. A further belief for envy is required: we believe that we also deserve the desired good in question. This belief in the *unfairness* of the situation leads us to think that we should also have the opportunity enjoyed by the other (4). Another condition can be identified in the judgment that we are *powerless* to change the situation (5). Finally, for in envy we consider it a *burden* that the other is the one who possesses what we desire, and we want to change places with them (6).<sup>20</sup> This complex network of cognitions is involved in Joaquín's existential envy: Joaquín compares himself with Abel. Both are the same age and share a common background. Abel is relevant to Joaquín's self-evaluation. In this comparison Joaquín discovers that Abel is closer than himself to his

ideal self. Joaquín thinks that he is a victim of an unfair situation, feels powerless to change the situation, and experiences Abel's existence as a burden.

### c) **The Self and the Sense of Possibility in Envy**

As the judgmental structure of envy shows, this emotion includes a twofold reference to the self. On the one hand, as has been emphasized, envy is an emotion of social comparison: a plurality of selves is necessary for envy to take place. It includes a social comparison, which takes another self as its object. On the other hand, envy entails a moment of self-reflexivity in which aspects of the self are revealed to oneself as painful (one's own inferiority, the failure to achieve one's desired goals, etc.). This self-reflexive moment, which has received much less attention in the literature on envy, will be the object of analysis in this section.

Throughout the novel, Joaquín is concerned about his own envious personality. Discussing Lord Byron's *Cain* he sketches four possible answers to the question as to why was he an envier: 1) Cain was created by God as an envier; 2) God is responsible for the unfair differences between Cain and Abel; 3) God showed his preference for Abel; 4) Abel triggered Cain's envy by boasting that he was God's favorite. With regard to the first three motives, Cain (and Joaquín) is a victim of God's injustice. The last motive presents Cain (and Joaquín) as Abel's victim, in this sense inverting their respective roles.<sup>21</sup> Joaquín thinks he is predestined to envy, and this gives rise to a paralysis of action and weakness of the will, to the extent that he cannot control his feelings.

These four motives present Joaquín as a victim of others (God, Abel) and as predestined to be an envier. However, on closer inspection, the novel offers a different reading according to which, far from being a predetermined character trait, envy is actually linked to the sense of possibility. Unamuno presents human existence as much more determined by its *possibilities* than by its factual reality.<sup>22</sup> Envy is only possible because certain possibilities inherent to ourselves go unrealized. The idea that we could have become a different person, that we could have developed different qualities, lived different lives, and achieved different goals can lead to suffering, anxiety, and negative feelings of all kinds, including envy. The other to whom we compare ourselves reminds us of our lost or unfulfilled possibilities, and we suffer as a result of this. From this perspective, the other is not just the object of our envy, but it is used as a trigger to feel the gap between our real self and our desired self which incarnates our unrealized expectations.

Related to this idea of unfulfilled possibilities at the core of envy, this emotion also has an existential dimension. As presented in Unamuno's work, envy (and emotion in general) is

not just a mental episode, but a mode of existence. Joaquín's existential envy neatly exemplifies this aspect. Unamuno himself, in the prologue to the second edition of the novel (1928), describes Joaquín's envy as "angelic", and as such differing from all vulgar forms of this emotion: his envy is derived from ontological insecurity and the search for a stable ground that cannot be found in oneself. This envy is directed towards the entire existence of the other, and it is so powerful that it is a constituent part of our personality.<sup>23</sup> Joaquín envies Abel's existence as a whole, not just an individual aspect of him (his talent, popularity, or his wife). His envy is rooted in the deepest level of his self and constitutes the affective background of his existence. Thus, he writes: "[...] for in his solitude he never managed to be alone, for the other was always there. The other! It got to the point where he suddenly found himself in dialogue with him, inventing what the other one said to him. And the other, in these solitary dialogues, in these dialogued monologues, said inconsequential and agreeable things to him, and never showed him any rancor. 'My God, why does he not hate me!', he came to ask himself" (AS, p. 135). Instead of a cultivation of the self, Joaquín appeases his hunger for immortality with the desire to become the envied other. The possibility of being Abel consumes Joaquín's life much more than the reality of his own being.

If Joaquín became an envier, this is not because he was destined to become so. The weakness of his will is not a question of fate, but one of self-esteem. Despite being an unpleasant, discomforting, destabilizing feeling, Joaquín's envy survives all attempts to transform it into embitterment, resignation, frustration, or even admiration. His self-hatred prevents him from controlling his passion and leads him to feel unloved and unworthy of love, as well as being incapable of loving others. It is this self-hatred that blocks any form of love and prevents him from living his life. Lucidly, on his deathbed, Joaquín exclaims to his wife: "If I had loved you that would have cured me. But I didn't love you and now it grieves me not to have loved you. If only we could start again" (AS, p. 221). Love would have opened him up to new possibilities and new ways of fully becoming an autonomous human being.

#### **4. Knowledge about the Emotions**

If Unamuno's narrative fictions may be considered as a kind of "thought experiment" in order to present and understand the intricacies of the human heart, then the question arises as to what kind of knowledge is conveyed by his literary writings. I will contend that, at least in three regards, we may obtain propositional and non-propositional knowledge about the emotions by reading Unamuno's novels. Attention will be paid to the enlargement of our capacities for the conceptualization and description, perception, and transformation of our emotional

experiences.<sup>24</sup> These three forms are not exhaustive but rather representative of his understanding of philosophy as literature. My focus will be the novel analyzed above, but my conclusions may be applied to all of Unamuno's literary output.

1) *Conceptualization and description*: First, narrative fictions offer conceptual and linguistic devices for the description of emotional experience. Envy is a complex phenomenon, a mode of existence that emerges from a unique combination of affective, cognitive, and volitional phenomena. As experience it may be too rich to be grasped in ordinary life, and we may lack the appropriate conceptual and linguistic devices for its description. Against this background, literature offers us the chance to conceptualize these emotional complexes and processes, while also providing a new vocabulary with which to express them. Focusing on the concrete case of *Abel Sánchez*, this novel presents us with the idea of an "existential envy", and it presents a linguistic description of its ontology, its bodily phenomenology, the world of its objects, and its self-reflexive moments. We learn to conceptualize and to linguistically express specific emotions, their nuances, and their hybrid forms.

2) *Perception*: A refinement of our perceptive abilities for certain emotions, emotional complexes, and features is also possible. Rather than presenting a theory of envy in the form of claims and arguments for and against them, Unamuno presents an ultimate form of envy. He exposes the reader to an extreme form of the emotion, such that we would be unlikely to experience in everyday life. In addition, this exposition does not take place from a detached perspective; rather, the author involves the reader in a first-person perspective (Joaquín's confessions afford us such an internal point of view). In this way, certain aspects of envy become more salient and visible, which leads to a refinement of the reader's awareness of this emotion.

3) *Transformation*: Literature may also lead to a change in our emotional life. In reacting emotionally to the depicted circumstances, in becoming viscerally involved in the narrative, and in mobilizing our own repertoire of lived experiences so as to understand the fictional universe, we are touched by the narrative. Even if we are not in a similarly envious state like Joaquín, we are nevertheless able to imagine, re-present, and understand his vital circumstances, reconstructing the scenarios depicted, with reference to our own experiences, step by step. We may also refuse to imagine, feel, or believe what is portrayed in the novel. In any case, we are confronted with ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that may lead to a transformation in ourselves. We may become aware of new aspects of our own emotional lives, or we might be prompted to reconsider aspects already known, yet from a new perspective.

This cultivation of our emotional capacities also has a moral dimension. As such, for Unamuno, the feeling of uncertainty, which determines the tragic sense of life and the inward struggle, serves “as the basis for action and morals” (*TSL*, p. 128). Thus, any change in our emotive capacities will have repercussions in our moral life. Not in the sense that he persuades us of moral maxims to follow, but in pushing us to perceive, judge, and feel in ways hitherto unimagined and in arriving at our own conclusions.<sup>25</sup> In presenting the complexity of human experience embedded in specific situations, Unamuno is also interested in moving us ethically, sharpening our capacities to perceive moral values, and cultivating our capacity for moral judgment.

To conclude, Unamuno’s interest in exploring human nature not only encompasses all his literary and non-literary work; it also amalgamates all of the other key themes of his philosophy of existence, identity, finitude, personality, and freedom. Besides his treatise *Del sentimiento trágico de la vida*, his philosophy of the emotions is primarily developed in his fictional works. As thought experiments, Unamuno’s fiction enlarges our knowledge not by being the vehicle for various propositions and claims. Rather, they most primarily confront the reader with unsuspected facets of the human being, present us with aspects of ourselves that are often overlooked or disguised, and alter our perception and judgment about the world of human experience in interesting and fruitful ways.

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<sup>1</sup> Following Borzoni’s suggestion according to which we should value his work for its originality and its power to reveal aspects of human nature, and Batchelor’s recommendation to take as wide a perspective as possible, I avoid interpreting Unamuno as belonging to a specific tradition of thought; S. Borzoni, “Faith and Existence”, in: *Companion to Miguel de Unamuno*, ed. J. Biggane and J. Macklin (Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2016), hereafter abbreviated *CMU*, p. 112, and R.E. Batchelor, *Unamuno Novelist: A European Perspective* (Oxford: Dolphin Book, 1972), p. 9. Moreover, my focus on feeling does not exclude other possible interpretations of his work. For an identification of other categories of reality present in his work, see: J. Ferrater Mora, *Unamuno. Bosquejo de una filosofía* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1957), pp. 126–32.

<sup>2</sup> J. Marías, *Miguel de Unamuno* (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpé, 1950), p. 63. For Marías, the function of Unamuno’s novel is to *show* the complexities of human existence (Marías, p. 67). In my view, Marías does not reduce the cognitive value of Unamuno’s literature to the presentation of propositions, but rather recognizes also that they convey knowledge by making us *acquainted with* aspects of the human reality. In a different vein, Longhurst maintains that,

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for Marías, Unamuno's novels may be read as philosophical statements; C.A. Longhurst, *Unamuno's Theory of the Novel* (London: Legenda, 2014), hereafter abbreviated *UTN*, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> Unamuno also established a distinction between "oviparous" novels written after a long process of recompilation of material, which entail previous conceptual work, and "viviparous" novels written immediately after having conceived of them. With the sole exception of *Paz en Guerra* (1897), Unamuno's process of creative gestation is "viviparous". On this distinction, see: H-P. Endress, "Fiction y realidad en 'Niebla' de Unamuno, con resonancias cervantinas y calderonianas", *Actas del XV Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas "Las dos orillas"*, Monterrey, México del 19 al 24 de julio de 2004, ed. B. Mariscal and M.T. Miaja de la Peña 3 (2007): 113–22, here 115; also J.-C. Rabaté, "Unamuno before 1902: Writing Nation, History, Politics", in: *CMU*, p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> With this notion of the "thought experiment" I distance myself from Catherine Elgin's recent proposal to use this concept in a narrow sense. See C. Elgin, "Fiction as Thought Experiment", *Perspectives in Science* 22(2) (2014): 221–41.

<sup>5</sup> I will follow here a line of thought inaugurated by Gottfried Gabriel for whom the main cognitive function of literature consists in conveying non-propositional forms of knowledge. For this idea see, for instance: G. Gabriel, "Fiktion, Wahrheit und Erkenntnis in der Literatur", in: *Wahrheit, Wissen und Erkenntnis in der Literatur. Philosophische Beiträge*, ed. by C. Demmerling and Í. Vendrell Ferran (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 163-180. This view implies an anti-intellectualist position according to which non-propositional forms of knowledge are possible. When Mary went out of the room in which she was confined to live without colors, she experienced something new and conveyed a knowledge that cannot be achieved just by reading books about color theory.

<sup>6</sup> In the foreword to *Amor y Pedagogía* (1902), he explicitly claims that feelings are better expressed in poetry, drama, and novels than in philosophical systems (interestingly, he regards the philosophical works of Kant, Hegel and Spinoza as novels). This novel may also be read as a defense of this claim: In showing how Avito Carrascal's rationalizing strategies lead him to be delusional about himself and his loved ones.

<sup>7</sup> The complementarity of poetic reason and rational argument in Unamuno was neatly stated by María Zambrano; in M. Zambrano, *Unamuno* (Barcelona: DeBols!llo, 2004), pp. 76–77. According to her, the progression from non-literary to literary forms takes place in order to compensate for the limitations of rational argument. She concludes that Unamuno's thought did not develop into a philosophy (2004, p. 79). Cf. for a radically different conclusion: Ferrater

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Mora (p. 106); Longhurst (*UTN*, p. 153); and P. Ribas, *Para leer a Unamuno* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial 2002), p. 105.

<sup>8</sup> See Ribas (pp. 75–76 and 144); J. Biggane “Foreword”, in: *CMU*, p. xii; Borzoni (p. 103).

<sup>9</sup> Miguel de Unamuno. *The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and in Peoples*, trans. J.E. Crawford Fritch (London: Leopold, 1921), hereafter abbreviated *TSL*, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> This idea has been explored by Biggane, “Writing Vital Struggle: Unamuno’s Narrative Fiction 1902–1923”, in: *CMU*, p. 44, and “From Separate Spheres to Unilateral Androgyny: Gender and Sexuality in the Work of Unamuno”, in: *CMU*, p. 188.

<sup>11</sup> M. Scheler, “Ordo amoris”, in *Selected Philosophical Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, 1973), pp. 110–11. In a similar vein, José Ortega y Gasset maintains that love is the “ratio essendi” and “ratio cognoscendi” of our existence; J. Ortega y Gasset, *Sobre el amor. Antología* (Madrid: Plenitud, 1963).

<sup>12</sup> Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000), p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of envy in Unamuno, see: G. Wood, “The Necessary Enemy or the Hated Friend: Self and Other in Unamuno”, in: *CMU*, p. 153 and 154. Wood maintains that envy may play a negative but also a “vivifying role”, helping the individual to define herself in the context of the community, and it may give rise to compassion. By contrast, I will focus here on envy as a negative emotion. In addition to this novel, *La Tía Tula* (1921) also deals with envy and especially envy of others’ motherhood (see A. Sinclair, *Uncovering the Mind: Unamuno, the Unknown and the Vicissitudes of Self* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 140; and Sinclair “A Question of Ethics: Exploring Issues of Right and Wrong in Unamuno”, in: *CMU*, p. 146, hereafter “QE”). In a short narration entitled “Artemio, heuatotimorumenos” (1918), Unamuno studies the possibility of envying oneself.

<sup>14</sup> M. de Unamuno, *Abel Sánchez*, trans. John Macklin (Oxford: Aris & Phillips, 2009), hereafter abbreviated *AS*, p. 189.

<sup>15</sup> See also J. Elster, *Alchemies of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 171.

<sup>16</sup> This concept of “Ressentiment” as terminus technicus can be found in Scheler: M. Scheler, *Ressentiment* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010), hereafter abbreviated *R*, p. 45–46

<sup>17</sup> Both aspects are central to the theories of the emotions developed in contemporary philosophy. While the so-called “feeling theories” focus on the qualitative experience of the emotions, the cognitive theories – which have dominated recent debates – underscore the

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cognitive bases of the emotions (perceptions, beliefs, memories, etc.), as well as their supposed cognitive function, which consists in giving us information about the world. For an overview, see: Paul E. Griffiths, *What Emotions Really Are: The Problem of Psychological Categories* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> This distinction was introduced by Anthony Kenny. See A. Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will* (London: Routledge, 1963).

<sup>19</sup> A. Ben-ze'ev, "Envy and Inequality", *Journal of Philosophy* 89(11) (1992): 551–81, here 554.

<sup>20</sup> This view differs strongly from Melanie Klein's psychoanalytical approach to envy. According to Klein: "Envy is the angry feeling that another person possesses and enjoys something desirable – the envious impulse being to take it away or to spoil it"; M. Klein, *Envy and Gratitude* (London: Vintage, 1997), p. 181. While Klein focuses on the desired object, I also take the feeling of being at a disadvantage and the feeling of powerlessness as being essential to envy.

<sup>21</sup> These motives point to four main concerns in Unamuno's theory of personality. First, there is a preoccupation with why some persons are born with talent (natural differences). Second, there is a concern about how we perceive others and are perceived by them (social perception). Third, the story makes clear that we need others in order to become who we are (social construction of the self). Finally, the interactions with others help us to become aware of our personality (socially mediated self-knowledge). For Unamuno's theory of personality, see: E. Salcedo, *Vida de Don Miguel* (Salamanca: Anaya, 1969), pp. 226–27, and Longhurst *UTN*, pp. 105 and 118.

<sup>22</sup> This idea of envy as a feeling of possibility that I put to the forefront here has been developed by Biemel and Zambrano; see W. Biemel, "Über den Neid", *Rencontre / Encounter / Begegnung* (1957): 40–49, and Zambrano, p. 136.

<sup>23</sup> For a philosophical description of existential envy, see Scheler: "The most powerless envy is also the most terrible. Therefore existential envy which is directed against the other person's very nature, is the strongest source of Ressentiment. It is as if it whispers continually; 'I can forgive everything, but not that you are – that you are what you are – that I am not what you are – indeed that I am not you'", *R*, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> These three aspects have been developed by the following authors: J. Eileen, "Reading Fiction and Conceptual Knowledge: Philosophical Thought in Literary Context", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 56(4) (1998): 331–48; M. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays*

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on *Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 152 and 164; R.W. Beardsmore, "Learning from a Novel", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures* 6 (1972): 23–46.

<sup>25</sup> Even if I agree with Sinclair's claim that Unamuno was not interested in persuading readers via specific moral statements, I cannot agree with her claim that ethical concerns are not central to him, but may emerge as a consequence of other aspects treated in his writings ("QE", p. 137).