

## ON THE INFLUENCE OF DOSTOYEVSKI IN UNAMUNO'S WORK

### INFLUENCIA LITERARIA DE DOSTOYEVSKI EN LA OBRA DE UNAMUNO



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#### RESUMEN

El objetivo del documento es describir las coincidencias ideológicas entre Fyodor M Dostoyevski y Miguel de Unamuno reflejadas en sus novelas, ensayos y documentos personales. Asimismo, a través de la revisión bibliográfica se pretende exponer las ideas relevantes del escritor ruso, y cuán similares a ellas se pueden encontrar en la obra literaria del pensador vasco. Se concluye que ambos escritores expresaron su percepción del ser humano y su existencia de manera literaria, aunque utilizando cada uno una forma diferente de exposición.

**Palabras clave:** coincidencias ideológicas, obras literarias, percepción, ser humano, existencia.

#### ABSTRACT

The objective of the document is to describe the ideological coincidences between Fyodor M Dostoyevski and Miguel de Unamuno as reflected in their novels, essays and personal documents. Likewise, through the bibliographical review, it aims to expose the relevant ideas of the Russian writer, and how similar to them can be found in the literary work of the Basque thinker. It is concluded that both writers expressed their perception of the human being and his existence in a literary way, although using each one a different form of exposition.

**Keywords:** ideological coincidences, literary works, perception, human being, existence.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the drama of Calderón de la Barca, *Life is a Dream*; the figure of Segismundo says that "the greatest crime of man is to have been born". (Calderón, 1987, p. 502) is a commentary repeated by Manuel Bueno (Unamuno, *San Manuel Bueno, mártir*, 1931), novel, considered, in general, related to the chapter of the brothers Karamázov, (Dostoyevsky, 1880), the *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*. In 1905 the Basque thinker had said: "Life in itself does not seem to me to be a desirable good, when one does not live for something". ("Life," 1905) two centuries after Calderon, Ivan Karamazov (the *Brothers Karamazov*) in conversation with his brother Alyosha says: "I believe that the first thing one must love in this world is life. - Without a doubt, to love life before logic. (Dostoevsky, 1994, p. 289) and in the same novel, in the chapter of the *Grand Inquisitor*, according to Konstantin Mochulsky "the highest creation of Russian thought and art", (Mochulsky, 1973, p. 235) the figure of that name says that "the mystery of human existence does not lie in living, but in what one lives for". (Dostoyevsky, 1994, p. 319) It is precisely the difficulty of being able to respond in an understandable way to that doubt where the tragedy that Dostoyevsky and Unamuno transmit to us lies. These dramatic words are an expression of the clash between rationality and irrationality, a dilemma present in the work of both writers, together with the doubt about the goodness of God and the destiny of humanity, the feeling of guilt and anguish. In this sense, the figure of unknown name from *underground memories*, Dostoyevsky (1864), and Joaquín Monegro in the novel *Abel Sánchez: History of a Passion*, Unamuno, (1917) poses a serious problem: that freedom and reason do not always go hand in hand.

For their part, Dostoyevsky and Unamuno express their ideas about human beings and existence in a literary way, using a different form of exposition. The two writers live in an era of apparent "apocalyptic nihilism", as George Steiner says in reference to Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy, which may also be applicable to Unamuno, which leads them to try to turn their ideas into their works through "acts of narrative-dramatic realization and religious thought", (Steiner, 1996, p. 15), their exposure being conditioned by the social and political situation of their country. While the Russian writer conveys his thoughts in his diaries and articles, and sometimes also in the words of his novel characters, Unamuno's opinions, which are in his essays, are synthetically incorporated into his novels and dramas.

Two important concepts that highlight Dostoyevsky's influence on Unamuno should be noted. The first is related to suffering and freedom; the second to immortality.

As regards the first consideration, there are very similar paragraphs in each of the two writers that express very significant ideas. Dostoyevsky, in the chapter of the *Great Inquisitor*, (second part of the book five of *The Brothers Karamazov*), that figure confronts, in a dialectic way, the idea of freedom (on earth) with that of

security (in heaven). The same problem is also evident in the words of the character Smerdiakov, who reminds his half-brother Ivan Karamazov of his own words: "if the infinite God does not exist, neither does any virtue exist, nor is there any need for it". (Dostoyevsky, 1864, p. 793.), Trace, in his study on Dostoyevsky in reference to the same question points out that the dilemma lies in the confrontation of "the utopia on earth sought by non-believers as opposed to the utopia in heaven sought by believers"(2000, p.82). Unamuno presents the same concern in the words of the figure of the priest Manuel Bueno, in San Manuel Bueno, martyr. The priest focuses on creativity and personal relationships as a way of overcoming the finitude and anguish of the existence endured by his credulous believers. Manuel Bueno does not believe in what he preaches, as is the case with the Grand Inquisitor. Both of them, pretend, deceive, carry in their conscience the weight of the lie and suffer for that their desire: "The first thing - he said (Manuel Bueno) - is that the people are happy, that they are all happy to live". (Unamuno, 1931, p. 55.) The Grand Inquisitor wants the same for his believers. In the behavior of both figures, it does not matter if the search for a supposed social harmony means restricting freedom. Irrationality is the answer!

In relation to immortality, for both Unamuno and Dostoyevsky, this idea has the meaning of individual improvement, which can be interpreted in an intergenerational way, as transmission of existence from parents to children. In both writers the death of two of their children meant a break in that relationship. Immortality can also be interpreted in the sense of social recognition.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Both writers, Dostoyevsky and Unamuno, are coincident in their idea of evil, coming to address interesting questions: what is its origin, why does it exist, did God create it, is it in Him its origin, is it man's creation? The Russian writer considered it to be innate in the human being, an idea that he deepened when he lived in Siberia (reference in Dostoevsky. Notes on Memoirs of the House of the Dead, 1860-1862), with terrible criminals, Dostoevsky, F (2017) and that for Unamuno was constituted in anguished torment reflected in his existential crisis of 1897. Fernandez (1966) was concerned about how to reconcile the existence of God with the existence of evil. On the subject of child abuse, Ivan Karamazov Dostoevsky, (The Brothers Karamazov) (1864) asks how to compensate for the evil caused, who can forgive the aggressor, society, the victim?

The idea of suffering is present in both writers, not in its physical meaning but in the moral one, which for Dostoyevsky had a positive sense of human reconciliation. Freedom, central to both writers, is portrayed in the figure of the Grand Inquisitor in The Brothers Karamazov, and in Joaquin Monegro in Unamuno's novel Abel Sánchez: History of a Passion. The character Joaquin is, on the other hand, the anonymous protagonist of underground memories (1864) by

Dostoyevsky, his literary work of greater philosophical content. The man from the underground and Joachim confront rationality and irrationality, underlying them the doubt of whether human beings are subjected to a determinism that restricts their will, a response that for Dostoevsky and Unamuno lies in personal responsibility to the conscience as well as that of society.

The figure of Manuel Bueno, in Unamuno's homonymous novel, is the Grand Inquisitor in the novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. The characters, who do not believe in what they preach, wish to do good to their parishioners by freeing them from the weight of evil and giving them happiness; to this end they are willing to bear the moral burden of the lie. The two authors, says Kirill Sergeevich Korkonosenko, develop the same plot, (zovaniya odnogo i togo zhe syuzheta-situatsii); Sergeevich (1999) with both unbelieving priests (the Grand Inquisitor and Manuel Bueno) deceiving his flock in the name of Christ. The Poem of the Grand Inquisitor and the moral limitations on the behaviour of the men contemplated in that story, with personal freedom as a reference, illustrate a philosophical point, which shows a strong influence in Unamuno's novel, *San Manuel Bueno Mártir*.

There are significant common features in the lives of the two writers. Unamuno in *The Man with the Fly and the Mattress* (1919) Unamuno, (1918) describes Dostoyevsky as a "cloistered Carthusian", a title he could also attribute to himself. However, none of them lived "locked up" in his ivory tower. Both considered that one of the main objectives of his literary work was to serve as a means of education for his readers; the Basque thinker wanted to channel it, especially through his plays and novels, as this made it easier for his thoughts, poured into his essays, especially in *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1913), to be more accessible to his fellow citizens, according to Colette and Rabaté. (2010). Both the Russian writer and the Basque thinker dealt with transcendent questions of human existence in their novels and writings, approaching them differently depending on how they expressed it in a letter, an article, a literary work and even by resorting to discourse. In Dostoyevsky, his lecture in honor of Pushkin at the unveiling of the poet's statue in Moscow was very prominent, while Dostoyevsky (2010) for his part Unamuno toured Spain giving lectures, with his "lay sermons".

Of all the transcendental themes presented in the Russian writer's work, there are some that are crucial, too, from Unamuno's perspective. The first of these is the defence of freedom. Dostoyevsky, the defender of the Orthodox Church, is, after all, along with language, one of Russia's outstanding roots, and Unamuno was educated in the Catholic faith; when he tried to rationalize his belief, doubt about the existence of God and about immortality surfaced in them. These are concerns of enormous personal importance, with somewhat divergent views, since in Dostoyevsky the idea of social transcendence is more present, while in Unamuno the personal connotation stands out, but both are dominated by a terrible anguish.

Regarding the subject of suicide, its consideration is crucial both in Dostoyevsky and in Unamuno. Among the various typologies that the Russian writer raises in his works, the so-called "logical suicide" stands out, which is approached by Dostoyevsky in his novel *The Demons* (1872), in the figure of Kirillov and Unamuno does it in his *Love and Pedagogy* (1902), with the character Apolodorus. The contrast between suicide and freedom, a central idea in Dostoyevsky's novel *The Idiot* (1869), in the tragic figure of Terentyev, is shown by Unamuno in the character of Augustus in his novel *Fog* (1907).

The relationship between parents and children is very present in both writers, to be highlighted in the Russian writer in *The Brothers Karamazov* with the disintegration of the family group, which Unamuno presents in *Abel Sánchez: History of a Passion*, although the main characters are not brothers. However, as in the biblical story, envy, hatred and misunderstanding of evil are its leitmotif. The feeling of guilt, the absurdity of life with Raskolnikov, in *Crime and Punishment* (1866), pretending to justify the impossible.

On the other hand, there are aspects that relate both writers as is the case of the symbolic figure of Don Quixote, present in Dostoyevsky's novel *The Idiot* and in the essay of Unamuno *Life of Don Quixote and Sancho* (1904). Both writers explore the psychological perception that the literary figure of the "double" means, in which the character tries to get a personality for which he feels attracted in exchange for his own, already present in Dostoyevsky's second novel *The Double* (1846). This is a mental break and a usurpation of the personality that is found in several characters of his novels, as is the case of Ivan Karamazov, or Stavrogin of the novel *The Demons*. In a somewhat similar way, Unamuno presents this figure in *The One Who Buried Himself* (1908), or in his dramatic tragedy *The Sphinx* (1898).

The problem of free will is fundamental in both writers; the same can be said of the conflict between the Enlightenment and existentialism, with the great influence of Søren Kierkegaard on the thought of Miguel de Unamuno.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

An exhaustive review of documents from Dostoyevsky's novels mentioned by Unamuno has been carried out, and Unamuno's writings with references to Dostoyevsky have also been consulted, and in each reference used the perception of the human being and his existence in his literary works was observed.

Dostoyevsky's novels mentioned by Unamuno: *Crime and punishment*, *underground memories* and *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Also shown are Unamuno's documents with references to Dostoyevsky or Russia:

On September 1, 1898, Unamuno sent a mail to the Spanish poet Angel Ganivet (1865-1898), who lived in Riga (Latvia), saying: "I am very interested in questions about Russia. Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, enter very deeply into my heart. I still think I have read some of them in French. I would like to meet the most Russian, the most genuine, the most appropriate, at least cosmopolitan. What interests me most is how much it refers to religious life in Russia, to all those sects that Mackenzie speaks about. (Unamuno, 2018, p. 795).

On April 13, 20 and 27, 1887, Emilia Pardo Bazán gave three lectures at the Ateneo de Madrid on Russian literature. In the third lecture Pardo Bazán spoke about Goncharov, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and the novel Fathers and Sons of Ivan Turgenev. After that, Pardo (2009) published The revolution and the novel in Russia. At that time, the writer began her friendship with Unamuno and the Spanish writer Vicente Blasco Ibañez (1867-1928). On May 22, 1895, Unamuno wrote to Pedro de Múgica Ortiz de Zárate: "I spent about three hours chatting (at the Ateneo) with Mrs. Emilia Pardo Bazán". (Unamuno, 2018, p. 496).

Unamuno's novel Peace in War (1897) is influenced by Tolstoy's War and Peace. In his essay (How to make a novel), he cites the tragedy of Pushkin's Boris Godunov.

## **RESULTS**

Both writers considered that there is much irrationality in human behavior, with its constant struggle for personal freedom. A good example of this is violence against children. From that approach they did not understand how God could have created such an unjust world dominated by evil and suffering. To understand the finite by appealing to the infinite, the absolute, God, is something impossible that leads to fatalism, because something that originates from an immediate cause whose effect is presented in the finite, it is not possible to understand it from a remote cause located in the infinite. Expressed in general terms, the conditioned, which is the existence of man, is impossible to be, understood outside him, appealing to the unconditioned, the supernatural, God. They sought to neutralize their anguish by accepting a stoic suffering, together with the idea of immortality as a means of overcoming it.

Human knowledge and faith are direct and intuitive respectively, fruits of thought. If Dostoyevsky and Unamuno had had to choose between the two ideas, they would have rejected the possible error into which to fall; for knowledge is doubt and raises fear, but man, as a rational being, needs to know, even if suffering is the price to be paid for the mere fact of knowing. Life is not a sequence of predetermined scenes; there is nothing written. It is the will of the human being that marks our destiny, with its successes and errors, based on decisions that are marked by reason and perhaps most of all by irrational impulses. Dostoyevsky and

Unamuno showed us in their literary works that freedom and reason do not always go hand in hand.

## CONCLUSION

Both writers expressed their ideas about human beings and their existence in a literary way, although each used a different form of exposition. They lived under the anguish of the confrontation of their thought with the reality dominated by the irrationality of human behavior, evil and suffering as references of the existence of man as free beings; living under the dictate of self-consciousness in a world created by God, members of a meaningless civilization dominated by pain, injustice and sorrow. In Dostoyevsky and Unamuno there was no express renunciation of religious thought, but each tried to interpret it.

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