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## THE PROTAGONIST AND HIS COUNTRY: A COMPARATIVE READING OF FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY'S *THE IDIOT* AND JOSÉ RIZAL'S *NOLI ME TANGERE*

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**Abstract.** This essay investigates the parallels between Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and José Rizal's *Noli me tangere*. The focus is typological parallels: authors living in Europe describe a character returning from Europe to his own country. In both novels, the protagonist's love for his country leads him on a saving mission, which ultimately fails, due to the overwhelming power of death and violence. For both Dostoevsky and Rizal, it remains open whether there could be salvation. Therefore, they use carnivalesque polyphony as their means of expression.

**Keywords:** Fyodor Dostoevsky, José Rizal, Mikhail Bakhtin, Russia, Philippines, salvation, polyphony, gender

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## ГЛАВНЫЙ ГЕРОЙ И ЕГО СТРАНА: СРАВНИТЕЛЬНОЕ ПРОЧТЕНИЕ РОМАНА ФЕДОРА ДОСТОЕВСКОГО «ИДИОТ» И РОМАНА ХОСЕ РИСАЛЯ «НЕ ПРИКАСАЙСЯ КО МНЕ»

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**Аннотация.** В статье исследуются параллели между романом Федора Достоевского «Идиот» и романом Хосе Рисаля «Не прикасайся ко мне».

В центре внимания типологические параллели: писатель, живущий в Европе, описывает героя, возвращающегося из Европы в свою страну. В обоих романах любовь главного героя к своей стране подвигает его на спасительную миссию, которая в конечном итоге терпит неудачу из-за подавляющей силы смерти и насилия. И для Достоевского, и для Ризала остается открытым вопрос, возможно ли спасение. В качестве выразительного средства оба писателя используют карнавальную полифонию.

**Ключевые слова:** Федор Достоевский, Хосе Ризаль, Михаил Бахтин, Россия, Филиппины, спасение, полифония, гендер

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Two recent studies about José Rizal's works, Epifanio San Juan Jr.'s *Sisa's Vengeance* [1. P. 44–45] and Aaron C. Castroverde's dissertation *José Rizal and the Spanish Novel* [2. P. 6], emphasize the importance of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of polyphony in Fyodor Dostoevsky's writing and of carnival in François Rabelais' [3. P. 7–12] for their interpretation of Rizal's work, which leads, for example, Castroverde to the conviction that *Noli me tangere* "can be viewed as a kind of colonial 'polyphonic' novel" [2. P. 10]. Thus, interpreting Rizal, who was born 40 years later than Dostoevsky, in the light of his elder Russian counterpart, can offer us some insight into both writers' art and *Weltanschauung*. Here we will limit this to Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot* and Rizal's *Noli me tangere*. Our primary question is why the protagonists in both works, on returning to their own country from Europe, try to find their place in life there but fail.

For our interpretation of Dostoevsky's novel, we refer to Bakhtin's magisteral *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, whose first publication in 1963 was a crucial event, both in Russia and internationally, in terms of Dostoevsky's interpretation [4. P. 10]. It stresses the radically and irreducibly polyphonic and dialogic character of Dostoevsky's novels [5. P. 6, 270]. We also refer to Nikolay Berdyaev, who interprets the novel as exclusively male-centric. He criticizes Dostoevsky's way of presenting women, primarily, Nastasya Filippovna, the main female character. According to Berdyaev, Dostoevsky portrays her as not completely human; for example, her passionate love seems to belong rather to the elemental forces than to human qualities [6. P. 407–413]. We also turn to the German theologian Romano

Guardini, who stresses that both Myshkin's humility and courage remind us of Christ [7. P. 267–268]. Furthermore, we rely on Michael Holquist, who shares with Guardini the importance he ascribes to Christology, though doubting whether it affirmed or negated in Dostoevsky [8. P. 128–130]. Since our research shows the strong link between the story of a man coming home and his relationship with women, we also refer to Tatyana Kasatkina [9.], who interprets Dostoevsky in terms of gender. Finally, we refer to Elena Novikova's work on *The Idiot*, where she asserts that the novel was written by a man who had the experience of coming back from exile in Siberia to Russia about a man coming back from Switzerland to Russia [10. P. 9–12]. Novikova also stresses that *The Idiot* is shaped by the theme of execution: Dostoevsky writes about his own mock execution [11. P. 51] and re-enacts it by telling the story of Nastasya Filippovna's murder in the light of Christ's execution [10. P. 6–12].

As for Rizal, one of his crucial biographies, *The First Filipino*, was written by León Ma. Guerrero when the Philippines celebrated Rizal's centennial (1961). Guerrero stresses that Rizal wrote *Noli me tangere* in a European context, where the Philippines were almost unknown, and its purpose resembles that of Hugo's, Dickens', Zola's, Daudet's and, most of all, Beecher Stowe's novels. *Noli me tangere* also shares this purpose with two Filipino novels – Fr. José Burgos' *La Loba Negra* and Pedro Paterno's *Ninay* – which aim at describing the reality of their authors' countries [12. P. 121–129]. Guerrero emphasizes that Rizal sees the power of the friars as the main source of injustice in the Philippines [12. P. 134–138].

Besides Guerrero's biography, alongside with Castroverde's dissertation and the mentioned study by San Juan, where *Noli me tangere* is interpreted from a gender point of view [1. P. 66–90], we also refer to San Juan's older essay on Rizal in *The Radical Tradition in Philippine Literature*, where, against a Marxist background, the protagonist, Crisóstomo Ibarra, is described as “alienated” [13. P. 13]. Later, San Juan returns to the novel and interprets it from the perspective of the “discourse of the Other” [14. P. 20] and as a “*Bildungsroman* with an embarrassed and inconclusive ending” [14. P. 37]. San Juan firmly and with good reason rejects the idea that Rizal himself is a “Tagalog Quixote” [13. P. 10], and though Ernesto Giménez Gaballero's study on Rizal is unilateral and imbued by Spanish nationalism, yet his opinion that Ibarra is “un eroe quijotesco perfecto” [15. P. 5] is worth considering, since San Juan's and Castroverde's interpretations of the novel in the light of Bakhtin's polyphony mean that the protagonist's position differs from the author's. Thus, Giménez' characterization of Ibarra

does not necessarily mean Rizal is a Don Quixote. Gregorio F. Zaide stresses that Rizal wrote the novel because his fellow Filipinos in Europe did not contribute to what they originally planned, i.e. a collective book on the Philippines [16. P. 105]. Later, Gregorio F. Zaide and Sonia M. Zaide interpret *Noli me tangere* in the light of Rizal's biography, seeing the novel as imbued by the author's reading of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [17. P. 88]. They also stress the connection between Cervantes and Rizal: just as *Don Quixote* depicts Spain, so *Noli me tangere* depicts the Philippines [17. P. 104].

Despite all the secondary literature, an in-depth comparison between Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Rizal's *Noli me tangere* has never taken place. However, some of the aspects mentioned by these researchers allow for the hypothesis that there is a connection between the two novels. Of course, Rizal could not have read *The Idiot* before writing *Noli me tangere*. He might have read *Humiliated and Insulted* and *Crime and Punishment*, published in French in 1884, whereas *The Idiot* was first translated into French only in 1887 [18. P. 334–335]. Certainly, in a time, when the first translations of Dostoevsky's works were published, Rizal might have taken part in conversations on the Russian novelist, which could somehow refer also to *The Idiot*. Already during Rizal's lifetime, José Cecilio in a letter to Rizal states that Rizal's novels remind the "style of the Russian novels" [2. P. 10]. Indeed, it is striking that *Noli me tangere* contains some allusions to Russia: Ibarra has been as far as "la Polonia rusa" [19. P. 47]. Likewise, one of his councilors is the philosopher (or lunatic) Anastasio or Tasio [19. P. 123], who happens to have the same first name as the main female character of *The Idiot*, Nastasya Filippovna, who, though well-educated, can be considered a "madwoman" [11. P. 33–41; 5. P. 173]. Yet these are unlikely to be direct and conscious allusions. Rather, the connection between *The Idiot* and *Noli me tangere* is, on the one hand, indirect: a link between them is Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. This is not strange, given Cervantes' influence on the whole history of the modern novel. Nevertheless, it is significant that both Dostoevsky and Rizal, like Cervantes, describe a protagonist who is heroically noble yet condemned to fail [8. P. 131–132; 13. P. 13; 17. P. 104]; as for Cervantes' influence on Dostoevsky cf., among others [5. P. 158]. On the other hand, parallels between Dostoevsky's and Rizal's novels might also be typological: similar artistic situations lead to similar strategies of storytelling.

To study the connection between the two novels, we analyze their authors' strategies, starting from the situations from which they write. Dostoevsky writes his novel while abroad, and not just abroad. In the last para-

graphs of both *The Idiot* and *Demons* he stresses that many Russians dream of living abroad, in Europe, and particularly, in Switzerland [11. P. 510; 1915: 467; 20. P. 516]. Regarding this background, it is particularly important to note that the first scene of the novel takes place in the train from Warsaw to Saint Petersburg. One of the passengers, Prince Lev Nikolaevich Myshkin explains to his fellow travelers that he has spent four years in Switzerland, where the doctor tried to heal his epilepsy. The doctor failed, but the prince has to return to Russia, since he has gone already two years without anybody to pay for his stay and therapy [11. P. 6–7].

From the very beginning, the prince is involved in discussions on whether life is better in “Europe” than in Russia. For example, when asked whether the judicial system is more just in Europe, he says that he “has heard a lot of good things about ours [the Russian courts of justice]” [11. P. 19]<sup>1</sup>, significantly reformed by Alexander II just a few years before the novel was written. The prince also describes the Swiss as relentless and rigoristic people. When telling his interlocutors that, in Switzerland, he came to know a girl called Marie who was seduced, defiled and then abandoned by a sales clerk, he narrates how the people in her village mocked at Marie and exclaims, “What hazy ideas they have as for this” [11. P. 60]. He also stresses that it is hard to live in Central Europe in winter, since the houses are heated worse than in Russia [11. P. 19].

Indeed, the concept of Otherness [1. P. 42], which plays a role in interpreting Rizal, is important also in *The Idiot*, however ambiguous. Aglaia dreams of going to Western Europe to visit museums and study in Paris [11. P. 358]. Additionally, after leaving the prince, she marries a Polish emigrant and becomes a Catholic and a supporter of an independent Poland [11. P. 509], thus changing sides. This is presented negatively, since the “pater” (usually this means a Jesuit), who becomes Aglaia’s confessor, has gained complete power over her mind, the Polish emigrant lies to her that he is wealthy and both alienates her from her family [11. P. 509]. The whole novel ends up with Aglaia’s mother exclaiming, by the way, while she is in Switzerland as Dostoevsky himself, “We have had enough enthusiasm, it’s time to give reverence to reason. And all this, and all your abroad, and all your Europe, and all of us, when abroad, this is only fancy... remember my words, you will see it by yourselves” [11. P. 510]. Thus, “the abroad” or “Europe” is presented as a place Russians may dream of but which is not worth the cost, since Russians can find true life only in Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* have been translated by me from the Russian original.

In this context, it is important that the prince comes from Europe and arrives in his own country, Russia. He expresses his happiness that he still speaks Russian well [11. P. 19]. In this sense, his stay in Europe has prepared him for coming back to Russia, since it has increased his desire to return to his own country.

The prince harshly criticizes the “West” and Catholicism for having given up Christianity and become atheistic [11. P. 450–451]. During the evening party, he exclaims, “Show the Russian man the Russian World, make him find this gold, this treasure, hidden from him in the earth!” He also says, “Show him [the Russian] in the future the renewal of the whole humankind and its resurrection, [which can be reached] maybe only with the help of the Russian thought, the Russian God, and Christ” [11. P. 453]. He declares himself an ideologist of the Russian “soil”, of Russia as the place where a Russian should have his or her home [10. P. 146].

By these words the prince wants to “save” his listeners [11. P. 458], but they do not accept them. For example, General Epanchin thinks that the prince strongly “ex-ag-ge-rates” [11. P. 451]. Even before the party Aglaia warns the prince not to talk about ideological topics “like the capital punishment, the economic situation in Russia, or [the conviction that] beauty will save the world”, foreseeing that this will make the prince nervous, so that he will make a vehement movement and break a precious vase [11. P. 435–436]. This is exactly what happens [11. P. 454]. After that, he still goes on preaching until, finally, has an epileptic seizure [11. P. 458]. The broken vase and the epileptic seizure stress what his interlocutors’ words already show: his theory of Russia is not accepted.

Thus, the prince arrives physically but is never able to make Russia his true home. Dostoevsky has already expressed this symbolically describing the prince’s voyage from Warsaw to Saint-Petersburg: the passengers cannot see anything because it is November and there is dense fog outside [11. P. 5]. The prince is also not dressed properly for a Russian November [11. P. 6].

What is worse, his compatriots reject him: General Epanchin, whose wife the prince sees as a distant relative, stresses that there are no family bounds between them [11. P. 23]. His interlocutors consider him “such a ... strange person” and “such a ... sick person” [11. P. 46–47; in both cases the ... are Dostoevsky’s], a “donkey” [11. P. 48–49], a “sheep” [11. P. 99] and, of course, an “idiot” (e.g.: 11. P. 75, 141, 323). People almost stop insulting him when they discover that he is wealthy [11. P. 139–141]. Later, he is rejected by the women he loves: first by Nastasya Filippovna [11. P. 142–149], then by Aglaia [11. P. 475] and, finally, again by Nastasya Filippov-

na, who flees while he is already waiting in the church for their wedding [11. P. 493]. Most overtly, the prince has physically reached his country without finding a home. After Rogozhin stabs Nastasya Filippovna, the prince is brought back to Switzerland because, at her deathbed, he has finally and almost definitely turned the “idiot” people had always seen him to be [11. P. 505–508].

One of the reasons why the prince cannot truly arrive home is the overwhelming power of death. For example, there is the strange story of his father’s death, which the prince hears for the first time, though it happened when he was a little boy. An officer, the retired General Ivolgin, pretends to be a good friend of Myshkin’s late father and tells him that the elder prince, Nikolai Lvovich Myshkin, died in prison while waiting for his court case to be resolved. This case alleged that Prince Myshkin Sr. had threatened to beat one of his subordinate soldiers for thievery. This soldier died and was buried but was found alive as a participant of a parade six months later [11. P. 82–83]. This seems to be just an anecdote, most of all, because General Ivolgin is an alcoholic and a famous liar [11. P. 91–94]; yet it accentuates the topic of death and, in a special way, the capital punishment and mock execution (the dead soldier found alive!), which is crucial to the novel.

The Prince stresses that, in Russia, “again, we do not have capital punishment” [11. P. 19], which is true insofar as throughout the 19th century the capital punishment was reduced to rare cases of terrorism and high treason. Yet, the whole novel is imbued by Dostoevsky’s own mock execution. From the beginning, the prince speaks about the death penalty. While waiting to be admitted at General Epanchin’s, he tells the general’s butler how deeply he was impressed and shocked by the execution he once witnessed in Lyons [11. P. 19–21], a city that is phonetically associated with “lions”, just as the prince’s own first name “Lev” means “lion.”

The prince tells this same story to the general’s wife and daughters [11. P. 54]. He also tells the four women about someone he knows who was:

once brought up to the scaffold, together with others, and he was read the sentence of death by shooting, for a political crime. After about twenty minutes the act of grace was also read and a different punishment was stipulated [11. P. 51].

Thus, he tells them Dostoevsky’s own story.

The Prince also suggests that Aglaia’s sister, Adelaida, who is an amateur painter but does not know what to paint since she cannot see properly that she should draw “the face of a condemned one a minute before the hit of the guillotine” [11. P. 54].

The “face of a condemned one” actually appears in the novel, though not drawn by Adelaida: it is Nastasya Filippovna’s photo, which the prince sees in the general’s bureau and in which “the expression of the face is passionate” [11. P. 27]. The prince concludes that “she has terribly suffered”. He wonders if she is (morally) good because, in this case, “all would be saved” [11. P. 31–32]. Indeed, it turns out that she has “terribly suffered” because, after her parents’ sudden and almost simultaneous death, she was taken under wing by Totsky, who first gave her an excellent education and then abused her sexually when she was a teenager [11. P. 35–36, 143]. This practically condemns her to death because it makes her go to the passionate and fierce Rogozhin rather than live with the meek prince, whom she is afraid to corrupt, as she was corrupted by Totsky [11. P. 143, 491]. She goes to Rogozhin although (or, to be precise: because) with him, “the knife is awaiting” her [11. P. 179]. One person who is “condemned to death” and whom the prince cannot save is Nastasya Filippovna. That is not just one fact among others. It is closely linked to Dostoevsky’s biography, since the description of the road to Rogozhin’s house, where he stabs Nastasya Filippovna and where he brings the prince in order to wake at her deathbed for one last night, shows that it must be less than two hundred meters away from Semyonovskaya Square, the place of Dostoevsky’s execution [11. P. 505].

The other person whom the prince cannot save is Ippolit, a young man suffering from tuberculosis. He is in some sense close to Nastasya Filippovna: both his name and Nastasya’s patronymic “Filippovna” allude to horses [21. P. 71–72]. Both characters feel menaced by Rogozhin [11. P. 320–321, 341, 490–491]. Both die at the end of the novel. The news about Nastasya Filippovna having been murdered by Rogozhin even accelerates Ippolit’s death [11. P. 508].

For Ippolit, fear of death plays a crucial role. He pays attention to the copy of a picture by Hans Holbein Jr. in Rogozhin’s house. It shows the dead Christ after he has been taken from the cross. This picture causes horror in the prince as well [11. P. 181–182]. It is Christ’s face that catches Ippolit’s attention:

This face has been terribly smashed from being beaten, it is bloated, with terrible, swollen and bleeding bruises, the eyes are open, their pupils squinting; the whites of the eyes are glooming with some deadly, glassy reflection [11. P. 339].

What makes death so strong in *The Idiot* is its destructive and violent power. Ippolit stresses that the face of Christ, who was “just now taken from the cross”, still bears the signs of Christ’s suffering, of his

wounds, tortures, beating by the guards, beating by the people, how he carried the cross and fell under the cross, and suffering on the cross for six hours [11. P. 339].

“Nature”, Ippolit stresses,

comes into imagination, while looking at this picture, in the form of some giant, inexorable and mute beast or, to say it far more truthfully, in the form of some giant machine, of those quite recently invented, which without sense has caught, smashed and swallowed, deafly and without feeling, the great and priceless being, which was worth all nature and all its laws, all the earth, which was made, maybe, only so that this being might appear! [11. P. 339].

This paragraph shows, on the one hand, how worthy Christ is, not only in Ippolit’s eyes but also from Dostoevsky’s own point of view. Dostoevsky writes in a letter to a good friend, Natalia Fonvizina, that there can be “nothing more beautiful” than Christ, and if he had to choose between being with Christ and being in the truth he would prefer being with Christ [22. P. 176; cf. 23. P. 144]. Yet, on the other hand, Dostoevsky expresses that this overwhelming beauty has been destroyed by the even more overwhelming power of death [11. P. 339].

The power of death finally destroys Ippolit, but, as we have seen, it overwhelms him even earlier. Like Dostoevsky in 1849 and like the person whose portrait the prince wishes to be drawn, Ippolit is someone “condemned to death”, as he himself expresses it [11. P. 327]. Indeed, he associates his situation of a man who is going to die soon with the death penalty, since, while sharing his emotions with a group of guests on the prince’s terrace, he says to the prince, “Write this down, Prince, remember it, you seem to be gathering materials about death penalty” [11. P. 319]. With Ippolit, even a symbolic re-enactment of Dostoevsky’s mock execution takes place. After reading a “declaration” about his viewpoints concerning suffering and death to the prince’s guests, he shoots at his head, but the pistol turns out to be empty [11. P. 348–349].

The novel oftentimes stresses that Ippolit seeks closer companionship with the prince. Already at the beginning of the party that ends up in Ippolit’s attempted suicide the sick young man impatiently waits for the prince to have time for him. Ippolit’s waiting accompanies his strong desire for the rising sun, as if being near the Prince meant being near the sun of salvation. The prince, however, is not very attentive. Moreover, Ippolit finds that the prince behaves as if he were the young man’s “nanny” [11. P. 308–309]. Ippolit also finds

out that the prince offers him false consolation from a “Christian” viewpoint. He expects that the prince might tell him it is good that he is going to die [11. P. 342]. Likewise, Ippolit cannot understand why the prince offers him to spend his last days in the village, among beautiful “trees”, rather than in the city; for him, since he is going to die anyway, it is pointless whether this is going to happen in a beautiful or an ugly surrounding [11. P. 343]. Ippolit also finds it difficult to accept that “humility is an awesome power”, a saying he ascribes to the prince [11. P. 343]. Thus, the prince offers Ippolit different kinds of consolation, or at least Ippolit ascribes them to the prince. However, from the young man’s point of view, they all are false.

Likewise, the deeper reason why the prince cannot save Nastasya Filippovna is her impression that the consolation he offers is not true. As Kasatkina correctly stresses, he is not able to join her in her deep pain, horror, and shame. He can only persuade her to believe that everything is good and that she is not guilty. This is, of course, true but not touching or convincing enough to reach her heart. The prince can console her in a human sense but he cannot save her [9. P. 157, 257]. The fact that he turns from a poor and despised “idiot” and outsider into someone belonging to the city’s high society and the heir of a fortune [11. P. 139; cf. 24. P. 35] alienates him from Nastasya Filippovna. While the prince used to be the one who believed in her and whom she trusted – to the extent that she followed his advice and did not marry Ganya [11. P. 131] – she now no longer trusts his promise to stay with her for the rest of her life [11. P. 142–144]. She thinks the prince’s affirmation that, having experienced the “hell” of sexual abuse, she is still “pure”, is something taken from “novels” and has nothing to do with reality [11. P. 138]. This is the deeper reason why she leaves him for the first time with Rogozhin, by whose hand she is destined to die.

Thus, the prince arrives in Russia without really coming home because he cannot accomplish what he wishes, i.e. to save the people he loves. That is the deeper reason why people see him as an “idiot”, i.e. an individual separated from the others, “a man separated from any collective identity” [8. P. 134].

The prince’s alienation is in part a universal problem. Not by chance, then, the novel speaks about the salvation of “the world”, to which the prince cannot contribute because he is separated from the others. Indeed, the phrase “beauty will save the world” [11. P. 317] is universal, and Sergei Bulgakov is right to call it one of Dostoevsky’s “crucial” phrases [25. P. 320; cf. 10. P. 163].

Yet it is important to interpret the prince’s “failure” not just from a universalistic point of view but also concretely, at least from two viewpoints. On the one hand, there is the Russian question, which we have already tak-

en into consideration. On the other hand, there is the question of gender: talking about Nastasya Filippovna, Adelaida stresses that “with such a beauty you can upturn the world” [11. P. 69, 380; cf. 9. P. 253]. This makes us think of gender issues, since it is the beauty of a woman who has suffered from sexual violence. The gender question is also stressed by Nastasya Filippovna’s birthday. It occurs on the 27th of November. In the morning before Nastasya Filippovna’s party, Ms. General Epanchina asks her daughters to tell her the calendar date. Upon hearing it, she comments, “The twenty-seventh? According to some calculations, this is good” [11. P. 71]. That is a symbolical allusion. The 27th of November is the feast day of the Mother of God of the Sign, the icon which brings salvation and victory through its tears and which, in a 12th-century battle, made a reversal to give the victory to the Novgorod army [9. P. 253]. Indeed, Nastasya Filippovna’s tears are very important for the prince when he first sees her photograph: they make him feel compassion and desire to save her [11. P. 31–32]. The question is whether they also make things turn around and save the woman from her offenders. Considering Nastasya Filippovna’s horrible death, we must rather deny this, at least on the level of the plot.

The fact that the prince cannot fulfill his mission, that the question of beauty, of Russia, of gender are asked but not answered, is the deep reason why the novel cannot be unambiguous and must be polyphonic. This polyphonic character of the novel is worth studying more in-depth. First, the situation allows it to be polyphonic. Bakhtin agrees with Otto Kaus (although he is convinced that Kaus does not interpret this deeply enough), that Dostoevsky’s novels can be polyphonic and the heroes can be on an equal level and (narratively) in non-hierarchical relations because Dostoevsky wrote during the period of social clashes: his characters have grown up according to their classical social roles (as landowners, officers, peasants, housewives etc.); but now, due to the shifts in the Russian society caused by the abolition of serfdom in 1861 and by early capitalism, they have reached a new period. They can go beyond their old role models and meet each other on the same level, which was not possible earlier [26. P. 63; cf. 5. P. 18–20].

Secondly, because of this new situation, the novel hierarchies turn upside down, and there are several strange encounters, even clashes. Just to mention a few of them (although there are far more), a prince whose family has become poor and who himself is an epileptic, a rich merchant’s outcast son and soon-to-be heir and a middle level state officer and alcoholic come together in one train compartment [11. P. 6–8]. These same people, together with a rich general, a rich landowner, a young noblewoman who has grown

up poor and practically become the rich landowner's sex slave, and the rich general's secretary Ganya, who is a poor general's son, gather for Nastasya Filippovna's birthday party [11. P. 114–149]. Myshkin, though he is a prince, is poor as a beggar and has to wait for his reception at the general's talking with the butler [11. P. 16–22].

Thirdly, these strange encounters, against the background of death, can be called carnivalesque. Moreover, there is absurd laughter during Nastasya Filippovna's birthday party [11. P. 138–140] and around Ippolit's failed suicide [11. P. 347–349]. This laughter is ambivalent [5. P. 165; 2. P. 54]: on the one hand, it expresses happiness and the joy of being alive, which people strongly need when they feel that death is near, just as Catholics feel the strong necessity of celebrating carnival right before Ash Wednesday and Lent. On the other hand, this laughter shows tension, which manifests in "mockery and deriding" [2. P. 54].

Fourthly, sometimes strange encounters lead to scandals [5. P. 117]. For example, during her birthday party, Nastasya Filippovna first follows the prince's advice and cancels the expected engagement with Ganya, thus shocking those present [11. P. 130–131]. Then she gets engaged to the prince, whom nobody would consider an adult man able to marry [11. P. 137–141]. Later, she leaves the prince for Rogozhin and burns 100,000 rubles [11. P. 142–148]. Likewise, Aglaia, a well-educated young upper-class woman, and Nastasya Filippovna, a scorned and poor young woman, meet to express their love and respect for one another [11. P. 465–466] but then become fierce enemies and force the prince to choose between his mercy for Nastasya Filippovna and his love for Aglaia [11. P. 468–475]. In this context, we could also add the vase broken at the climax of the discussion on Russia and the West [11. P. 435–436].

All this shows that the characters of the novel long in vain for harmony both in private and in public life and that the questions of their lives are not answered, neither by the prince nor by anybody else. This is what Dostoevsky expresses when he does not allow the prince to make Russia his home and makes the novel end up in the prince's sickbed in Switzerland. The concrete place of the prince's failure is Russia, but Europe is not better than Russia, and the main questions – home and otherness, death, violence, beauty, and the gender issue – remain unsolved.

From many points of view, José Rizal's *Noli me tangere*, written eighteen years later than *The Idiot*, can be compared to the famous Russian novel. Rizal gives great importance to the fact that he writes his novel in Europe. At its end, he writes, "Berlín, 21 de febrero de 1887, 11 ½ noche.

Lunes” [19. P. 582]. This is not just an exterior fact. Ibarra calls the countries where he has been “la Europa libre” [19. P. 47]. Ibarra walks along the sea and thinks about the fact that “on the other shore, there is Europe”<sup>1</sup>, which he knows to be a place of catastrophes and wars, but also a place with a high level of spiritual experiences and with a longing for happiness [19. P. 92]. Here, like in Dostoevsky, the concept of Otherness is relevant [1. P. 42], i.e. the idea that there are two poles of life, in this case, Europe and the Philippines. Yet, Ibarra’s position is different from the prince’s. On the one hand, we know Rizal feels that staying far away from the “patria” makes one love her more intensely and that “one imagines the *patria* only in missing her” [27. P. 599]. This corresponds to the prince’s enthusiasm for his mother tongue after coming back to Russia. In *Noli me tangere* it is expressed in what Ibarra says to his beloved, María Clara:

To me it seemed that you were the fay, the spirit, the poetic incarnation of my motherland, beautiful, simple, amiable, innocent, daughter of the Philippines, of this beautiful country that unites the great virtues of Mother Spain to the beautiful qualities of a young people [19. P. 83].

But, on the other hand, unlike the prince, after coming to his country, Ibarra’s main task is not to save a woman but to save his country where and how he can – although, as we have mentioned, on the symbolic level there is an element of femininity in how he perceives his country. The woman he loves, and her beauty is a strong driver for his patriotism. This is stressed also by the fact that María Clara, during a holiday excursion, sings a song “Dulces las horas en la propria patria!” [19. P. 209]. Ibarra’s love for his country finds its expression in his desire to contribute to its salvation through people’s education [19. P. 83]. In this, Ibarra is inspired also by a male ideal: he thinks it is not good just to mourn his father’s death, and even less, to take vengeance on somebody for it, but to honor his father by realizing the education project that his father failed to realize [19. P. 163].

Whereas Dostoevsky’s prince wants to “save” his fellow citizens from a dangerous European influence, Ibarra certainly sees Europe as an example and a model in saving his fellow Filipinos. For example, he shares the village teacher’s ideas, who praises the system in Germany [19. P. 164]. The philosopher Tasio calls Ibarra a “plant shifted from Europe to this stony ground” [19. P. 251].

This indicates already why Ibarra’s saving plans fail, just like the prince’s. Indeed, during the solemn laying of the foundation stone of Ibar-

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<sup>1</sup> All translations from the Spanish original of *Noli me tangere* are ours.

ra's rural school, a worker is killed during the attempt to murder Ibarra in what looks like an accident [19. P. 315–316]. Then, after being patient for a long time, Ibarra is excommunicated because he attacks his father's old enemy, Padre Dámaso, and would have killed him, had it been not for María Clara, who stops him in the last moment [19. P. 332–335]. This is why Ibarra is considered a "plibastiero" (filibuster) by the Dominicans and his project of building a school is destined to fail [19. P. 341–342]. Then, in the end, a plot against the government is organized, and Ibarra is accused of being its leader [19. P. 492]. As such he is arrested [19. P. 498], his house burns down [19. P. 501], he is accused by the relatives of the other men arrested as guilty of their suffering [19. P. 524–525], then he escapes and finally flees [19. P. 560], so that he can come back only many years later, disguised as Simoun [13. P. 32]. Thus, like Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin, he has reached his country but not truly come home. This corresponds to the fact that Sisa, the woman whom he has tried to protect, dies [19. P. 573; cf. 223–224] and that María Clara, the woman he loves, enters a convent to avoid marriage with another man, and that she is sexually abused there by a priest [19. P. 581–582].

As in *The Idiot*, the protagonist's failure is presaged early. As we have seen, this is done by the fog that makes Myshkin unable to see his country during the train journey. In his turn, Rizal uses the strange rhetorical figure of introducing María Clara's real appearance to those invited for a celebration in her (legal) father's, Capitan Tiago's, house with a statement contrary to fact, "Ibarra habría visto una joven hermosísima" [19. P. 60]. This shows that Ibarra's encounter with the Philippines, whom María Clara represents, does not become full reality, among others, because he is too occupied and worried [2. P. 23–24]. That corresponds to the fact that he is partly perceived as a Spaniard [19. P. 120] and that he calls himself "casi extranjero en mi país" [19. P. 244; cf. 13. P. 14]. He also recognizes that he "has not been educated in the midst of the people whose needs [he], maybe, [does] not know" [19. P. 459]. In this sense, it is true what San Juan stresses: Ibarra epitomizes "Rizal's limitations as a bourgeois intellectual", as a member of the emerging middle class [17. P. 7], though recognizing these limitations might help "transcend" them [13. P. 18]. They are due to "an excessive belief in the power of reason" [14 P. 30], the opinion that one can do good by spreading education, irrespective of the social and political context. That is why his attempt at helping to save his country fails.

Like in Dostoevsky's novel, an important reason for the failure of the protagonist's saving intentions is the overwhelming power of death. This is expressed

by the general setting. A significant part of the story takes place around All Saints' Day (November 1), when Catholics pray in a special manner to the faithful departed [19. P. 112–117; 28]. Because of this, certain scenes become natural: a reflection on the relation between the living and the dead, a visit to the cemetery where two gravediggers, whose dialogue reminds us of Shakespeare's Hamlet, excavate a dead body in order to bury somebody else [19. P. 112–117; cf. 2. P. 54], a discussion on the purgatory [19. P. 127–133]. In this situation, we can apply what Bakhtin writes about Dostoevsky: closeness of death plays an important role in creating an atmosphere of carnival [5. P. 125–126].

In this context, as in the case of Dostoevsky, an execution in the past plays a crucial role for Rizal. As for Rizal, the execution happened about 15 years before he wrote the novel, and it was real, whereas Dostoevsky's was about twenty years earlier and turned out to be a mock one. We are talking about the execution of Frs. Burgos, Zamora, and Gomez. Already during Ibarra's first walk along Manila Bay, he pays attention to the field of Bagumbayan and to the "old priest" who taught him love of knowledge and who died in this field [19. P. 92–93]. The fear of being sent there or ending up like "Padre Burg..." is present also after the rebellion, in all those people who are afraid that they might be considered participants in it [19. P. 526, 532]. This corresponds to the fact that the three priests' execution was a formative experience for Rizal, or, as Guerrero expresses it, "something to remember" [12. P. 1, 17].

Where the reader can feel the power of death, we can also interpret a story that is very similar to one in *The Idiot*: the story of the protagonist's father's death. Like Dostoevsky's Myshkin, Ibarra only now comes to know how it happened: he hears from an old officer that, like in *The Idiot*, the father died in prison waiting for his trial [19. P. 52–59]. Ibarra even finds out that his father was posthumously treated like a pagan or heretic, his body was excavated and thrown into a lake by order of the old parish priest, Padre Dámaso. The cross on his grave was burned, which indicates the future burning of Ibarra's house [19. P. 119–121]. Not by chance, the chapter in which these events are described is called "Presagios de tempestad" [19. P. 118]. Since his father's death was a strong motivation for Ibarra to do good through education [19. P. 163], it becomes an important factor in his failure: Padre Dámaso's allusion that Ibarra's father made a grave mistake by sending his son to Europe and was justly punished for this makes Ibarra so furious that he attacks the Franciscan [19. P. 333], which, as we have seen, is a crucial moment in making him an outcast.

Like in *The Idiot*, the problem of death is closely linked to gender issues. We can see this when studying the image of women presented by Ri-

zal: Sisa represents the country insofar as it can be compared to a mother who cannot protect her children [29. P. 304]. Her arrest and humiliation when she has to walk along the road with the guardias civiles who arrested her [19. P. 189–192] reenact one of Rizal's crucial memories – the moment when his mother was wrongly accused, arrested, and lead away from Calamba to Santa Cruz, about 50 km, on foot and with guards [1. P. 68–69]. Sisa is arrested because she is poor and has a husband who does not care [19. P. 144]. She cannot protect her sons from the accusation of stealing money from the church, so her younger son dies and her older son flees away [19. P. 188–189, 223–225]. Not by chance, already in her first appearance she does not dare to defend the food she has prepared for her children from her greedy and careless husband [19. P. 142]. At her last moment, she overcomes madness to see her older son, Basilio, alive but wounded, and dies like a Pietà, just the other way round: the son survives, whereas the mother holding him dies [19. P. 573]. Not by chance, this happens during Christmas night, when Christians honour a little boy and the mother holding him. Unlike in the gospel, death in the novel is stronger than life, and its power is linked to Rizal's feeling that, unfortunately, Filipino mothers have become weak and helpless [1. P. 55]. This “motherlessness” is stressed also by the fact that both Ibarra and María Clara, like Dostoevsky's prince and Nastasya Filippovna, have lost their mothers many years ago [19. P. 75, 549].

Besides, the power of death is closely linked to the question of sexual power and violence. In the end of the novel, we come to know the true reason why Padre Dámaso has been fighting against Crisóstomo Ibarra's family: he is María Clara's biological father and has always wanted to prevent his daughter from becoming unhappy by marrying a Filipino instead of a Spaniard [19. P. 563–565]. This shows the sexual power of the allegedly chaste friars, since having a child with Padre Dámaso has made her mother, a strong woman, so unhappy that shortly after María Clara's birth she dies [19. P. 75]. Sexual violence is also present in the end of the novel: to save her family's honour, María Clara is forced to betray her beloved by handing over two letters that can be used to accuse Ibarra [19. P. 546–547, 551]. She is also forced to marry a Spaniard of doubtful identity [19. P. 544–545]. Finally, she declares that she prefers the convent or death to this marriage and enters the convent to become the victim of Padre Salvi's sexual harassments, and nobody is ready to help her [19. P. 580–582]. Thus, violence and the power of the friars make impossible not only true motherhood, but also true love between a young man and a young woman. This is emphasized in the

prophecy of a Chinese magician whom María Clara's legal father consults during his wife's pregnancy and who says about the baby to be born, "If it is not a man and does not move, it is going to be a good woman." Rizal stresses that the girl was born to make these words come true by rather obeying than moving [19. P. 542]. The other couples in the novel also demonstrate the absence of true love between man and woman: Capitán Tiago and Doña Pía remain childless for several years, until Padre Dámaso fathers Doña Pía's daughter [19. P. 74–75]. Doña Consolación, the alferez' (commander of the Guardia Civil's) wife, is presented as furious, cruel woman who at any cost wants to hide her Filipino identity and to be taken for a Spaniard. Her image vacillates between cruelty, when she mistreats Sisa, who at that moment is a prisoner of the Guardia Civil, and grotesque, when she tries to speak Spanish well and to hide that she speaks Tagalog [19. P. 366–377]. In a similar way, Espadaña and his wife, Doña Victorina, are described as inauthentic: he is a Spaniard, who has come to the Philippines in order to make a fortune but failed, and he is not a real doctor, whereas she is a Filipina who, like Doña Consolación, tries to hide her identity [19. P. 391–405]. They all are strongly moved by greed, too. Thus, the novel stresses the absence of authentic relations between men and women. As in *The Idiot*, this absence is one of the factors why the protagonist cannot find his place in life and in his country. Because of the overwhelming power of death and violence, which destructs motherhood and authentic relations between men and women, Ibarra's "life is dismantled piece by piece until he is utterly destroyed through the machinations of the colonial system" [2. P. 9].

So, if, after reading *The Idiot*, we are in doubt whether the world can be saved by beauty, and Russia can find its true place in it, and we know that the prince is not the right person to make this possible, after reading *Noli me tangere*, we are in doubt whether the Philippines can be saved by education, and we know that the way Ibarra suggests does not suit (or at least is not sufficient). Indeed, it is not Rizal's intention to give us an unambiguous answer to our question. In his foreword "A mi patria", he clearly expresses that he acts like the doctors in antiquity, who used to put the sick in front of the temples,

so that each person who just comes from invoking the Godhead might propose them a remedy" [19. P. 21].

"He does not propose a cure; he proposes a method, moreover a method that involves the multiplicity of opinions" [2. P. 43].

Accordingly,

Rizal shares with Dostoevsky a stylistic tendency towards a multi-voiced narrative space where the distinct characters are allowed to exist apart from the author's consciousness [2. P. 10].

Indeed, the various conceptions of being Filipino remain unreconciled. The novel shows that those conceptions that are noble (like Tasio's or Ibarra's) are far from reality: Tasio writes in Tagalog but uses an old alphabet (hieroglyphs) in order to write down thoughts that are not for now but for people coming much later [19. P. 241–242]. As we have seen, it is stressed that Ibarra is absent when his beloved one appears [19. P. 60]. Besides, Ibarra's position is also unclear: after remembering the horror of Bagumbayan, he calls himself back to positive thoughts:

¡No, a pesar de todo, primero la patria, primero Filipinas, hija de España, primero la patria Española! [19. P. 93; 2. P. 39].

Thus, he does not know whether, for him, the Philippines or Spain comes first. The natural idea of being a Filipina (Sisa's) fails. Those ignoble and egoistic, like Capitán Tiago's, Doña Consolación's and Doña Victorina's, might succeed but are discredited by their ridiculousness.

As in Dostoevsky, polyphony deserves an in-depth analysis. First, just as in *The Idiot*, polyphony becomes possible due to shifts in society. Padre Dámaso clearly expresses this:

Since the Canal of Suez has been opened, corruption has come here. Before, when we had to pass the Cape, neither so many lost people came here, nor others went there to get lost [19. P. 332–333].

Indeed, there are deep shifts in the Philippine society. They have to do with the enhancement of international trade and the fact that more adventurers come to the Philippines from Spain and more young people from the Philippines go to Europe to study [1. P. 67]. Likewise, Guerrero states that more Filipinos, like Rizal's own family, become wealthy. On the other hand, this wealth is always combined with inferiority, due to the deeply enrooted racism, and it is uncertain, since a Filipino or mestizo might at any moment become the victim of the friars' or military officers' arbitrariness [12. P. 18–21].

Indeed, secondly, just like Dostoevsky, Rizal describes how these shifts lead to carnivalesque encounters and inversions [5. P. 118]. Tasio, the lunatic, turns out to be more educated than those who despise him [19. P. 126–133]. Priests and clergy who are supposed to be chaste turn mad of sexual desire [19. P. 218–219] or of fatherly feelings [19. P. 561–565]. The alferez' wife, who, as Filipina, is supposed to be socially inferior to her hus-

band, but usually is superior to him, is now beaten by him [19. P. 369–377]. The Spanish desperado Espadaña becomes rich as a fake doctor, but he also is subordinate to his Filipino wife [19. P. 394–401].

Thirdly, as in *The Idiot*, these encounters and inversions create an atmosphere of tension, which on many occasions requires laughter that expresses and dissolves the tension. In our case, this is predominantly the laughter that the narrator shares with the reader; for example, when two friars quarrel over who should have the best seat at the banquet, thus directly acting out that for which Jesus criticizes the scribes and pharisees [19. P. 45; cf. Mt 23: 6]; when the preacher during the feast day sermon speaks both bad Latin and bad Tagalog, so that one Filipino even says to his neighbor this Tagalog seems to be “Greek” [19. P. 297–303]; when Padre Dámaso derides Ibarra that he has asked an architect to design the future school building and says the one who needs “péritos” (experts) is a “perrito” (little dog) [19. P. 332], so that he, who derides others, becomes ridiculous himself, due to his ignorance which is combined with cruelty towards and unjustly low wages for the Filipinos who work for the friars as builders [19. P. 332]; the scene when the alférez beats his wife because she opens her door after their quarrel, just after asking her domestic worker whether he has left, which the worker truthfully affirms, but without mentioning that the alférez has come back [19. P. 377]; when Doña Victorina takes out her husband’s artificial teeth to punish him [19. P. 403]; the scene when the Filipina Doña Victorina pronounces the consonants *s*, *t* and *d* more softly in order to seem Andalusian [19. P. 543]. At a first glance, this seems to be satire. Yet, as San Juan stresses, satirical laughter usually has a measure. It is about clear rules of good and evil, of wise and stupid, beautiful and ugly. The one who breaks these rules is “punished” by laughter. Here, instead, this measure itself is questioned [13. P. 16] because satire is “embedded” in the polyphony of the novel as a whole: one can feel that Rizal has no measure, no rule. He laughs in order not to cry [13. P. 11], since he describes what is hard to accept: the friars who want to govern despite their ignorance; the Filipinas who want to be European at any cost, etc. Yet, as we have mentioned already, Rizal describes the disease but does not offer a therapy.

Fourthly, in some situations, as in *The Idiot*, tension leads not only to laughter but also to scandals. For example, Padre Dámaso pronounces his sermon “de siempre y de todo”, which, in its ridiculousness, stresses the tension between his role as a leader and example, on the one hand, and his lack of education on the other, especially because the Tagalog part of the sermon is about the respect the “indios” are supposed to show to the friars

[19. P. 303–305]. This sermon with its lack of depth makes some of the audience sleep, so that a woman shouts at a man who leans his head against her shoulder [19. P. 305].

Like Dostoevsky's prince, who, during the party, can no longer stay calm at the moment of highest tension and breaks a vase, so it happens to Ibarra: during the dinner he tries to stay calm at any cost, but at a certain moment he cannot endure any longer. He breaks the norms and attacks the friar who has made his father suffer, then dishonored him after his death, and now continues deriding Ibarra himself [19. P. 333]. Like in *The Idiot* (when the prince is between Nastasya Filippovna and Aglaia), the protagonist is also forced to choose: not between two women but between his love for his father, whose honor he wants to defend, and his love for his "patria", which he wishes to help, although he cannot do this against the friars' will.

All this shows that, like Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin, Crisóstomo Ibarra has reached his country but is not able to do the good he wishes. Unlike Dostoevsky, Rizal is convinced that his country can learn a lot from Europe. Yet, as in Dostoevsky's novel, the fact that the protagonist is forced to leave shows that his plans do not come true. That means that Europe, even if it is a model, was not a good preparation for Ibarra to make them come true.

Thus, both in *The Idiot* and in *Noli me tangere* the author who stays in Europe writes about the protagonist who has just returned from Europe to his own country, which is also the author's. In both cases, the protagonist ascribes to himself a saving mission that has to do with love for his country. In both novels, it expresses itself in love for one woman and mercy for another. However, in both cases, this saving mission fails because of the overwhelming power of death, which is linked to the question of sexual power and violence. In both cases, the absence of a clear answer to human needs and sufferings demands polyphony, enabled by strange, carnivalesque encounters that have become possible recently due to social changes. In both novels, the tension created by such encounters expresses itself in laughter and leads to scandals. All this leads to the failure of the saving mission, when the protagonist's relations with the women he wants to be close with fail and he has to leave his country.

One of the reasons for these parallels between novels might be that Rizal to some extent knew Dostoevsky, although it is hardly possible that he read *The Idiot* before writing *Noli me tangere*. It is more likely that both authors are linked with one another as artists through Cervantes. However, a more crucial link between the two authors and their novels is typological: Dostoevsky and Rizal are close to one another due to their love for their country,

which becomes even stronger when they are far away from it. Both suffer because they observe how people live, even if, in Dostoevsky's case, this is rather an existential question, in Rizal's, a social and concrete one. They both see no way how people could be saved and express it in the grotesque, carnivalesque polyphony against the background of death.

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