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The Tragic Sense Of Life In Men And Nations

The Tragic Sense of Life in Men and Nations

by Miguel de Unamuno

Translated by Anthony Kerrigan



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Synopsis

The acknowledged masterpiece of Unamuno expresses the anguish of modern man as he is caught up in the struggle between the dictates of reason and the demands of his own heart.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As a disclaimer, I must say this is probably my favorite book of all time, so once I start explaining it, I frequently tend to effusion. In the simplest terms, it is a book written by a man who wants to understand why he lives and why he dies. Miguel de Unamuno was a spanish philosopher and novelist, a part of the "generation of 1898," along with Ortega y Gasset and Pio Baroja among others. They are part of the Spanish Romantic movement and their main quest in their writings is for a sense of the individual as a representative of the universal.Unamuno in particular and in this book attempts to reconcile Christianity with Classicism, and does so through the characters of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza(of course). These two for Unamuno are symbols of human striving both for noble purpose, outside of one's own self (christianity) yet also for an almost pagan "immortality" through heroic reputation (classicism). Unamuno wants to live nobly and never wants to die. He loves the concept of suffering and redemption, both in the model of a Christ who redeems, and by our own actions in this world, by which we redeem ourselves.Unamuno is all about striving, in the most ethical way possible, to create yourself. In a way, he is a more humanistic Nietzsche. His will-to-power is tempered by his mediterranean/Spanish anarchical democratic sentiment. Whew.

He's like a Spanish Walt Whitman. A Spanish William Blake. But really so much better than them.

Nada menos que todo un hombre.

Unamuno was a classical philologist and writer endowed with soft irony, like the inventor of the novel, Cervantes, which is conveyed by this translation too. A man of Church asserted that the existence of God is perceived in a more immediate way than that of a fellow human being. In spite of the asserted immediacy of this phenomenal perception, also today there are persons who doubt -- Unamuno (p. 97) rebutted. The personal God by Unamuno was an inclination to respect his own body and his own mind which doesn't need the severe prescription of ecclesiastic authorities, often colliding with medical science, and which avoids whichever appeal to non-observable and unreal entities. Body and mind are distinct entities, but united from life to death in one Self for whom refuses the Christian-Jewish dualism starting from the materiality of the body and from the continuity of personal identity: "Sum, ergo cogito" (pp. 13 and 41). "Homo sum! Nihil humani a me alienum puto, said the Latin playwright. For my part I would rather say: nullum hominem a me alienum puto; I am a man; no other man do I deem a stranger" (p. 3). The playwright to whom the text alludes is the Berber Terentium. Unamuno's universalism is ahead of his time and in touch with the declaration of human rights. Philologists consider the Basque a language unrelated to the other principal European languages. But Unamuno's insight in his doctorate thesis debated in 1884 about the genetic nearness of the Basques to the other Europeans is likely to be corroborated by recent research (see Cavalli-Sforza et al. 1994, pp. 517-518).

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