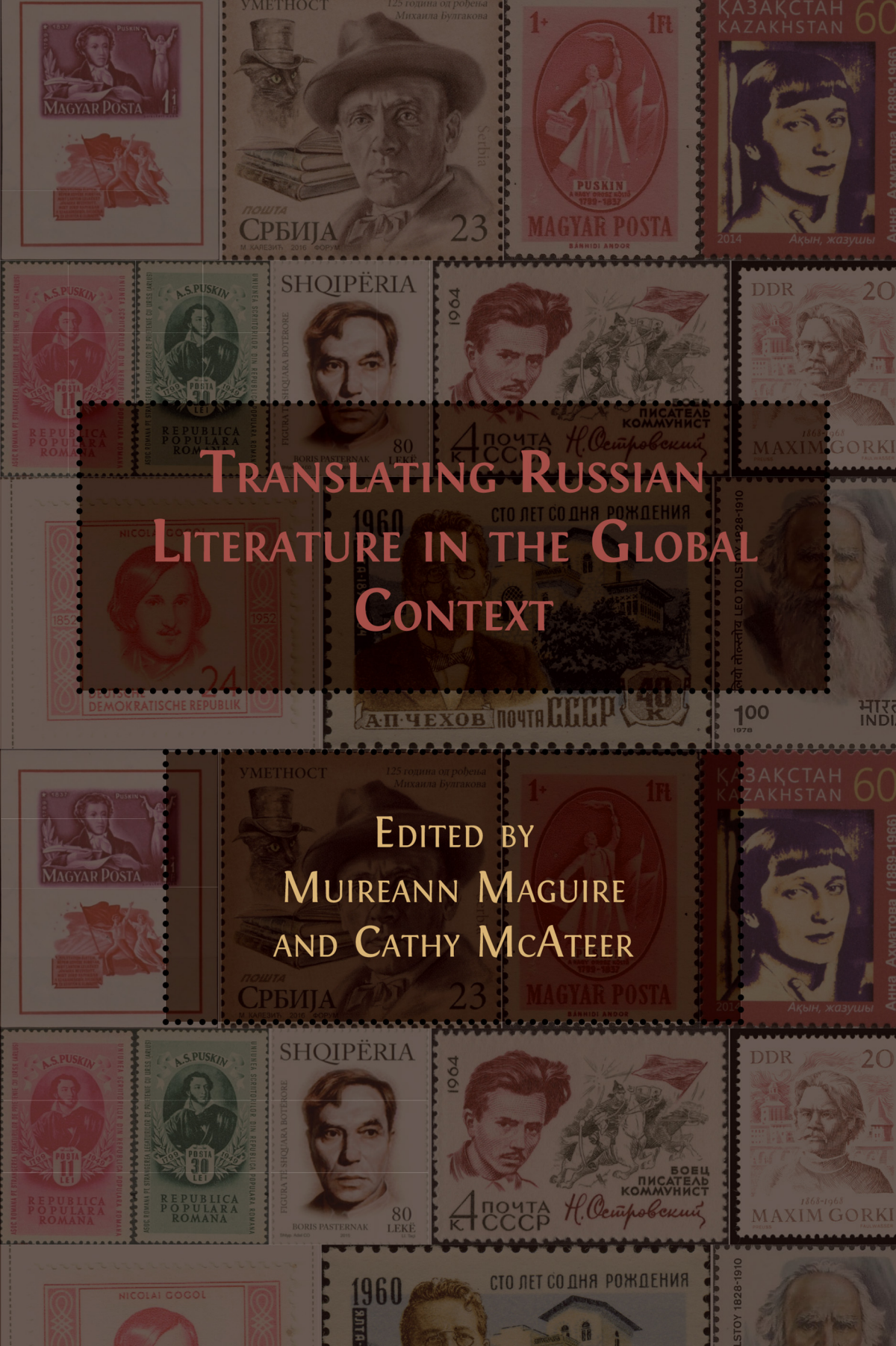

Translating Russian Literature in the Global Context

Edited by
Muireann Maguire
and Cathy McAteer

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Romania

Dostoevsky in Romanian Culture: At the Crossroads between East and West

Octavian Gabor

Introduction

Alexandru Paleologu (1919–2005), Romanian writer and scholar, describes Fedor Dostoevsky as "Russian to the core". However:

> Dostoevsky was just as much a "European", through his culture but also his radical structure as a townsman, a devourer of daily news; his critique of the West stems from a conscience that is essentially involved in the West's destiny.[1]

Paleologu's words are cited in the afterword to the most comprehensive study of Dostoevsky's reception currently available in Romanian, Dinu Pillat's (1921–75) *Dostoevsky in the Romanian Literary Conscience* (*Dostoievski în conştiinţa literară românească*, 1976).[2] Dostoevsky's reception in Romanian culture exists, like the writer himself, at the crossroads between two civilisations, a mystical East and a rational West. Constantin Noica (1909–87), one of the most important Romanian philosophers of the twentieth century, describes the Romanian ethos thus: "in

1 Alexandru Paleologu, 'Afterword or: A Postponed Discussion' ['Postfață sau: O discuție amânată'] in Dinu Pillat, *Dostoevsky in Romanian Literary Conscience* [*Dostoievski în conștiința literară românească*] (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1976), pp. 136–70 (p. 186). Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Romanian are my own.

2 I will return to Pillat's volume later in this chapter. Much of this essay is indebted to Pillat's careful and thorough analysis.

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their encounter, two massive worlds enclose a community which, instead of being crushed by them, as at a crossroad, can open itself towards them and, especially, open them toward each other".[3] This struggle between East and West, and also the geographical and cultural similarity between the Romanian and Russian cultures (both share important Orthodox Christian influences and traditional views on society, combined with a sense of belonging to the European cultural space) has led Romania to welcome Dostoevsky's thought. In addition, one other aspect of Dostoevsky's reception is quite specific to Romania: the country's domination, at the end of the Second World War, by the political descendants of the fictional terrorists Dostoevsky imagined in his novel *Demons* (*Besy*, 1872). As we shall see, the Russian author's reception began under the influence of politics and continued to be more or less impacted by Romania's own government and its political culture.

This chapter focuses on the history of Dostoevsky's academic and intellectual reception in Romania. While translations of the Russian writer's work into Romanian are not the primary subjects of this essay, a focus on how the work of an author changes as it moves from one political system to another shows a different kind of 'translation'. The discussion will begin with the pre-Communist period, in a milieu dominated by nationalist and religious ideas. I will then move to the Communist period, when, after a couple of decades where Dostoevsky is virtually absent, a series of scholars wrote essays in praise of him, creating robust scholarship. I will then examine how literary and theological interpretations of Dostoevsky changed after the fall of the totalitarian regime. This chapter will conclude with an overview of Romanian philosophical approaches to the author.

The two most influential studies of Dostoevsky's influence upon and reception in Romanian culture are Dinu Pillat's monograph, mentioned above, and Elena Loghinovski's *Dostoevsky and the Romanian Novel* (*Dostoievski și romanul românesc*, 2003). Indeed, one cannot venture to discuss Dostoevsky's reception in Romanian culture without paying homage to Pillat's well-documented and carefully crafted study. Although incomplete, due to the author's premature death, Pillat's book provides a comprehensive account of Dostoevsky's reception in Romania until 1974. In its three sections—'Discovering Dostoevsky (1881–1920)', 'Understanding Dostoevsky (1920–1944)', and 'Reconsidering Dostoevsky (1944–1974)'—Pillat's volume explores translations from the Russian author's work and the reception of his novels, as well as his influence upon Romanian novelists. Like Pillat, I begin here with Dostoevsky's first mention in the Romanian press. *The Telegraph* (*Telegraful*), a Bucharest newspaper, announced the writer's death (on 20 February 1881)

3 Constantin Noica, *The Romanian Sentiment of Being* [*Sentimentul Românesc al ființei*], trans. by Octavian and Elena Gabor (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2022), p. 22, https://punctumbooks.com/titles/the-romanian-sentiment-of-being/

as "the most significant event in the life of the Capital of the Tsar".[4] As Pillat observes, even this first mention was thus politically inflected; as I will show, this would prove typical of much of Dostoevsky's Romanian reception. In this first article, Dostoevsky's work was evaluated "exclusively from the perspective of nihilist circles".[5] He is criticised as "a completely reactionary author" who became "an enemy of the young generation, which fought against obscurantism, autocratic traditions, and despotism".[6] Pillat suggests that this critical tone is unsurprising, since the author of the article had participated "in the formation of a revolutionary committee as a student at the Military Academy of Surgery in Petersburg, together with the nihilist Sergey Nechaev, based on whose legal case Dostoevsky [would] later write *Demons*".[7] This essay is heavily indebted to Pillat's work for much of the timeline and many of the facts regarding the Romanian reception of Dostoevsky, as outlined below.

The first Romanian literary analysis of Dostoevsky was published four years after the writer's death. It appeared in 1885 as an introduction to several extracts translated from *The Insulted and the Injured* (*Unizhennye i oskorblennye*, 1861) in the journal *The Romanian* (*Românul*). Despite his own Socialist sympathies, its author, Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea (1855–1920), one of the country's most important nineteenth-century literary critics, did not reject Dostoevsky's work on the basis of the latter's politics. On the contrary, Dobrogeanu-Gherea returned to Dostoevsky after this first commentary in an article entitled 'What We Must Translate', where he assessed *Crime and Punishment* (*Prestuplenie i nakazanie*, 1866) as the "climax" of Dostoevsky's "creative force", the equivalent of *Madame Bovary* (1856) for Flaubert and *The Red and the Black* (*Le rouge et le noir*, 1830) for Stendhal.[8]

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, the reception of Dostoevsky's works remained very limited, likely owing to the scarcity and poor quality of translations.[9] Those who did read Dostoevsky accessed his writing through other languages. Octavian Goga (1881–1938), for example, the Romanian poet, playwright, and translator of several books from Hungarian to Romanian, read *Crime and Punishment* in German, in an edition translated as *Rodion Raskolnikoff*.[10] He claimed that the novel inspired him to undertake

4 See Pillat, *Dostoevsky*, p. 7.
5 Ibid.
6 Zamfir Arbore, 'From Russia' ['Din Rusia'], *Telegraful*, 20 February 1881. See also Pillat, *Dostoevsky*, p. 8.
7 Pillat, *Dostoevsky*, p. 8.
8 Ibid., p. 11.
9 Ibid., p. 21.
10 This was probably the 1908 translation by the Estonian-born Elisabeth Kaerrick (1886–1966) under the pseudonym of E.K. Rahsin. Her versions of Dostoevsky's novels in 22 volumes, originally edited by her brother-in-law, the German historian and nationalist thinker, Arthur Moeller van den Bruck (1876–1925), were

a "revision of moral problems" and "a change of world view".[11] Although interest in Dostoevsky intensified between the two world wars, Pillat notes that Romanians continued to read him through intermediary languages. The educated preferred French translations. The relatively few and unreliable Romanian translations were used by casual readers. Pillat's brief summary of these translations is as follows:

> *Memoirs from the House of the Dead* (1862) appeared in a version by A. Iacobescu, in two editions, one in 1926, the other in 1944. *Crime and Punishment* was issued in four editions, starting with the version by S. Avramof in 1922; the last was by Ion Pas in 1939. *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879) was printed in 1921 and again in 1929, in a scandalously abbreviated version by an unscrupulous translator, George B. Rareș. N. Dașcovici published his translation of Book X of *The Brothers Karamazov* under the title *The Precocious Ones* [*Precocii*] in 1923 [...]. *The Idiot* (1869) was translated for the first time by Zizica Pătrășcanu, with a sinister cover image, just as for *The Brothers Karamazov*. Although a masterpiece such as *Demons* remains untranslated, [... Romanians, surprisingly, benefited from] two translations of the chapter known as 'Stavrogin's Confession': one attributed to a certain R.D. in 1925, the other by the industrious George B. Rareș in 1928.[12]

Pillat concludes that "[w]e cannot consider Dostoevsky fully naturalized in Romanian as long as there is no complete edition of *The Brothers Karamazov* and no translation of *Notes from Underground* (1864), *The Adolescent* (1875), or of *Demons*".[13]

A significant step in the reception of Dostoevsky prior to the Second World War was a course taught by Nichifor Crainic (1889–1972), a prominent writer and politician who held office in the pro-Fascist government between 1940 and 1941. Prior to his political career, Crainic taught his own Dostoevsky course, first at the Faculty of Theology in Chișinău in 1926, and later at the University of Bucharest in 1933.[14] Crainic called his course 'The History of Religious Literature' and justified his focus on Dostoevsky by calling the latter "one of the greatest literary geniuses that humankind [had] to offer. He is on the same level as Homer, Vergil, Dante, Goethe, Milton [...]".[15] Crainic claimed that Dostoevsky's

published between 1906 and 1919 by the publisher Reinhard Piper and gradually became the canonical German editions of Dostoevsky.

11 Octavian Goga, 'Autobiographical Fragments' ['Fragmente autobiografice'] in *Talks* [*Discursuri*], (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1942), p. 17.

12 Pillat, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 30–31.

13 Ibid., p. 32.

14 Ibid., pp. 52–53.

15 Nichifor Crainic, *Dostoevsky and Russian Christianity* [*Dostoievski și creștinismul rus*] (Sfinţii Martiri Brâncoveni, 2013), p. 21. This volume is the second edition of

stature precluded his elimination by the cultural police of the new Communist power in Russia:

> While many other Russian writers were excluded, ranked among forbidden literature, by the Bolshevik censorship and thus cast off by the Communist state from the new culture that pretended to be established, Dostoevsky remained an undeniable good. My words are paradoxical: we are in the presence of a genius who was accepted by two fundamentally mutually exclusive worlds. If the Russians of the former empire accepted him with imperial honours, the Russia that was born from the collapse of the Tsarist Empire accepts him as well, although with different honours. The paradox is, however, only apparent when you know Dostoevsky's works deeply [... then] you understand why such a complex genius can be claimed by a Christian Russia as well as by a Communist, deeply anti-Christian Russia.[16]

Crainic's words resonate with events that would transpire in Romania just over a decade later. When the Communist Party seized power there in 1946, Dostoevsky almost disappeared for a decade. When his works did return, critics had to re-package them for compatibility with their new political masters' ideological demands.

The history of Crainic's lecture course is relevant to us because it indicates how Dostoevsky was greeted alternately with veneration and disregard: both forms of reception were exaggerated, corresponding to whatever ideology was identified with authority at any given time. Between the wars, Crainic's thinking was ultra-conservative, and this was then reflected in his reading of Dostoevsky.[17] Reasonably for a course about modern *religious* literature, he chose to focus on the Russian writer's Orthodoxy. Crainic's analysis is robust. He engages with the important problems of Dostoevsky's works, from the opposition between Westernisers and Slavophiles to the question of universal guilt, where Crainic finds clear evidence of Dostoevsky's "religious, specifically Orthodox thinking".[18] Crainic's course came to be published much later, after the fall of Communism in 1989. The person responsible for its rediscovery was Bartolomeu Anania (1921–2011), the former Archbishop of Cluj.

Anania credits Crainic's course as the source for his own interest in Dostoevsky. With other adolescents from the Central Seminary in Bucharest, Anania formed a literary group in 1938 because the curriculum did not fulfil

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the course that was first published in 1998, if we do not include the lithographed version.

16 Ibid., p. 21.

17 Crainic's political views were simultaneously ultra-conservative, anti-Semitic, and pro-Fascist.

18 Crainic, *Dostoevsky and Russian Christianity*, p. 169.

their thirst for culture.[19] Their group was mentored by a theology student, Ion Bârlănescu, "who began speaking about Dostoevsky, a new name for us, not even mentioned by our professors of literature".[20] Bârlănescu discussed "[Dostoevsky's] heroes, their deeds and inner turmoil, and so, slowly, for two years, strange and mysterious silhouettes were travelling through our thoughts: Raskolnikov, Sonia, Prince Myshkin, Stavrogin, Dmitry, Ivan, and Alyosha Karamazov, the *starets* [wise man] Zosima, but also the tall, sober, and frightening shadow of the Great Inquisitor".[21] Much later, Anania realised that Bârlănescu was aware of these characters as a former student of Crainic at the University of Bucharest. The latter's "course about Dostoevsky had become famous not only because different generations shared it verbally, but also because of the aura of mystery [conferred by the circulation of notes] in very few copies [...]".[22] One such rare copy was offered to Anania by the Archimandrite Grigorie Băbuş (1915–2007), who had been imprisoned by the Communists between 1959 and 1964 for belonging to *The Burning Bush* [*Rugul Aprins*] cultural organisation.[23] The Archimandrite kept a copy of the course in his cell. After the fall of Communism, he entrusted this copy to Anania, who eventually published it under the title *Dostoevsky and Russian Christianity*.

Dinu Pillat, completing his Dostoevsky monograph under Communism in 1976, mentions Crainic's course, but his analysis of the latter's thought is drawn from his pre-war published articles. Pillat begins in a critical tone, despite citing Crainic abundantly. Crainic's principal opinion, which he sketched in his lectures, was predicated on the claim that, to understand Dostoevsky's ideas, one must start with the doctrine of the Elder Zosima in *The Brothers Karamazov*: "the universalism of love is opposed to nihilist individualism".[24] At the end of his account of Crainic, Pillat reveals his implicit sympathy with Crainic's view: "Regarding Dostoevsky's work, Nichifor Crainic's judgment as an essayist leaves no space for errors of interpretation".[25] But this emphasis by Crainic and others on religious aspects of Dostoevsky's thought disappeared after the end of the Second World War, when Christian spirituality was critiqued by Romania's new political regime. The presence of the Soviet army and the Communist seizure of power enforced a national decline in Dostoevsky's reception. Many intellectuals were imprisoned as enemies of the regime. Atrocities occurred both

19 Anania's memory appears as a short introduction to Crainic's *Dostoevsky*, pp. 3–4.
20 Anania, 'Argument', in ibid., p. 3.
21 Ibid. According to Anania, Bârlănescu himself was a political prisoner of the Communist regime.
22 Crainic, *Dostoevsky*, p. 4.
23 For details on the Burning Bush, see Andrei Scrima, *The Time of the Burning Bush* [*Timpul Rugului Aprins*] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2012), pp. 123–204.
24 Nichifor Crainic, 'Dostoievski' in *Gândirea*, February 1931, 49–53. See also Pillat, *Dostoevsky*, p. 55.
25 Dinu Pillat, *Dostoevsky*, p. 57.

in and out of prisons.[26] In this context, Dostoevsky could only be interpreted as a reactionary against the Communist Revolution, someone who forsook the Socialist ideals of his youth on account of the persecution that he experienced and his subsequent fear of the tsarist regime. Thus, critical literature from this period attempting to re-evaluate Dostoevsky sounds either pathetic or comical, couched in the wooden formulae of Socialist dogma then current.

Among the first such unsuccessful attempts was Mihai Novicov's (1914–92) 1956 article, marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of Dostoevsky's death.[27] Novicov, a proponent of Socialist Realism, produced a typically uninspired text. Dinu Pillat, although also bound by Communist-era restrictions, singled out Novicov's "narrowness of spirit".[28] Novicov attributed Dostoevsky's genius to his investigation of existential angst, adding however, that Dostoevsky's "solutions are almost always mistaken, because his reactionary ideology is manifested in them through violence".[29] Nor was Novicov alone in using scholarship to court political power—such actions were widespread. Similar ideas appear in the writings of the scholar George Călinescu, one of the most widely cited Romanian literary critics, and in important monographs like Albert Kovács's *Dostoevsky's Poetics* (*Poetica lui Dostoievski*, 1987) and Ion Ianoşi's work, which I will discuss below. Despite their indisputable academic quality, all of these occasionally manifest ideas that were designed to appease the Communist censors. These ideas are purely superficial elements, mandatory tributes to an authority that refused to consider freedom of thought. In treatments of Dostoevsky from the early Communist period, the authors' claims are blatantly false, and written in typically clichéd language. To illustrate this impoverished, partisan analysis, I will cite a 1963 essay by Valeriu Ciobanu, a pioneering scholar of Dostoevsky's Romanian reception. He explains how Dostoevsky was received before the country became Communist:

26 For an account of this historical period, see Dennis Deletant, *Romania under Communist Rule* (Bucharest: Civic Academy Foundation, 2006); Romulus Rusan, *The Chronology and the Geography of the Repression in Communist Romania. Census of the Concentration Camp Population* (*1945–1989*) (Bucharest: Civic Academy Foundation, 2007), *Romania during the Cold War: A Short Chronology of Events, Institutions and Mentalities* (*1945–1989*), ed. by Romulus Rusan (Bucharest: Civic Academy Foundation, 2008), and Robert D. Kaplan, *In Europe's Shadow. Two Cold Wars and a Thirty-Year Journey through Romania and Beyond* (New York: Random House, 2016). Noica's *Pray*, mentioned above, is a philosophical description of life in prison (and at liberty).

27 Mihai Novicov, 'Marking 75 years since F. M. Dostoevsky's death' ['La 75 de ani de la moartea lui F. M. Dostoievski'] in the volume *Studies of Universal Literature* [*Studii de literatură universală*] (Bucharest: Societatea de Stiinţe Istorice și Filologice, 1956), pp. 177–88.

28 Pillat, *Dostoevsky*, p. 94.

29 Ibid., p. 93.

> During this period, when the reactionaries in capitalist countries who were worried about the success of the Revolution in Russia attempt to falsify the correct perception of Russian literature, the contradictions in Dostoevsky's work appear more obvious in our country, by their insistence on their negative aspects [sic–*OG*] which the mercenaries of the bourgeoisie emphasize. In general, there is no critical attitude toward the weaker parts of his works. On the contrary, it is precisely these parts that are brought to light, with emphasis on their mystical, obscure parts, denoting mistrust in man. [...] To such unilateral and also mystifying echoes from the Romanian press were added contributions from French newspapers and journals infiltrated by notorious reactionaries, such as Merezhkovskii and Berdiaev.[30] These articles and notes disfigured Dostoevsky's image by emphasizing certain features and neglecting others, precisely the positive ones. They were not published in the clearly reactionary media only, but, at times, even in media that pretended to be on the left but was in fact eclectic.[31]

One can see in this text how the author tries to redeem Dostoevsky, making him meaningful to a dogmatic society. To do so, he blames all the "dangerous" elements of his writings on the "faulty" interpretation of the "reactionary" society that preceded Communism. While Ciobanu wrote in the bureaucratic style of the time, he may have intended this text as a subtle path for the rehabilitation of Dostoevsky's work, which as he seems to argue, should not be dismissed. Instead, we should reject reactionary interpretations of Dostoevsky so that we can discover the 'real' writer.

1965 brought a short but welcome period of relaxation in Romanian culture. The Communist Party no longer interfered with publishers' plans. Consequently, the 1970s witnessed perhaps the most fertile period in Dostoevsky scholarship

30 To understand the context of this political era, one must recall that in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, Romanian intellectuals filled political prisons. Some of them died and were disposed of in common graves; others survived to eventually be released in 1964, during a general amnesty. Dinu Pillat and Nichifor Crainic both spent time in prison. Pillat was tried in the same group as Constantin Noica, a Romanian philosopher whose prison diary appeared in English as *Pray for Brother Alexander,* trans. by Octavian Gabor (Santa Barbara, CA: Punctum Books, 2016). Dostoevsky's "presence" in Communist political prisons is also attested to in Nicolae Steinhardt's *Diary of Happiness* [*Jurnalul fericirii*] (Rohia: Mănăstirea Rohia, 2005). Steinhardt mentions, for example, a moment when a priest is upset by Dostoevsky's distinction, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, between non-salvific suffering and suffering as a holy spectacle. While Communist political prisons were dungeons of terror, there were times when imprisoned intellectuals could offer lectures to each other in their respective fields. See Noica's *Pray for Brother Alexander*.

31 Valeriu Ciobanu, 'F.M. Dostoievski in Romania', *Studii şi cercetări în istorie literară şi folclor*, 1–2 (1963), 105–106. See also Pillat, *Dostoevsky*, p. 101.

in Romania up to that point. Prior to Pillat's book, which I have already cited extensively, four remarkable scholarly monographs analysing Dostoevsky appeared: Ion Ianoşi's *Dostoevsky: 'The Tragedy of the Underground'* (*Dostoievski: 'tragedia subteranei'*, 1968), Liviu Petrescu's *Dostoievski* (1971), Valeriu Cristea's *The Young Dostoevsky* (*Tânărul Dostoievski*, 1971), and Alfred Heinrich's *The Temptation of the Absolute: Character and Composition in Dostoevsky's Works* (*Tentaţia absolutului: Personaj şi compoziţie în opera lui Dostoievski*, 1973). Immediately after the publication of Pillat's book in 1976, Ion Ianoşi produced *A Story with Two Strangers: Dostoevsky and Tolstoy* (*Poveste cu doi necunoscuţi: Dostoievski şi Tolstoi*, 1977). I will begin by discussing the last of these, as an unusual example of scholarship.

The Romanian word for 'strangers' (*necunoscuţi*), may suggest either that Dostoevsky and Tolstoy are strangers to each other, since they never met, or else that both are unknown to the reader, because aspects of their work and characters still need to be revealed. Ianoşi's book plays on this double meaning. At one level it is a playful analysis of both authors' works based on their accounts of each other's writings and memoirs by common friends. But Ianoşi's book also reveals new aspects about each of these two major writers: not by presenting previously unknown biographical details, but rather by interpreting their historical interconnections on a personal level. Occasionally repetitive, Ianoşi's analysis is nonetheless refreshingly written, making original links between ideas. It reads like a novel rather than a work of scholarship, citing the two authors' diaries and letters without references to precise page numbers or editions. This approach deliberately creates the impression of sitting in a coffee shop, listening to a friend's knowledgeable and sophisticated account of parallels in the lives of two literary giants. Yet this innovative book pays lip service to Romania's political context and the requirements of Communist ideology. Ianoşi (1928–2016) was himself an intellectual with Socialist ideas. Nevertheless, his references to Lenin and his judgment of Dostoevsky's betrayal of the ideas of his youth should be read as obligatory prepared statements.

Ianoşi wrote a more traditionally academic analysis of Dostoevsky's work ten years prior to the publication of *A Story with Two Strangers*. In 1968, he had published *Dostoevsky: 'The Tragedy of the Underground'* (*Dostoievski: 'tragedia subteranei'*), a study of the "characters from the underground", as he calls them: namely, Raskolnikov, Ippolit, Stavrogin, Versilov, and Ivan Karamazov. Ianoşi wrote, "The 'Idiot' Myshkin, Makar Ivanovich Dolgorukii, or Alyosha Karamazov are examples of a Russian Don Quixote, while Hamlet has the face of 'the man from the underground', Raskolnikov, Ippolit, Stavrogin, Versilov, or Ivan Karamazov".[32] This is, in my estimation, one of the best analyses of Dostoevsky's writings, placing the Russian author in the context of international

32 Ianoşi, *Dostoevsky: 'The Tragedy of the Underground'* [*Dostoievski: 'tragedia subteranei'*] (Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură Universală, 1968), p. 9.

literature and demonstrating the considerable openness of Romanian society towards the West.[33]

Ianoşi situates each 'negative' character from Dostoevsky's novels within the context of world literature, analysing his work in connection with Friedrich Nietzsche, Albert Camus, Nikolai Berdiaev, and Thomas Mann. Thus, he inserts Dostoevsky, and indirectly Romanian scholarship, into "the world republic of letters" described by Pascale Casanova, where Russian characters take their place beside international fictional heroes.[34]

Three years after Ianoşi's scholarly volume, two more monographs appeared: *Dostoevsky* by Liviu Petrescu (1941–99) and *The Young Dostoevsky* by Valeriu Cristea (1937–99).[35] Petrescu's short book is an excellent essay that tackles Dostoevsky's problem of man's solidarity with nature, with the universe, which is in an "extremely precarious state, under the menace of being destroyed at any instant, either by the loss of faith, or by an unprepossessing character of the laws of nature".[36] The opposite of "mystical union with the universe" is "human revolt, chaos, and the freedom that is unbridled by anything, the affirmation of individuality".[37] Dostoevsky's hero is placed, Petrescu says, "before a tormenting alternative, which he cannot bypass or avoid; [...] he is forced to choose between supreme freedom and supreme depersonalization".[38] The use of the latter term is confusing, but it should be understood as de-individualisation. This dichotomy emphasises the stark choice posed by Dostoevsky between freedom of action which Ivan Karamazov professes, and loss of individuality as is accepted by, for example, Markel, Fr. Zosima's brother.

This is how Dostoevsky depicts the metaphysical drama of humanity, Petrescu writes:

> Tragic lucidity is always to be preferred to gross disappointments, to which those who are easily impressionable consent with joy; one of the most efficacious forms of disappointment is represented—in the author's view—by a society organized after a totalitarian model, because in such an organization man will hide from himself his duty of being free.[39]

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33 In 1968, Romania was the only Eastern bloc country not to support the Soviet repression of the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia. Nicolae Ceaușescu gained in popularity after condemning the USSR's invasion. Nevertheless, after visiting North Korea in 1971, his approach changed, and he became one of the most ruthless dictators in Eastern Europe.

34 See Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by Malcolm DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 83.

35 According to Paleologu's 'Afterword', Dinu Pillat was planning on continuing his reception studies with an analysis of Ianoşi's and Petrescu's works (p. 136).

36 Petrescu, *Dostoevsky* [*Dostoievski*] (Cluj: Editura Dacia, 1971), p. 15.

37 Ibid., p. 19.

38 Ibid., p. 22.

39 Ibid., pp. 26–27.

Reading such a phrase in a book published in Romania would have been impossible even six years earlier than 1971.

Cristea's *The Young Dostoevsky*, published the same year, is regarded as another high-quality academic work.[40] The author studies Dostoevsky's earliest works, but in an original way: as a 'reversed lecture', in which the early characters are analysed through the lens of the later, major writings. "By dwelling on a theme or an epic situation, we will try to show how it was transformed and in which subsequent creations it appears".[41] Cristea is convinced that there is no internal hiatus in Dostoevsky's work between the period prior to his 1849 imprisonment and the decades after his return to European Russia; and that the major works are derived not exclusively from Dostoevsky's prison experiences, but rather his earliest literary beginnings.

The last major work from this period of intense scholarship is Heinrich's 1973 *The Temptation of the Absolute: Character and Composition in Dostoevsky's Works* (*Tentația absolutului: Personaj şi compoziţie în opera lui Dostoievski*). Heinrich focuses on Dostoevsky's psychological realism, moving from the early works to the complex characters of *The Brothers Karamazov*. Among various intriguing insights, he believes that Dostoevsky's characters cannot be interpreted in terms of their psychological traits only. His explanation, though, does not seem justified by the text. He says:

> They are not individualized by their psychological traits, nor by the contradictions of their internal worlds. Some impulse was required to kick-start their psychology. For Dostoevsky, the engine of psychic life is constituted by a character's ideology, as expressed in his 'ideas'. He acts under the impulse of an idea that mobilizes all his forces and all his possibilities, concentrating them into a single point.[42]

Heinrich's work remains, however, a significant moment in Dostoevsky's reception in Romania.

Thus, the period bookended by Ianoşi's two monographs, *Dostoevsky: 'The Tragedy of the Underground'* (1968) and *A Story with Two Strangers: Dostoevsky and Tolstoy* (1978), is, I believe, the golden decade of Dostoevsky's reception in Romania, in which Universal Literature Press (Editura pentru Literatură Universală, 1966–74) published a translation of his collected works into Romanian in eleven volumes. The first volume included a robust introductory essay by Tudor Vianu (1898–1964), one of the most gifted literary critics of his time. The next two volumes include meticulous critical apparatus by Tamara

40 Cristea also published *The Dictionary of Dostoevsky's Characters* [*Dicţionarul personajelor lui Dostoievski*] in two volumes (1983 and 1995).

41 Cristea, *The Young Dostoevsky* [*Tânărul Dostoievski*] (Bucharest: Editura Cartea Românească), p. 21.

42 Alfred Heinrich, *The Temptation of the Absolute* [*Tentația absolutului: Personaj şi compoziţie în opera lui Dostoievski*] (Timişoara: Facla, 1973), p. 96.

Gane, while the remaining eight were edited by Ion Ianoşi. The final volume, containing extracts from Dostoevsky's *A Writer's Diary*, was translated and edited by Leonida Teodorescu, with an introduction by Ion Ianoşi. The volumes have different translators.

The tradition of careful and remarkable Dostoevsky scholarship continued with Ileana Mălăncioiu's splendid short monograph *The Tragic Guilt: The Greek Tragedians, Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, Kafka* (*Vina tragică: Tragicii greci, Shakespeare, Dostoievski, Kafka*, 1978) and two studies by Albert Kovács, who would remain an influential scholar in the field even after the fall of the Communist regime. His two volumes, *Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1987) and *Dostoevsky: Quo Vadis Homo?* (2000) are remarkable, Bakhtin-influenced analyses.

After the fall of Communism, the study of Dostoevsky's Christian spirituality was reprised in two substantial monographs, the Archimandrite Paulin Lecca's *Divine Beauty in Dostoevsky's Work* (*Frumosul divin în opera lui Dostoevschi*, 1998) and Ion Mânzat's *The Christian Psychology of the Depths: F.M. Dostoevsky against S. Freud* (*Psihologia creştină a adâncurilor: F.M. Dostoievski contra S. Freud*, 1999). We should note that Nichifor Crainic's lecture series was also first published at this time as *Dostoevsky and Russian Christianity* (2013).

Lecca (1914–96) believed that Dostoevsky should be understood through the figure of Jesus Christ. His thinking resembles the twentieth-century Romanian theologian Andre Scrima's theory of "apophatic anthropology", which combined elements of Christian anthropology with Eastern Orthodox mysticism. Scrima believes that the problem of understanding other humans begins with Christ, who has two indivisible natures, divine and human as the Council of Chalcedon stated.[43] Humans also have two natures, according to Scrima, but the split between them is inchoate: we have lost our divinity and we are journeying toward recovering it. To understand who we are, we need to understand both our divinity and our humanity. Scrima emphasises in his 1952 monograph *Apophatic Anthropology* that "[t]he problem of man can be formulated in its plenitude only in the light of a theandric idea".[44] Lecca seconds Scrima's formulation and attributes a similar view to Dostoevsky. By so doing, Lecca reopens the study of Dostoevsky's connection with Christianity, a field which had lapsed during the forty-five years of the Communist regime. To examine the problem of understanding human motivations, Lecca analysed Dostoevsky's ideas by interpreting the author's fiction through his biography. For Lecca, every character of the writer's novels is an expression of Dostoevsky's life. His characters were developed with the purpose of answering the question of what man is. While Mânzat's book, discussed

43 The Council of Chalcedon was the fourth ecumenical council of the Christian Church. It took place in 451 AD, and it established the two natures of the person of Christ.

44 Andre Scrima, *Apophatic Anthropology*, trans. by Octavian Gabor (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016), p. 44.

below, scrutinises Dostoevsky's psychology, *Divine Beauty in Dostoevsky's Work* starts from the Russian writer's own confession that he was not a psychologist but rather a realist attempting to portray the depths of the human soul—as Heinrich did in *The Temptation of the Absolute*.

As an archimandrite, Lecca was one of relatively few ordained clergy to engage with Dostoevsky's fiction.[45] His formal role within the Church naturally inflects his work. He frequently brings Dostoevsky into *rapprochement* with the Church Fathers, as well as with his own ideas. Near the end of *Divine Beauty*, Lecca returns to what he considers the key element in the interpretation of Dostoevsky's novels: the figure of Christ. He says, "According to Dostoevsky, beauty is Christ, He is the saint, the spiritual man, everything that is uplifting, generous, good, and pure".[46] To find beauty, Lecca says, Dostoevsky labours to reveal its source in Christ. Lecca's writing makes no pretence to be scholarly, although it abounds in references to other scholars. Sometimes he juxtaposes citations in order to convey his own view. Regardless of whether he cites from Dr A. Stocker or Konstantin Mochulsky,[47] perhaps his two primary sources, his own view is clear. Lecca summarises Dostoevsky's core notion thus: "each one of us, being guilty before all, can bring the Kingdom of Love on Earth only by taking the sins of our brothers upon us, just like Christ himself did on Golgotha".[48]

Lecca's dialogue with Dostoevsky is not limited to this monograph. He often returns to him in his other, specifically theological writings. In his *Spiritual Diary* (*Jurnal duhovnicesc*, 2013), he refers to Dostoevsky as often as he does to the Church Fathers, as if they were equally valid spiritual authorities. For example, he says that "Dostoevsky, the only one who writes the truth, shows in *The Brothers Karamazov* that hell is man's inability to love any more".[49] Lecca does not focus in this book on Dostoevsky's writing, but rather on ordinary human beings who "have a basement, as Dostoevsky said, where worms, toads, snakes, and even dragons live. [...] Often, when I contemplate all these crawling things, more or less dangerous and poisonous, I am overtaken by horror".[50] It is no wonder that he perceives that the solution to all of this terror is beauty: "Perhaps this is the meaning of Dostoevsky's claim that humankind can live without bread, but it

45 Lecca's analysis is not the only study by a Romanian priest. Pillat mentions two others active before the Second World War: Clement Bontea, author of the short 1926 study, *F. M. Dostoevsky: His Life and His Works* [*F.M. Dostoievski: Viaţa şi operele lui*] and Stefan Dobra's 1938 examination of 'Christian pedagogy' in Dostoevsky: *Dostoevsky and the Youth* [*Dostoievski şi tineretul*]. Pillat criticises both works for lacking personal vision (see Pillat, *Dostoevsky*, pp. 57–60).

46 Lecca, *Divine Beauty in Dostoevsky's Work* [*Frumosul divin în opera lui Dostoevschi*] (Bucharest: Discipol, 1998), p. 212.

47 Lecca cites Konstantin Mochulsky's *Dostoevsky: His Life and Work* (1947) and A. Stocker's *Ame Russe: Réalisme psychologique des Frères Karamazov*.

48 Lecca, *Divine Beauty*, p. 330

49 Lecca, *Spiritual Diary* [*Jurnal duhovnicesc*] (Bacău: Editura Studion, 2013), p. 27.

50 Ibid., p. 130.

cannot live without beauty. And beauty, according to Dostoevsky, belongs to Christ the Saviour".[51]

The fact that a theologian cites Dostoevsky in defence of his professional views is relevant to how some Romanian scholars persist in seeing the Russian writer as a significant religious figure. While focusing on the soul and Christianity, both Lecca and Crainic stay away from psychology. This is 'corrected' by Ion Mânzat in his thorough analysis, *The Christian Psychology of Depths: F.M. Dostoevsky against Sigmund Freud* (*Psihologia creştină a adâncurilor: F.M. Dostoievski contra S. Freud*, 2009). Mânzat begins with a claim similar to Lecca's: "Dostoevsky developed a psychology of suffering throughout his entire work, which sprang from his life. Suffering is an experience lived in spirit, with beneficial and malefic effects on self-knowledge and self-realization. Suffering guards us against mediocrity, increases our dignity; suffering strengthens the spirit which thus finds its Self".[52]

Mânzat discusses whether Dostoevsky's views influenced Freud. One of the points of comparison is the dichotomy between tender love and sensual love, which Mânzat applies to *Crime and Punishment*. He concludes however that:

> [...] psychoanalysts' competent comparisons and analyses are incomplete and partially artificial, since they did not take into consideration the third kind of love, one which proved definitional for Dostoevsky and his characters. This is the mystical love of Christ, love between a human being and divinity, as a metaphysical form of knowledge and communication between a human and divinity.[53]

In comparing what he calls the psychoanalytic approaches of Freud and of Dostoevsky, Mânzat considers the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* superior, because of his profound Christian sensitivity. This passage expresses Mânzat's view in essence:

> Freudian psychoanalysis acknowledges that it has limits; it feels defenceless before the subtleties and refinements of artistic creation (Sigmund Freud's own testimony). On the contrary, Dostoevsky's Christian psychoanalysis of the depths has no limits of time and space, because its premise and its result represent the relation of the human spirit with divinity; God and the spirit have no limits.[54]

51 Ibid., p. 311.
52 Mânzat, *Christian Psychology* [*Psihologia creştină a adâncurilor: F.M. Dostoievski contra S. Freud*] (Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic Gold, 1999), p. 23.
53 Ibid., p. 90.
54 Ibid., p. 104.

In a somewhat surprising conclusion, Mânzat claims that "Freud is identified more with Moses, while F.M. Dostoevsky with Christ".[55] His book thus engages with major themes of Dostoevsky's work from a psychoanalytic perspective, exploring both atheistic and Christian approaches to the novels. This unusual study certainly deserves more thorough analysis than this chapter can offer.

One of the most recent volumes dedicated to Dostoevsky is Ciprian Iulian Toroczkai's *Nihilism in Dostoevsky's Work* (*Nihilismul în opera lui Dostoievski*, 2014). This monograph is yet another theological interpretation. Often modelling his arguments on Lecca's, Mânzat's, and Ianoşi's previous works, Toroczkai engages with the problems of nihilism as Dostoevsky described them before indicating tools to cure what he calls this "nihilist malady": the word of Scripture, suffering, love, and beauty.[56]

* * *

A short note about Dostoevsky's influence on Romanian novelists: Pillat states that, prior to the Second World War, many novelists referred to the Russian author:

> [...W]e don't have a notable writer, regardless of the generation [...] that would not feel the need to say what he believes about Dostoevsky. Having become a cardinal point of reference even for Romanian culture, the author of *The Brothers Karamazov* does not, however, constitute a point of influence as well.[57]

Loghinovski's aforementioned volume on reception, *Dostoevsky and the Romanian Novel*, is useful on this topic. She continues Pillat's work, focusing primarily on Romanian novelists' responses to Dostoevsky's writings. Her book discusses three great Romanian novels: Liviu Rebreanu's *Ciuleandra* (1927),[58] Gib Mihăescu's *The Russian Woman* (*Rusoaica*, 1933), and Marin Preda's *The Most Beloved of Earthlings* (*Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni*, 1980). But after the Second World War, Dostoevsky no longer seemed to preoccupy Romanian writers. From 1944 to 1974, the period analysed by Pillat, only a few explicitly mention Dostoevsky. Pillat does not attempt to explain this situation; perhaps it was self-evident that the Orwellian conditions of Communist society precluded references to novels of this type. After the fall of Communism, Dostoevsky has appeared in new and unexpected interpretations. I will mention here only Mihail Gălăţanu's novel, *The Last Karamazov* (*Ultimul Karamazov*, 2014), which is framed as a continuation

55 Ibid., p. 105.
56 Ciprian Iulian Toroczkai, *Nihilism in Dostoevsky's Work* [*Nihilismul în opera lui Dostoievski*] (Sibiu: Astra Museum, 2014), p. 129.
57 Dinu Pillat, *Dostoevsky*, p. 89.
58 'Ciuleandra' is the name of a folk dance from Muntenia, the Southern part of Romania. It has a progressively accelerated rhythm.

of Dostoevsky's famous book, as penned by the youngest Karamazov brother, Mikhail. This character does not appear, of course, in Dostoevsky's original.

* * *

One cannot write about Dostoevsky's reception in Romania without touching upon how the Russian author was received by philosophers. The three giants of twentieth-century Romanian philosophy, Lucian Blaga (1895–1961), Constantin Noica (1909–87), and Emil Cioran (1911–95), each took a different path, recalling Romanian culture's diverse approaches to Dostoevsky. Lucian Blaga found inspiration in the Orthodox tradition; thus, he cited Dostoevsky to support his own views. Constantin Noica's thought evolved within the framework of traditional Western metaphysics, focusing on Greek and German philosophy, and therefore he was silent about Dostoevsky. But Noica does mention the Russian author in a 1934 article, listing translations into Romanian from Russian literature.[59] Here he observes that "Dostoevsky has over twenty translations, while Lev Tolstoy almost *one hundred*"[60] (his own emphasis). Emil Cioran, a philosopher who did not merely discuss, but who viscerally experienced the despair and absurdity of life, could hardly remain impassive to Dostoevsky's troubled characters or to the problem of suffering. Nor did he—but I will turn first to Lucian Blaga. In the second volume of his *Trilogy of Culture* (*Trilogia culturii*), *The 'Mioritic' Space* (*Spaţiul mioritic*, 1936),[61] Blaga used 'the wedding at Cana' scene from *The Brothers Karamazov* to illustrate Orthodox spirituality. As we have seen in the theological approaches outlined earlier in this chapter, Dostoevsky's works often serve to provide insight into the meaning of Orthodox thought. Blaga discusses what he calls bipolar spiritualities within three strands of Christianity: Protestantism, Catholicism, and Orthodoxy. When discussing the conflict between the transcendent and the temporal, he uses Dostoevsky to illustrate the Orthodox view. Blaga refers to the scene when Alyosha enters the room where Fr. Zosima's corpse is laid out and a monk reads the Gospel of the wedding in Cana. Alyosha has a vision of Zosima as one of the guests. Blaga says:

> Overtaken by tears of joy, Alyosha comes out of the room in the night. Above, he sees the starry heaven and the Milky Way; at that moment, without knowing why, he falls down [...] and kisses the earth crying. In this moment of ecstasy, the earth becomes an equivalent of heavens for him. The reality of death is transformed into a vision of life, this eternal

59 Published in *Faith* [*Credinta*], 70 (27 February 1934), p. 3. See Constantin Noica, *Between Soul and Spirit* [*Între suflet şi spirit*] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), p. 302.

60 Noica, *Between Soul and Spirit*, p. 302.

61 The term *mioritic* designates an ethos that Blaga finds uniquely characteristic of Romanian culture. I cannot find a precise English equivalent. It derives from a term of endearment, *mioara*, meaning literally a 'lamb'.

> wedding at Cana. Alyosha kisses the earth crying as it is a great keeper of life. The organic, with all of its aspects and values, is crowned with the diadem of the Milky Way.[62]

Blaga's conclusion is that Dostoevsky was more than an analyst of the dungeons and sanctuaries of the human soul, or an Orthodox dialectician; he was also "a lyrical poet of the Orthodox experience".[63]

Whereas Blaga focuses on the Orthodox spirituality of Romanian culture and so finds in Dostoevsky illustrative examples because of this common Orthodox trend, Emil Cioran's perspective was different. Preoccupied with dissolution and despair, Cioran was drawn to Dostoevsky's treatment of suffering.[64] The son of an Orthodox priest, Cioran left Romania prior to the Second World War and moved to France. His Romanian writings before his departure for France show his attraction to Dostoevsky's themes, without accepting the Russian author's ideas. This struggle continued in Cioran's books published in French. I mention here one passage from his *History and Utopia* (*Histoire et utopie*, 1960), written after he had settled in France. In his typically exalted style, Cioran writes:

> Suffering, in its early stages, counts on the golden age here on earth, seeks a basis for it, attaches itself to it, in a sense; but as suffering intensifies, it withdraws, attached only to itself. Once an accomplice of utopian systems, it now rises against them, discerning in them a mortal danger to the preservation of its own pangs, whose charms it has just discovered. With the voice of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* it will plead in favour of chaos, rise up against reason, against '"two and two equals four", against the "crystal palace", that replica of the phalanstery.[65]

Cioran continues for several pages to recount different scenes from Dostoevsky's novel, dialoguing with the author's "hostility to utopia".[66]

* * *

Who is Dostoevsky, in Romanian culture? Some scholars say that translation has a dialogical nature: translators must attempt to live in two cultures at the same

62 Blaga, *The Mioritic Space* [*Spaţiul mioritic*] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994), pp. 35–36.
63 Ibid., p. 36.
64 For an excellent article about Cioran's life and work, see Costică Brădăţan's 'The Philosophy of Failure: Emil Cioran's Heights of Despair', in *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 28 November 2016, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/philosopher-failure-emil-ciorans-heights-despair/
65 Emil Cioran, *History and Utopia*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Seaver Books, 1987), p. 111.
66 Ibid., p. 112.

time, transferring their way of being from one to another.[67] Ideas do not live in a vacuum; rather, they are embodied in languages and cultures. Translators, interpreters, and adapters of Dostoevsky enter into dialogue with him from whichever space they inhabit. Thus, Dostoevsky gains meanings and flavours relative to the culture or society that his writings inform. It can be challenging to exclude politics from any text. Dostoevsky's reception in Romania certainly proves this statement. His own political and religious views made him attractive for some and problematic for others. But the Romanian experience shows that genuine philosophical value transcends political interests. Dostoevsky's consistently positive and thoughtful reception among scholars in the turbulent history of Romania gives reason for hope that, regardless of political affiliation, people can always find a way to communicate if they focus on what is valuable. Dostoevsky's great novels provide such a space for potential opponents to encounter each other peacefully.

67 See Eugenio Refini, *The Vernacular Aristotle. Translation as Reception in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).