

DOSTOYEVSKY IN ROMANIAN LITERARY CONSCIOUSNESS*

A question rises spontaneously opening another chapter in the history of Dostoyevsky's echoes and that is to what extent the writer focused the attention of Romanian novelists between the two World Wars.

Liviu Rebreanu includes among his favourite books *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*, "the most terrible moment of

* The following text is a fragment from the last work of Dinu Pillat (1921-1975) entitled *Dostoyevsky in Romanian Literary Consciousness* (Dostoievski in conștiința literară românească), which unfortunately he could not see printed. The book is divided into three sections: *The Discovery of Dostoyevsky (1881-1920)* (Descoperirea lui Dostoievski): *The Understanding of Dostoyevsky (1920-1944)* (Înțelegerea lui Dostoievski) and *The Reconsideration of Dostoyevsky (1944-1947)* (Reconsiderarea lui Dostoievski). The fragment published here (translated into English by the writer Monica Pillat, the author's daughter, and Ileana Verzea, a literary researcher), part of the second section of the book, examines the reflection of Dostoyevsky's work in the consciousness of Romanian prose writers between 1900 and 1944. The author, well known for his superior modesty in connection with his own work, deliberately stood off the competition. If his work as a commentator and interpreter of Dostoyevsky is relatively well known in our country (his first texts were written when he was about 20-see "Albatros", 1941, March 25, - followed by *Notes on the Modern Novel* (Note despre romanul modern), in "Revista fundațiilor regale", 1943, nr. 4, by *Romanian Debates of the Novel* (Dezbateri românești asupra romanului), in "Viața românească", 1967, nr. 5, and by four more articles published from 1972 on which are in fact first versions or fragments from the book he was working on during the last years of his life), his contact as a prose writer with Dostoyevsky's work is almost unknown. The two novels he published (a novel in manuscript, though the most relevant for the problem we are interested in, as it was an alternative to the *Posessed*, has been lost in the course of time), whose titles are *Awkward Youth* (Tinerete ciudată, 1941, preface by Ionel Teodoreanu, a novelist friend of the author and a great admirer of Dostoyevsky) and *Daily Death* (Moartea cotidiană, 1946) recall, it is true, André Gide and Bernanos rather than of Dostoyevsky. But if we do not forget that it was Gide who discovered the great Russian writer in France, if we take into account the fervency that animated Dinu Pillat, his capacity to distil his preferences and to objectify his idols in writing and if we read these books as indisputable "experiments" of a modern spirit, then referring them also to Dostoyevsky is almost necessary. For we should not forget that Sergiu in *Awkward Youth* is a virtual Stavroghin *in nuce* by his passion for experimenting the types of psychological reaction of those around him and by other things, as Veniamin, Alexe and Adrian in the same novel obsessed by the declared idea of living life in the manner of Dostoyevsky's vitalist outburst. *Daily Death* can be likewise significantly related with *Poor Folk* so that what appeared as an influence of Gide, Joyce, Cezar Petrescu and particularly Ionel Teodoreanu, is in fact an even more serious and dense substance of the work of Dinu Pillat, that can partly be referred to the author of *The Devils*. But for the time being those are but details of literary history significant for understanding the respective Romanian literary epoch, the man and artist who was Dinu Pillat. He who reads the fragment that follows or the whole book (under print) will be once again conquered by the artistic quality and the suggestive power of the work of Dinu Pillat as an essayist, literary historian and critic, by his clarity and apparently impersonal depth, by his necessary use of nuances, suggesting something of his own personal

Dostoyevsky”¹. A zealous researcher of Rebreanu’s literary beginnings informs us, among other things, that before the outbreak of the First World War the writer translated after a German intermediary the well known story *Krotkaya* given by Dostoyevsky in *An Author’s Diary*, a story under whose influence he was to create some time later one of his early short-stories, *The Swan Song* (Cintecul lebedei), as can be seen in “some similarities” of “atmosphere” and even of the “plot”². Although there can be no affinity with the Russian novelist in *The Forest of the Hanged* (Pădurea spinzuraților), Radu Dragnea considers it as the first Romanian novel belonging to an “integral realism”, like that established by Dostoyevsky with a “complete vision of the world”, that approaches both “the seen realities” and “the spiritual ones”, represents “mankind in its most varied and contradictory aspects”, fathoms “the individual’s psychology”, abolishes “the aesthetics of types common to both romanticism and Balzac”. As an ideologic exponent of “Gindirea”, the essayist shares the conviction that the “new conception” of the generation of novelists after the First World War, a conception based on a complex understanding of man, “starting from Dostoyevsky” can remain only “at the surface of certain creative devices” if it has not also appropriated the human significance of orthodoxy in its moral substance”. Implicitly expressing his desideratum that by a novel of Dostoyevsky’s Christian spirituality Romanian literature should rise to the dimensions of the eternal and the universal”, Radu Dragnea takes the occasion to suggest that *The Forest of the Hanged* is the only book of the time meaning the first step to an achievement in this respect³. More cautious in his affirmations, Pompiliu Constantinescu confines himself to point in *The Forest of the Hanged* to “insignificant deviations of ecstatic states, of subjective mysticism, over which hovers Dostoyevsky’s giant shadow”⁴. In Al. Piru’s relatively more recent opinion, the writer seems to have used in *The Forest of the Hanged*, unlike in *Ion*, “a novel in the manner of Tolstoy”, “the analytical technique of Dostoyevsky’s novel”⁵. Nicolae Balotă, one of the latest commentators, in a note to his survey *Liviu Rebreanu or the Vocation of the Tragic* (Liviu Rebreanu sau vocația tragicului) briefly makes the most evident reference to Dostoyevsky, in connection with *The Forest of the Hanged*. “We recognize in Rebreanu’s novel the psychic oppression, the mystic élans, the falls, the hallucinating quasi hypnotic progress to be met with

charm and of his spiritual wealth. He who reads it will find at the same time an admirable investigation of what Dostoyevsky meant for Romanian literary consciousness, since the exeget recorded with fineness all the significant reactions (constantly avoiding his own criticism). An essay deeply grounded in documents, concisely pertinent in characterizing moments and situations, written with apparent impersonality but revealing a great passion, the book that was to be the swan song of Dinu Pillat is at the same time one of the most lasting works of the writer and of this time. (George Muntean).

¹ M. Sebastian, *Talking with Liviu Rebreanu about the Past and a little about the Future* (Cu Liviu Rebreanu, despre trecut și puțin despre viitor), in “Rampa”, 1935, December 2.

² Nicolae Liu, *Liviu Rebreanu and the Masters of Russian Realism* (Liviu Rebreanu și maștrii realismului rus), in “Steaua”, March, 1960.

³ Radu Dragnea, *The Eternal and Universal* (Veșnic și universal), in “Gindirea”, 1929, March, p. 69–80.

⁴ Pompiliu Constantinescu, *Liviu Rebreanu*, in “Viața literară”, 1925, May 29.

⁵ Al. Piru, *Liviu Rebreanu*, Bucharest, 1965, p. 57.

in Dostoyevsky's novels. As a matter of fact Dostoyevsky was the only literary master Rebreanu could have for projecting an unhappy, really tragic, consciousness"⁶.

Carol Ardeleanu who thinks he owes his literary training to Dostoyevsky⁷ is often symptomatic of Dostoyevsky's epigonism. In a novel as *The Diplomat, the Tanner and the Actress* (Diplomatul, tăbăcarul și actrița) most critics, from E. Lovinescu to G. Călinescu, see in Săleanu, the déclassé consul addicted to alcohol, "a paler shadow of Dostoyevsky's degraded types, like captain Snegirev in *The Brothers Karamazov*". G. Călinescu says in a connection with the implications of metaphysical drama in *I Have Murdered God* which surpass the author's powers of representation, that "he might have intended to write a novel of consciousness, by the Russian model". When analysing the novel, he exposes some elements of similarity at the end of the plot. "It is not difficult to notice here, in a caricature, the gesture of liberating the consciousness by fact as in *Crime and Punishment*. Then follows, as in the Russian novel, a delirious stage, haunted by the fear of responsibility, and the hero finally gives himself away and repents (...). And as with the Russian novelist, a young girl falls in love with this crazy man, suffering for him"⁸. Much later the same novel makes Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu deplore the way in which the author falls a victim to "not digested" readings of Dostoyevsky⁹.

As far as Matei Caragiale is concerned, no indications are available to certify whether he was or was not sensitive to Dostoyevsky. Though nothing in *Old Court Libertines* (Craii de Curtea Veche) seems to allow any reference to the Russian writer's vision, we should mention that such attempts were made several times in that epoch. After having confessed to a literary inquirer that he loves Matei Caragiale's novel¹⁰ "more than anything in the whole Romanian prose (in the light of *The Brothers Karamazov* with an ancient soul come from the East", Ion Barbu hyperbolically resumes the idea in his article *Libertines come from the Levant* (Răsăritul Crailor) starting that "it is the first time in our literature and the second time in world literature (Dostoyevsky's more complex case should be considered more carefully) when planetary nature replaces the biological, social or merely human nature of the hero of ordinal novels"¹¹. Commenting on the novel *Old Court Libertines*, Radu Dragnea relates it from the very beginning to a tradition of "the tale of vices", exemplarily illustrated both by Balzac *Cousin Bette* and especially by "Dostoyevsky's genius fathoming the same abyss whose depth had been

⁶ Nicolae Balotă, *From Ion to Ioanide* (De la Ion la Ioanide), Bucharest 1974, p. 466.

⁷ I. Valerian, *Talking with C. Ardeleanu* (De vorbă cu C. Ardeleanu), in "Viața literară", February 1927.

⁸ G. Călinescu, *Carol Ardeleanu*, in *The History of Romanian Literature from its Origin to the Present Time* (Istoria literaturii române de la origini pînă în prezent), Bucharest, 1941, p. 670-691.

⁹ Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, *Carol Ardeleanu in Romanian Literature between the two World Wars* (Literatura română între cele două războaie mondiale), vol. I, revised edition, Bucharest, 1972, p. 308.

¹⁰ F. Aderca, *Talking with Ion Barbu* (De vorbă cu Ion Barbu), in "Viața literară", 1927, October 15.

¹¹ Ion Barbu, *Libertines come from the Levant* (Răsăritul Crailor), in "Ultima oră", 1929, May 1.

tried by the fathers of the church who alongside the lay moralists attempted to present us with human nature". In the texture of Matei Caragiale's "conspicuously Levantine creation", the essayist of "Gindirea" pays special attention to the episodic character of Pena Corcodușa, about whom he says among other things that "she recalls of Maria of *The Idiot* both by her identical position, the woman ill-treated by everybody for the same guilt, and as human sympathy, who finds a protector in the Russian prince looking after his health in Switzerland, i.e. in Dostoyevsky's Christianity"¹². In a study of literary types, Vladimir Streinu writes about the house of the Arnotens as having a "plurality of vices, madness and illness" that surpasses — in his opinion — "the direst pages of Dostoyevsky". He also refers to Gore Pirgu, "the ghost of rottenness and the Libertines fatality" as to a character that can make you after all think of Dostoyevsky. The more Pirgu has a sort of soft spot in his heart for old icons, the more we think of the Russian Writer's world. He is like so many heroes and heroines of the Russian novel, from whose fall an idealistic aspiration rises now and then: he is especially like awful Lebedev in *The Idiot*, the servile, selfish, intriguing, immoral profiteer who nevertheless interprets the hidden symbols of the Apocalypse¹³.

A connoisseur of Dostoyevsky whose biography he studies in an article of his youth published in "Gindirea" under the pen name Ion Darie, at the 1921 commemoration of 100 years since the writer's birth, Cezar Petrescu proclaims the novelist "the most enthusiastic apostle of suffering the literature of mankind has ever had"¹⁴, though he has never been a great admirer of the writer. We should add that the Romanian author in one of his maturity novels, i.e. *Carlton*, in which he reconstitutes scenes from the lives of the lodgers of a Bucharest block of flats on the eve of the 1941 catastrophic earthquake, feels an impulse to resort at a given moment, in the middle of a scene, to the support of Dostoyevsky's visionary intuitions. These are the unusually monstrous pages of symbolic anticipation of the tragic historical convulsions of the 20th century world describing the apocalyptic nightmare Raskolnikov had at the end of the novel *Crime and Punishment*. These are pages entirely reproduced by Cezar Petrescu when professor Dominic Sabaru — one of the characters of the book — reads them aloud, as an alarmed warning in the dramatic discussion with his son, a fanatic type of youth, ready to participate in the disastrous action of those moments of terror when the iron-guardists took over the power. In the commentary that makes Dostoyevsky's text topical that following the reading, it goes without saying that the respective character express the author's own point of view: "— Isn't this the aspect and meaning of today's exterminations, and everything that will follow, because we are only at the beginning? That is a page that anticipates history... I personally don't love Dostoyevsky. He is too tormented. Too dark... But how shouldn't I admit that he comes next to the prophets of the Bible? ..."¹⁵.

¹² Radu Dragnea, *Matei I. Caragiale*, in "Gindirea", 1931, February, p. 64–68.

¹³ Vladimir Streinu, *Literary Types* (Tipologie literară), II, in "Universul literar", 1938, October, 29.

¹⁴ Ion Darie, *Feder Mihallovitch Dostoyevsky*, in "Gindirea", 1921, October, 15, p. 224–225.

¹⁵ Cezar Petrescu, *Carlton*, vol. I, Bucharest, 1946, p. 151–153.

Gib Mihăescu, "temperamentally related — according to this own confession — with the Russian writers", appreciates Dostoyevsky's Ras-kolnikov as a summit of art contemporary works could aspire to"¹⁶. Writing about the author of *The Russian Woman* (Rusoaica), Șerban Cioculescu underlines among other things the fact that "the gloomy pathetism and the propensity to catastrophe originate in Dostoyevsky", with the amendment that in the Romanian novel there is "no trace of the problem of sin and atonement or of the rhetoric of suffering and pity"¹⁷. More categorical, Vladimir Streinu points to Gib Mihăescu as the only Romanian representative of a psychological novel of Dostoyevsky's "school". We see him discover in *Donna Alba* "a great many scenes and episodes of Dostoyevsky's stamp and power"¹⁸. A different opinion will be that of Octav Șuluțiu who wants to draw the attention to the fact that "the analysis" in Gib Mihăescu, though "similar by subject, is different in its lucid manner from the gloomy character of Dostoyevsky's analysis"¹⁹. In a special study with the title *Gib Mihăescu and Dostoyevsky*, Vladimir Dogaru broadly debates, though in a rather naïve style, the problem of the respective parallelism, where he starts by establishing general fundamental differences between the specific components of the Russian and Romanian soul. Passing on to the delimitations raised by the two novelists in whose works "the heroes" lives depend more on the resorts of the unconscious than on the conscious", the critic starts by admitting that Dostoyevsky, as an author of a world ruled by "love, crime and madness", with complex reactions typical of the dual Russian soul, "finds himself as far as the material analysed is concerned — in a position superior to that of Gib Mihăescu where only love is an element of revealing human depth". But Vladimir Dogaru thinks there can be no connection between the vision of Gib Mihăescu and Dostoyevsky in the approach of erotic passion either. Love does not lead the heroes of the Romanian novelist, "more balanced creatures" to "nothingness", as it happens with the heroes of the Russian novelist. On the contrary it makes them more active, giving them new powers. In Gib Mihăescu's work, erotic trance "disturbs but also enhances without possessing the protagonists daemonically", as in Dostoyevsky's work. On the other hand we do not meet here those strange forms of "love accompanied by pity". Vladimir Dogaru concludes that the author of *The Russian Woman* "borrowed from the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* only details of technique"²⁰. In the last years, in the book *Reality and Romance* (Realitate și romanesc), in the chapter dedicated to Gib Mihăescu, Liviu Petrescu discovers in a memorable scene at the end of *Donna Alba*, when Mihai Aspru in possession of the compromising letters

¹⁶ I. Valerian, *Talking with Gib Mihăescu* (De vorbă cu Gib Mihăescu), in "Viața literară", 1927, December—January.

¹⁷ Șerban Cioculescu, *Gib Mihăescu*, in "Revista Fundațiilor regale", 1935, December, p. 628—643.

¹⁸ Vladimir Streinu, *Gib Mihăescu: "Donna Alba"*, in *Pages of Literary Criticism* (Pagini de critică literară), Bucharest, 1938.

¹⁹ Octav Șuluțiu, *Obituary: Gib I. Mihăescu* (Necrolog: Gib I. Mihăescu), in *About Books* (Pe margini de cărți), Sighișoara, 1938, p. 310—311.

²⁰ Vladimir Dogaru, *Gib Mihăescu and Dostoyevsky* (Gib Mihăescu și Dostoievski), in "Universul literar", 1944, February 29 and March 10.

sent by Alba to a former lover, non dead, returns them to her asking nothing in return, two moments similar in circumstance and tension with Dostoyevsky's work. The scene in *The Brothers Karamazov* when "Dimitrie Karamazov lends a large sum of money to Katerina Ivanova, asking nothing for it, although the girl had come by herself to his house to take the money". And then, the scene in *Crime and Punishment* when "old Svidrigailov, in love with Dunea, Raskolnikov's sister, sets the girl a trap taking her to his room", but he unexpectedly lets her go in the height of his erotic aggression, "when he is convinced of her total indifference to him"²¹. Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, the latest to have tackled the problem of Gib Mihăescu's "origin from Dostoyevsky", makes a most opportune specification. "Gib Mihăescu has taken from Dostoyevsky the obsessive psychology, the monomania, the inner graving. But in Lebedev, Ippolit Terentyev or Smerdiakov, the representatives of the "underground" life, it hides a complex of social inferiority, a sick pride putting on the coat of aggressive humiliation, practised for unavowed vindicative purposes. Novels such as *The Brothers Karamazov* or *The Possessed* take through their characters serious moral and philosophic dilemmas. The abyssal psychology is not for Dostoyevsky the mere subject of exact descriptions, but acquires metaphysical implications, arouses disturbing questions and answers about human existence"²². Besides the oral existence of closer acquaintances, who certify Victor Papilian's spiritual permeability to an author like Dostoyevsky²³, we should say that the writer has one of the most genuinely Dostoyevskian vision in his novel *In the Faith of the Seven Candlesticks* (În credința celor șapte sfeșnice). Especially in the moments concerning the so contradictory psychological behaviour of some religious sectarians of Cîmpia Turzii caught in a shady intrigue against the historical background of an epoch of transition that followed the union with Transylvania in 1918. G. Călinescu is the first to discover a Dostoyevsky's hero, in a character like Maxim Muscă, "a servant of professor Bălăceanu, head of the section of the millenists, a sincere and chaotic mystic, an excellent actor for the masses, a devoted and hypocrite, an immaculate and criminal creature". But in his opinion Victor Papilian's "Dostoyevskism" of *In the Faith of the Seven Candlesticks* is "Freudist" in the way he deals with the case he proposed²⁴. Nowadays on the occasion of larger references to the same novel, D. Micu notices in his turn that the type of the sectarian Maxim Muscă is "an unhappy, Dostoyevskian spirit", in whom "the religious élan and the paranoiac fret are permanently confronted and mistaken for each other". He insists on the fact that *In the Faith of the Seven*

²¹ Liviu Petrescu, *Gib I. Mihăescu. Homo aestheticus*, in *Reality and Romance* (Realitate și romanese), Bucharest, 1969, p. 243-244.

²² Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu, *Romanian Literature Between the Two World Wars* (Literatura română între cele două războaie mondiale), vol. I (Revised edition), Bucharest, 1972, p. 512-513.

²³ The Transylvanian poet Grigore Popa, among others, has informed us that Victor Papilian, who had read Dostoyevsky in his youth and had his works in French translation in a place of honour in his bookcase understood him only after 1931.

²⁴ G. Călinescu, Victor Papilian, in *The History of Romanian Literature from its Origin to the Present Time* (Istoria literaturii române de la origini pînă în prezent), Bucharest, 1941, p. 842-843.

Candlesticks introduces us in a world of "the possessed", a native variant of the world of Dostoyevsky's great novel"²⁵.

In the pathetic image of the Bucharest suburb given by G. M. Zamfirescu in both the tragic comedy *Miss Nastasia* (Domnișoara Nastasia) and *The Holy Great Impudence* (Sfinta mare nerușinare) of the cycle *The Turnpike* (Bariera) we distinguish notes of humanitarian mysticism in which Dostoyevsky and Gorky's filiation is degraded in melodramatism. The great appreciation the Romanian author had for Dostoyevsky becomes public in the newspaper "Calendarul" of 1932, in the article *The Critical Postulate and Dostoyevsky's Realism* (Postulatul critic și realismul dostoyevskian) meant to retort the French critic André Thérive's plea for coming back to "every-day realism". Standing against that realism of "servilely rendering the vital aspect" which is the function of the "reportage", G. M. Zamfirescu thinks that more interesting is only the fiction in which life is "interpreted", "raised by the author by revelation to similarly revealing potentialities", as is Dostoyevsky's work. To demonstrate his point of view he dwells upon the Russian novelists vision in a commentary paraphrasing Nikolai Berdyaev in his well known exegesis *Dostoyevsky's Spirit*, considered as "a penetrating understanding". The Stress is laid on the fact that "reality" with a Dostoyevsky does not lie in "the empiric life, in the outer forms of life", but in "man's spiritual depth", in "the avatars of human destiny", in "the ideas through which man starts living effectively". He furtherly states that an "essential theme" of Dostoyevsky's work like that of the "dual spirit" is naturally inaccessible to the representations of "realistic art". G. M. Zamfirescu concludes that worth recommending is only the realism "of high revelation" "by means of which Dostoyevsky makes an actual "radiography of human soul", a modality of realism wholly different from the "commonplaces" of the formula of the so-called "realistic" novels in a current acceptation"²⁶.

Strange though it may seem, Ionel Teodoreanu has considered Dostoyevsky, alongside Kipling, a fundamental author throughout his life. Moreover, almost incredible, the writer points to Dostoyevsky as to a novelist of world literature with whom he feels "most akin"²⁶. Worth mentioning as a significant detail with fact that reading Gide's book on Dostoyevsky resulted for Ionel Teodoreanu in a revealing shock. He then developed an actual complex of inferiority, convinced that even the best things he had written in fiction (*The Tower of Milena*, *Turnul Milenei*) was frail and worthless"²⁷.

It is only Camil Petrescu, an exclusive advocate of Proust's manner of creation, that is hostile to Dostoyevsky's novel. In characterizing the state of facts in modern prose until Proust at the beginning of his essay *The New Structure and the Work of Marcel Proust* (Noua structură și opera lui Marcel Proust) published in "Revista Fundațiilor regale" 1935, the

²⁵ D. Micu, *Victor Papilian*, in "Gindirea" and *Gindirism* ("Gindirea" și gindirismul), Bucharest, 1975, p. 813-818.

²⁶ G.M. Zamfirescu, *The Critical Postulate and Dostoyevsky's Realism* (Postulatul critic și realismul dostoyevskian), in "Calendarul", 1932, January 26.

²⁷ Eugeniu V. Haralambie, *A Sunny Morning with Ionel Teodoreanu* (O dimineață însorită cu Ionel Teodoreanu), in "Ilustrația săptămânii", 1941, March 2.

author briefly minimizes with obvious malevolence Dostoyevsky's contribution, claiming that it offers "the most skilful dosage" of that "amalgamate of rationalist, romantic and positivist psychology", whose recipes are used by almost all European novelists of the last century and at the beginning of our century. He does not hesitate to expose incriminatingly what he calls "the mechanism" in opposite direction of "the psychological formula" accredited by Dostoyevsky's novel. "Dostoyevsky, who was himself sentenced to the gallows showed that a man sentenced to death was absent in the moment before the execution as if he were not involved and noticed details that he had not seen before, for example: that the officer had three buttons on his coat . . . and wondered why he had not noticed that before. His remark will become a rationalized dogma . . . So you will meet with such details collected from the field of "observation", considered characteristic and then pharmaceutically "systematized", automatized by numerous Russian novelists. The type character is taken skilfully — also rationalistically — upside down. The decent bourgeois is a beast; the whore is an angel; the criminal has the soul of a saint; the drunkard is a genius; normal man is limited, wicked, deprived of the sense of devotion, cannot inspire us with sympathy; complete humaneness is to be met with (automatically) only in the brothel and in the den"²⁹. Some other time, telling a literary inquirer, among other things, about the impressions he received by reading again three memorable books, among them *The Idiot*, with the intention to "practise for the writing" of *The Bed of Procuſt* (Patul lui Procuſt), Camil Petrescu drastically declares that Dostoyevsky's novel sowed to him "absolutely unreadable, conventional and imbued with Russian commonplaces from the beginning to the end"³⁰. In a lecture dedicated by Camil Petrescu to Dostoyevsky in 1938, under the auspices of the open university, the Russian writer is reduced to the limits of a mere sensational novelist, an epigon of Eugène Sue. Unfortunately, since Camil Petrescu lectured freely, and the lecture was not taken down in shorthand, nothing has been preserved from his argumentation³¹.

The philosophic literary sensibility of the younger generation of prose writers that came to the fore after 1930 was in its turn symptomatically focused on Dostoyevsky. From an account made by Anton Holban at the end of the volume *The Teachers' Parade* (Parada dascălilor) we learn that when he was thirty he read "Dostoyevsky's *Underground* for the hundredth time", almost as frequently as listening to "a Beethoven's quartet" on a record player³². His inveterate Proustianism does not prevent him from also receptive to Dostoyevsky's novel. In one of the numerous commentaries written about Proust we can even see him noticing at a given moment that in the vision of "the dual aspect of man" the French writer comes close

²⁹ Camil Petrescu, *The New Structure and the Work of Marcel Proust* (Noua structură și opera lui Marcel Proust), in "Revista Fundațiilor regale", 1935, November 1, p. 377—401.

³⁰ Eugen Jebeleanu, *Mr. Camil Petrescu about his New Novel and other Things* (Domnul Camil Petrescu despre noul său roman și despre altele), in "România literară", 1933, February 4.

³¹ As a pupil in the secondary school, aged of 17, I attended the respective lecture, from which I only remember its basic idea.

³² Anton Holban, *The Teachers' Parade* (Parada dascălilor), Bucharest, 1932, p. 105—106.

to Dostoyevsky's "refined" psychologic viewpoint, and as such he cannot be opposed to the Russian novelist, as a Camil Petrescu tried to do³³.

If we know only that the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* was for Pavel Dan one of those few writers who had "obsessed" him as early as his student's years in Cluj³⁴, we can see what Dostoyevsky's novel meant for Mihail Sebastian from some reading notes published in "Revista Fundațiilor regale", 1937, on the occasion of having re-read *The Possessed*.

The author's attention is first drawn by Dostoyevsky's literary technique. "Sometimes he seems to create on purpose great difficulties of composition, only for the sake of solving them. He indulges in extravagant positions, accumulates contradictory facts, complicates the action, leads it to moments of a highest tension, makes characters belonging to the most opposite nature face each other, and when everything seems to have reached an inevitable, unsolvable, hopeless end, with no way out, suddenly, by a mere turning of the crew, the drama clears up (...). Many times have I had the feeling that the matter dealt with by the novelist, is at the end of the rope, so great is the tension achieved, so quick the rhythm imposed". Mihail Sebastian admires the novelist's "masterly skill" in calculating "the effects", the writer of feuilleton's art that gives, from the first to the last line of *The Possessed*, the impression of "a terrible run". As a playwright, our essayist shows a special interest in the dramatic qualities of Dostoyevsky's epic. He sees in the author of *The Possessed* a playwright who writes novels, only because the stag is too narrow a frame for his vision". On a second reading of *The Possessed*, he gets convinced that the author is, on the contrary, "a clear, intelligible novelist whose prose is imbued with nuances, a lucid observer who never loses himself in the course of the drama". Moreover, he identifies the writer wellknown as "an exalted, feverish, visionary man" with "a vigilant and reliable artist". But Mihail Sebastian's most original observation are those endowed with an associative character and are concerned with the "up-to-date" impact of *The Possessed* on the succeeding generations. The problem of Dostoyevsky's influence on Gide's only novel is dealt with in a clever, subtle spirit "I should re-read André Gide's *Les Faux-monnayeurs*, now after having read *The Possessed*. The latter's influence seems to me overwhelming. Gide's original view consists in some Protestant questions only (questions Dostoyevsky could neither ask nor understand) and in some technical devices, which might be interesting just for their awkwardness, artificiality and lack of skill. The rest, everything descend from *The Possessed*. The same anxiety, bewilderment, bantering cynicism, moral dissolution, despair. What an amazing theoretician of the act for act's sake is Nicolae Stavroghin!" Some new suggestions, prone to leave room for meditation, are further given, when he tries to make a comparison between Mircea Eliade's *Hooligans* (Huliganii) and Dostoyevsky's novel. "I should like to read Mircea Eliade's *Hooligans* in the light of these rediscovered *Possessed*."

³³ Anton Holban, *Marcel Proust, Artifices* (Marcel Proust. Artificii), in "Azi", 1936 May-June.

³⁴ Ion Chinezu, *Presentation to Pavel Dan, Old Urcan* (Urcan Bătrînul), Bucharest, 1938, p. XIV.

If the hooliganism (at least in the way Mircea Eliade defines the term) is but a sort of inadaptability, of non-conformism, of amorality and despair, then it is not far from the possessed nature of Dostoyevsky's heroes. Otherwise I am afraid this approach is not only of a literary kind. Our young generation — so pathetic and violent — owes to *The Possessed* much more than a favourite vocabulary. A certain attitude recently assumed with fierceness, a certain political messianism find excitingly similar echoes in Dostoyevsky"³⁵.

From Mihail Sebastian's right considerations of *The Hooligans*, we must not implicitly draw the conclusion that Mircea Eliade, an entirely Gidian writer, is to be ranked among the representatives of a novel that shares Dostoyevsky's vision. However structurally different from Dostoyevsky, Mircea Eliade shows interest in the former's work.

Some reflections included in his volume *Fragmentarium* are relevant in this respect. Leaving aside a paragraph in which he quotes Dostoyevsky as an example in his apology for "the novel of ideas", we have first to take into account two short commentaries that point out the striking originality of the writer who analyses the uniqueness of the Russian author. In his first note, Mircea Eliade starts from the assumption that in literature there are but "two possibilities" left for "a creative personality": either "to give a new, personal value to life" (Dostoyevsky) or "to restore the rules of conduct" (Dante, Shakespeare, Racine). Studying further, the contribution of the type of writer embodied in Dostoyevsky, the essayist makes some subtle remarks. "The Hell and the Paradise discovered by Dostoyevsky belonged to human experience, through a long tradition in time. Dostoyevsky gave only a new value and significance to these misty zones of existence. Before him, the people who plunged into these misty zones, were not aware of their sharing a value, of their experience as having a human significance. At most, they thought they were departing from humanity, as it happened with all the mysteries of "darkness", which were performed in Eurasia, long before Dionysos, and with all the Demetrical experiments (which gave the feeling of "possession", "humiliation", "subconsciousness"). Dostoyevsky restores — if we may say so — the rules of this Demetrical existence. The underground life in Dostoyevsky's work no longer has a pejorative meaning of confusion, chaos, neurosis (...). Discovering — for the modern European sensibility — a new mental continent, Dostoyevsky discovers, at the same time, the rules which reign over these apparently so vague regions (...). Dostoyevsky's personality is overwhelming, because he is the first, who, refusing to go along on Dante's journey, leads us through these underground abysses of the human being"³⁶.

Of a great importance is also the second remark made by Mircea Eliade — the stress is laid on the idea that Dostoyevsky is a marvellous exception in the European literature, wherein all the writers since the

³⁵ Mihail Sebastian, *Note on "The Possessed"* (Notă la *Posedații*), in "Revista Fundațiilor regale", September 1, 1937, pp. 679—683.

³⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Two Types of Creators* (Două tipuri de creatori), in *Fragmentarium*, Bucharest 1939, pg. 103—105.

ancient times "think that the human soul reaches its climax (domination, salvation) through woman", that "man contemplates and lives the reality as such, through woman". In the essayist's opinion, *The Brothers Karamazov's* author, breaks, like no one else before, a tradition according to which literature has its "essential dramatic function" in woman. "In Dostoyevsky", Mircea Eliade states and argues with a never failing ideating force, "man becomes, for the first time the victim of his own fate, without the drama of love; without the agent of sufferance and ecstasy that are always represented, in European literature, by woman. That is why, from a certain point of view, Dostoyevsky can be considered to belong to the extraliterary literature, to the ascetic European literature. His characters: people directly, immediately implied in sufferance; who are aware of the nothingness or of the abysses of existence through their own experience, not through love, but through their living together"³⁷.

An unexpected article as *Darkness* (Tenebre), published in "Lumea Românească" in 1938, eloquently shows that Geo Bogza cannot overlook Dostoyevsky, either. In the beginning we are told about the "incomplete" and "mostly undigested" readings of the youth from the Russian novelist's work, "terrifying readings", never to be renewed of time. "My readings from Dostoyevsky's books were an accident, many times taking the proportions of a catastrophe, which quickened my breath and made me feel dizzy. I read them paying no attention to the author's craftsmanship, not trying to see whether there was something worth learning from his skill and power in writing".

Further on, judging Dostoyevsky in the light of the historical present, looked upon from a protesting point of view, Geo Bogza, unlike most of the contemporary commentators of the epoch, denies in essence the visionary spirit of the author of the *Memories from the House of the Dead*. In this respect, his conclusion shows a bewildering blindness. "Nothing regarding the modern man's concern, nothing referring to what is happening now on the great stage of the world can give topicality to Dostoyevsky and his books, in a way or another". The reporter's rich life — experience, undergone by the writer in the years before the second World War, gives Geo Bogza a special turn of sensitivity for "the news in brief", and hence he gradually comes to discover, at last, a paradoxical way of approaching Dostoyevsky's work. "The news in brief have always opened up suddenly, like some windows bursting open in the storm, upon a humanity caught in its most private and unpredictable actions. The news in brief, the trivial events have often equated with and surpassed in importance, in whatever they brought news to the world, the great deeds of international notoriety (...). If the political or literary events which take place nowadays are far from reminding us of Dostoyevsky, they are also far from reminding us of them, he is not up to date, but in exchange, so many news in brief claim him and are claimed by him (...). All over the world there is but a man, whose rough name, resembling the cuts on a unique key, can alone fit in the indicate and strange mechanism of these events, can unlock and claim them to be his own (...). The fact that a name of a writer is brought up

³⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Dostoyevsky and the European Tradition*, (Dostoievski și tradiția europeană), in *Fragmentarium*, Bucharest, 1939, pg. 114—115.

to date by force of the material life events, I dare say, is certainly the most amazing (and more than that — the most terrific) homage to be ever paid”³⁸.

Among the prose writers affirmed in the literary life after 1930, Dan Petraşincu is the first and perhaps the only one who writes under the fascination of Dostoyevsky, being a representative of a literature dealing with abyssal psychology; unfortunately his perception is bounded within the limits of certain naturalistic prejudices. In his epic vision, lured by “everything beyond the normal”, by “man’s ambiguity and unease”, vision characterized by a genuine “obsession of the pathological”, as well as in the very method of analytical investigation which leaves “that Latin clarity” for the sake of “more intricate and crooked galleries”, Eugen Lovinescu perceives “a deep Russian and especially Dostoyevskian influence”³⁹. In his turn, in a brief consideration of the author’s short-stories and novels, George Călinescu observes that “the themes are taken (in a wrong way from Dostoyevsky) from the morbid areas”⁴⁰. In the articles signed by Dan Petraşincu, in the literary press in between 1935 and 1948, Dostoyevsky’s name is frequently mentioned. The essayist speaks twice exclusively about his favourite author’s work. So, in some pretty confused considerations, published under the title *Dostoyevsky’s Greatest Hero* (Cel mai mare erou al lui Dostoievski) in “Rampa”, 1936, we find him classifying some main characters from Dostoyevsky’s novels, according to “the spiritual freedom” attained. Raskolnikov would belong to the first stage, he is defined as a “Faustian hero who lives only one moment of absolute freedom (the actual, however gratuitous act of murder), then comes back to nature, to salvation, as if in fear of nothingness”.

He places Ivan Karamazov on a superior level “who is not the accomplished hero yet, although he ends in madness”. Without any further commentary we are shown a third level, personified in Prince Muishkin — “a failing Don Quixot, but more modern than him”. On this level, the author perceives an attempt at harmonizing the sense of freedom with the moral sense”, “harmonization” which proves to be impossible at last and ends in the stupour of idiocy. The last and supreme level of attaining “the spiritual freedom” is represented by Nicolae Stavroghin “the very embodiment of nothingness and of a greatest self-awareness”, where the novelist would have reached the climax of “courage”, creating a “state of madness and gratuitousness within a normal frame”. Besides, the author of the article wants to contest “the very comfortable romantic prejudice of the common-sense” regarding the “demonism” of Dostoyevsky’s heroes labelled as “awkward”. Exaggerating the truth of the idea that “the world of absolute freedom excludes the gratuitousness of a demonic nature”, we see him drawing the conclusion that the “mostly absurd gratuitous deeds “of the characters mentioned in his classification are not the results of an organic impact of evil, of revolt”, as it happens, for instance, with the typically satanic heroes in Byron’s work”⁴¹. The commentaries in *Notes on Dostoyevsky* in “Contemporanul”, in 1948, are more convincing and

³⁸ Geo Bogza, *Darkness* (Tenebre), in “Lumea Românească”, October 29, 1938.

³⁹ E. Lovinescu, *Dan Petraşincu*, in *Aquaforte*, Bucharest, 1941 p. 329–330.

⁴⁰ G. Călinescu, *Dan Petraşincu*, in *History of the Romanian Literature from the Origins to Nowadays*, Bucharest, 1941, p. 879.

⁴¹ Dan Petraşincu, *Dostoyevsky’s Greatest Hero* (Cel mai mare erou al lui Dostoievski), in “Rampa”, April 28, 1936.

doubtlessly show a growth in the essayist's understanding, judgment and expression. In Dan Petraşineu's opinion "in his very philosophy", Dostoyevsky behaves like a "novelist". For a writer like him, endowed "with a kind of lust in observing the spiritual events" that makes him feel at ease in "the labyrinth of the most complex idea-men", "orthodoxy and atheism" would be but "two dialectical positions", meant "to intensify the heros' existence in a terrible way".

The essayist notices that "Dostoyevsky, raising the problems of people à nu, puzzles the Europeans' spirit and undermines their idealistic certitudes". The great victory of the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* would consist in the fact that he succeeded at last "in involving" the spirit of the western World in the "dizzy whirls" of his own universe, bringing slowly about, like no one else before, the disintegration of the "Cartesian vision" on reality. Looked upon as being "the most complex writer of our age", Dostoyevsky is compared with Lobachevsky, the mathematician, "who, out of a sudden, discovers a world with four, five, with n-dimensions, a world to be faced with Rieman's universe". Among other things, he further supports the idea that we have to deal with a "difficult author", his novels being "exclusively philosophical", and their meaning is for the readers as well as for the critics a real test "not of taste" but of a "spiritual culture". Finally, we cannot overlook the fact that in a monographs written in 1942 *Edgar Poe, The Enlightened* (Edgar Poe, Iluminatul, Dan Petraşineu insist on a comparison between Poe and Dostoyevsky, being convinced that the two great phrenetics are united within the same modern consonance". In the rather awkward parallels he draws all along his book, the essayist refers to Dostoyevsky's non-traditional image of the Devil pictured as "a country squire" in Ivan Karamazov's hallucinations and to Poe's image of the smart nocturnal visitor coming to the inn from *Bon-Bon* or to that of the decrepit little old man, always present in the street, from "*The Man of the Crowd* (here we must say that Dan Petraşineu's interpretation is wrong). Further, we find an analysis of the theme of the double, as it appears in the novel *The Double*, belonging to Dostoyevsky's first period of creation and in the short-story *William Wilson*. Trying to define, by means of contrast, the fantastic realism of the two hypersensitive writers, Dan Petraşineu starts from the peculiar nature of each writer's visionary perception. "Dostoyevsky is tortured by the problem of Good and Evil and his experiments will always have that Christian tinge, seen under the impact of the original sin. Poe, on the contrary, has a scientific turn of mind, with him the experiments are strictly intellectual, pointing to a certain structure. The analysis aims at becoming mathematic rather than moral, as it happens with Dostoyevsky. Poe worships the intellect. While Dostoyevsky's novels come to a moral conclusion, Poe's experiment remains but a naked skeleton of dogmas, seen from a metaphysical point of view. Poe is a kind of Ivan Karamazov obsessed with the end of things, judged in a scientific perspective. His idea to put together within the same "family" of "strange, distorted books" considered to be "failures

from the strictly literary point of view, such different works as *Memories from the House of the Dead* and *Eureka*, seems to us completely out of the point. These books are said to leave the reader with a "bitter feeling of uncertainty", bewildering the untrained mind"⁴².

Before the end of the second world war we also find Octav Șuluțiu's unexpected approach to Dostoyevsky. The critic, this time a novelist, analyses in "Salvation" (Mintuire) a most uncommon matter of conscience, with moral implications, conceived in a genuine Dostoyevskian spirit"⁴³.

Obsessed with the murders committed by a sadist who always succeeded in not being caught by the police, the main hero, pictured by the author, becomes the victim of a deep spiritual crisis. He recovers only after having assumed the responsibility of the monstrous deeds, committed by his unknown fellow being, under the power of evil. In this way the hero, imprisoned, understands to help the murderer and make him repent and save his soul. At the time it is published, the novel *Salvation* passes almost unnoticed. Later on, however it is casually quoted by Ion Vlad in a study meant to reconsider Octav Șuluțiu's complete work. Ion Vlad looks upon *Salvation* as being a Dostoyevskian novel dominated by the idea of guilt"⁴⁴.

Taking into account all the considerations quoted in this chapter, we come to the conclusion that during the epoch in between the two World Wars, almost every important writer, no matter the generation, feels bound to define his opinions on Dostoyevsky. Although becoming a cardinal point of reference in Romanian literature too, the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* does not exert an influence on our writers, as it happens in the western novel after 1920. Even if some commentators quote Dostoyevsky's name with reference to the novelists of the age, their appreciations do not imply the existence of an essential spiritual kinship. We cannot speak of the Romanian literature as offering ground for the development of a Dostoyevskian type of novel, in the way R. M. Albérès defined it within the system of the viewpoints presented in his *History of the Modern Novel*. In one and the same chapter, the French essayist deals with Dostoyevsky, with the representatives of "a tragic Christian novel", with Georges Bernanos, Julien Green or Graham Greene, as well as with some "expressionists", from Franz Werfel to Jakob Wasserman, whose works reveal a psychology enriched with "the Freudian vision", too.

In Albérès's right opinion the category of "the Dostoyevskian novel" is above all characterized by a fundamental change of perspective introduced within the story, together with the discovery of a third dimension, "the spiritual dimension", which bring about the image of man no longer seen as a social "psychological animal" but as a "metaphysical animal"⁴⁵.

⁴² Dan Petrașineu, *Edgar Poe, The Enlightened*, Bucharest 1942, p. 85—86, 177.

⁴³ We point a relevant detail we detain from Elena Șuluțiu: her husband, while writing *Salvation*, kept on his desk *Crime and Punishment*.

⁴⁴ Ion Vlad, *A Literary Chronicle (Un cronicar literar)*, in "România literară", March 7, 1974.

⁴⁵ R.M. Albérès, *The Dostoyevskian Novel*, in *History of the Modern Novel*, Bucharest, 1968.