DOSTOEVSKY AND NICOLAE BREBAN'S NOVELS

Cristina CERGAN[*]

Abstract: *The article presents some of the possible connections between Dostoeevsky's work and Breban' novels. The obsession for power, new religions of modernity, bleak, oppressive atmosphere, perfect crime and, above all, the interest in human psychology are the main ideas the study hints at.*

Keywords: *Dostoevsky, crime, power, master, servant.*

Concerning many junction points of his work, the writer Nicolae Breban doubles his work of explanatory assertions, so that the researcher also has to take into account the writer's declarations about the analysis of writings, even if, sometimes, that is only to determine the contradictions. Breban likes shocking declarations, velleity that proves once again, his well-known megalomania. Breban made numerous allegations and references about his relationship with Dostoevsky in almost all of his interviews and essays. His belief is that the 21-st century will be under Dostoevsky and Nietzsche's rule, though, emphasizing the Russian writer's work major influence and its predominant importance in setting up the distinctiveness of the modern literature.

Nicolae Breban said many number of times that some of the literature maestros are: Nietzsche, Tolstoi and Dostoevsky. Most of the critics, both in reviews and studies, considered Breban's assertion, trying to establish some similitude and contrast elements between the great Russian writer and the Romanian one. It is all about the term dostoevskyanism – understood differently by each one who approached this subject. There is only one certain thing: we cannot talk about imitation, but about a more subtle, profound influence, about an emulation process, because Dostoevsky "can't be followed, but only loved." (Nicolae Breban)

Breban's dostoevskyanism may be identified at the level of some atmosphere elements, of some character's features and especially, at the level of his attraction towards the so-called abyssal psychology. This dostoevskyanism was a subject of discussion or disproof even from Breban's first writings. If there may be a correspondence, easy to recognize, there are also many points where the two writers' works are different. V. Cristea was the most fervent supporter of the differences between the two, of the substantial dissimilitude between them. He considers that in his work, Dostoevsky caught the great diversity of life, "the passing through all the stages of human, from elevation to collapse, the author of the *Karamazov Brothers* encircled for the first time, like a new Magellan, the vast sphere of what is human, showing its complexity."(Cristea, V., 1975: 205) In this critic's opinion, from all this broad kingdom, Breban possesses only a narrow band – the biological – sexual and teratological one and that of force relationships. It is missing the antithetic area: that of joy and serenity, the Romanian writer not paying attention to the positive, brilliant side of human.

The criticism was unanimous concerning one element: the tendency towards the **abyssal psychology**. That would be the feature that approaches him most to the Russian writer, here being necessary a few explanations. Whether Dostoevsky's characters live intensely their own drama or joy, Breban's characters lack the passion

[*] University of Pitești, cristinacergan2003@yahoo.com

BDD-A14506 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:07 UTC)

"corrupted by a bookish conscience, otherwise modern, of the artifact, the emptiness meets in Nicolae Breban's work, the coldness of observation." (Maliţa, L., 2001: 3)

The author said about the novel *Animale bolnave* (1968) that it was written "with humiliation in Dostoievsky's luminous linen." Dostoevsky is considered the true father of the modern detective novel, a narrative formula adopted by Nicolae Breban, too in this novel. In Dostoevsky's work, the murder is not only an abstract enigma which should be unraveled through inventive logical deduction or fantasy games, but also a material fact which through its atrocious reality, through the smell of blood and through the animal cruelty, is able to overturn man's whole moral structure, calling him in question. The dostoevskyan characters' abyssal psychology gives the possibility to any surprise, thus they could pass from one extreme to another, nothing being impossible. "In each dostoevskyan hero, there is a saint and a murderer."(Crohmălniceanu, O.,1981: 191)

Animale bolnave has a complex structure, so that, here, the writer makes a synthesis of the novel formula, preponderant realistic which was also approached in *Francisca* and of the antimimetic pragmatic, pseudo – realistic of the eseistic - poematic prose from *În absenţa stăpânilor*. Thus, we have a **reality**, described in an objective manner (a description of the town, characters, relationship between them and of crimes) and a **reflection of reality**, its reflection in Paul's conscience and imagination. So, for many times, we have the same event presented through both ways. Here, we recognize the counterpoint technique, used ingeniously, the police novel being doubled by an abyssal one. "A novel made up of two novels: the classic, social, of manners, of classic typology etc and beside these, the oneiric one, based on Paul who destroys and creates continuously reality."(Pecican, O., 1994: 104)

This abyssal, oneiric mystifies permanently the peaceful passing of the traditional, invading all the structures through Paul's hallucinating reflection, mixing the daily, brutal reality with the practices of an expansive imagination. Despite this subversive plan, all the conventions of a detective novel are respected: in a mountain town, there happen a few crimes, whose author is assiduously looked for, and after many failed attempts, he is caught. On the same ground, there is also displayed a strange love story between Irina Dabici and a former student, Titus. All these real elements are permanently scattered and then, rebuilt by the witness of all these events: Paul Sucuturdean. So, in an industrial, mountain town, Nadrag, where Paul Sucuturdean has just arrived, there happen three absurd crimes, due to the fact that nobody can establish their reason and there is no connection between them. At the beginning, the crimes puzzles the authorities because of the lack of clues, looking like perfect crimes, just like Raskolnikov initially wanted to accomplish. Like in any other detective novel, the author puts us on more wrong ways, so that, in the end, the detective Mateias' vigilant eye and his sharp mind, to retrace the course of the crimes and reorder previous, skipped details. But, police action does not represent Nicolae Breban's concern, who just like Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment*, is interested in surprising the complex abyssal psychology of crime, in what is happening behind all these insane facts which are the intimate resorts that are brought into play.

The characters are very interesting, appropriate to this kind of narrative line. Krinitzki is the missionary of a new religion, the giant that tries to suppress his force and violent tendencies through reconsidering and introversion. Preaching the Christian moral, the character affects the people round him and transforms them in fanatics.

This image of the prophet – the one who gathers supporters, "proselytes", can be found in many of Breban's novels, some of them being: *Bunavestire* and *Don Juan.*

BDD-A14506 © 2014 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:07 UTC)

In *Bunavestire*, Grobei (the one from the second part of the novel, the one after the metamorphosis) becomes Farca's spiritual follower, embodying and transmitting further his ideas about the existence of some new social relations, based on the opposition **master – servant.** Grobei is adulated by scores of members of the organization in the whole country, although he refuses any of their gestures. He will isolate himself, breaking off from the outside world, who will worship him, making a legend of him. In this situation we can talk about a certain mysticism, in Grobei's case, but also for Krinitzki, too, even if it is not about the traditional meaning of the term. Both characters identify themselves with the preached idea, they cannot exist independently, but not on their own will too, because the other proselytes see them committed to these ideas and there is no way to return. In Krinitzki's case, this fact has much more severe consequences, because his ideas are generalized and rise grimly in Miloia's soul. Krinitzki is a powerful and violent person who obeys to a canon, because he fears of himself. He is a "saint ", through giving up to self –control. His power turns into gentleness, and the selfishness in dedication. The God he preaches is one that can be found everywhere, in all what is alive.

Religion is for Krinitzki a way to restrain his powerful instincts, but he will start up the crimes, without knowing, and will be the victim of his most faithful apprentice, Donesie Micula. Micula is a weak person and this weakness pushes him to fanaticism and crime. In this situation, it is eloquent the reaction of the two towards the biblical example of the servant who hid the coin from his master. Krinitzki considers that faith should not be given up to, but preached, that being the reason for which he speaks and reads daily from the Bible to those who are interested. On contrary, Miloia makes from divinity, a good for him, hidden, because he considers himself entitled to defend God from sinners. Under the mask of absolute devotion, the most ardent intolerance is hidden. Through Miloia, the author illustrates the possible fanatic side of any other religion. Miloia kills those who aggress Krinitzki in any way. He cannot accept someone to hurt his idol and his reaction is to cast them out. In the end, he kills Krinitzki, too, because he does not correspond with the image he created about his idol. When he kills Krinitzki, Miloia kills a big part of himself, because he remains alone.

A new couple is settling into shape, representative for Breban's novels that resembles to dostoevskyan works (beside the **tough – weak** one, **executioner – victim, lord - servant**) is that of **master – disciple.** This type of couple **is** identifiable in *Animale bolnave* (Krinitzki - Miloia), in *Bunavestire* (Farca – Grobei), but in *Don Juan (*Rogulski - Rusu), too. Refusing the propagandistic service, Krinitzki does not work for any religious institution, but just like in the primary Christianity, The Idea. Actually, he preaches the Christian ideology like a form of therapy for a devastated psychic. Miloia seems to play the role of the favorite apprentice, the most fervent and faithful. The Master is the one to formulate the ideas, and the disciple has to assume and preaches them. The propagandistic dimension refused by Krinitzki has a special value, prior for Miloia. Because Krinitzki keeps the dogma for himself, being unable to open himself towards the people, to punish those who make fun of the saint ideas, to convert them, to take attitude, Miloia kills him considering him a traitor of Idea. So, here we can feel the sinister presence of the dostoevskyan climate, the novel being about an ideological crime, not about a religious one.

The author confesses that he was tempted by this type of birth of violence from non-violence preaching. Krinitzki's ideas about isolation and lack of involvement, his peaceful attitude will raise in Miloia the wicked structures of his soul, pushing him towards murder. The crime is committed by Miloia, to keep untouched the purity of

BDD-A14506 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:07 UTC)

Idea and not to compromise the ideology. In this situation we see a change of the well - known relationship – the master is suspected by distortioning the idea and this implies a change of the story line and of roles. "In a symbolic way, the crime was part of a pre-established script, the Apprentice representing a middle stage, being connected with the inner reason, with the dynamics of the relationship between master–disciple, so as the latter to devour his master, to finish his formation."(Maliţa, L., *op. cit*. :41) But Miloia does not have the ability to accede to the master position, declining the symbolic and ceremonial act into a trivial, a mediocre one. Miloia understands the things at a superficial level, but he becomes fanatic and the damage takes place. Miloia does not commit a crime, but three. The first two are meant to defense the master, the embodiment of Idea, from those who wanted to desecrate and indent his authority, and the last one is meant to defense the Idea itself from the one that betrayed it.

At antipole, there is Grobei. Even from the beginning, he is looking for a master. All his life was under this sign: looking for a master to serve him, to whom he would obey. After a big part of the novel seems that this role is played by the beautiful Lelia Crainiceanu, the story line changes suddenly. Grobei leaves his fiancée and opposed to Miloia, he will not kill his master (already dead), but through metamorphosis, he will come to identify himself with Farca. So, the disciple, in this case, is able to turn into master. If Miloia succeeds to attract attention in a negative way above the preached ideas through his gestures, Grobei is extremely efficient in organizing and spreading his master's ideas, Farca. He dedicates his whole existence to this noble aim, to this legend about to born. Donesie Micula, called Miloia and Traian Liviu Grobei represent not only two complementary typologies. They encode two different cultural situations. Whether in the first one, we can read, the experience, even if it is deformed, by fanaticism, the horrifying battle with the angel, "in the second case impresses especially the nostalgia, doubled by the painful conscience of impossibility to invent a new myth, which should reconnect us to transcendence."*(ibidem*: 45)

The line of the crimes is started by the murder of a worker, Simonca, the next is Irina Dabici's son, and then, Krinitzki. The investigators start the investigations, arresting a few of the suspects, but, beside these, there are others too that raise suspicions. Krinitzki had had a more ardent discussion with the smith, just before the murder, thus becoming a possible murderer. The question mark above him emphasizes, especially because he seems to know some things, but he refuses to talk about them, despite the pressures of investigations.

Strangely, Paul is always present at the place of the crimes. This is a strange character between the most unusual of Breban's characters. He continuously changes the reality through the filter of a pathological imagination. A great part of the investigation has to display on Paul's depositions, a person who cannot make a real distinction between truth and fiction.

Another character, above whom the air of guilt is floating, is Gaspar, an enigmatic character with violent tendencies. He had a violent meeting with the second victim, Irina's son, in one of his nightly visit he was making to her. Irina is widow, an unearthly beauty, who thimks about herself that she is damned to bring unhappiness to those who love her. Titus Garda, doctor Garda's son, a personality of the small town, made a passion for her. His gestures, many of them exaggerated, prove an abnormal love, a love to which he cannot give up.

The atmosphere of the novel is an extremely tensioned one, murder, guilt are in the air, so that "all (Krinitzki, Paul, Irina) are victims and executioners, angels and demons, saints of abjections or demons of suffering."(Simion, E., 1978: 477)

BDD-A14506 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:07 UTC)

Breban's characters are not the traditional characters any more, with logical, explainable actions, due to the environment they live in and to the situations they are exposed to. Krinitzki, Miloia, Paul, Irina have what is called, "an abyssal psychology", a psychology outside the common canons, making surprises at any time. Like Dostoevsky, Breban throws an unexpected light above the dark side of the human soul, shocking with the revelation that the criminal instincts can hide anytime and in any human soul. In *Seek Animals*, there are the murderous tendencies displayed in all their horror. The crimes are not abstract acts, some disposals of the characters based on an existence scheme, they are violent actions described in a monstrous way. Simonca is found with the broken skull by a powerful beat, Dan, the high school student is lying strangled with the head on the table, Krinitzki has on all its body the marks of more razor stabs. The crime is not only an idea, a thought, an intention to demonstrate the supremacy, to show that you are above good or bad, just as Raskolnikov believed. He also discovered, like the characters in *Animale bolnave* that the crime has a material, physical, monstrous side. So, the crime, expression of the power will, turns into pure bestiality. The will without power transforms people into "seek animals", because pushing them to self improvement, giving them a real superiority, can also lower them on the most infamous step, that of crime. All characters have something monstrous, distorted, and terrifying in their being, they all seem to be accomplices at all the crimes that horrifies the town.

Paul Sucuturdean is the character that introduces us Nadrag town and through his eyes we discover the first elements of the Romanian universe. He is one of the most original characters in Romanian literature. He is a liar, a person with a hallucinatory imagination, lacking a clear image above his own existence. Paul mixes the dreams, the fictional projections with the real events. The people see him like a disabled person, like an unintegrated , the only one that will show a more profound understanding of Krinitzki. He seems to live continuously in an area of subconsciousness and only sometimes he seems conscious, but even then he lacks his memory. There are a few memorable scenes, where Paul is the main character. One of them is Paul's visit to "the woman in black", Irina Dabici, the one who caught his eye from the first moments after his arrival in town. Once he entered in the intimate atmosphere of the summer kitchen, happy that he will eat the dishes prepared by the hand of the one he idolatrizes, the young man suddenly observes two hens on the table that begin to walk slowly through the plates. The birds create him a terrible fear – fed by the unexplainable feelings towards Miloia who had a physical deficiency: a hand like a claw. Paul's assertions about claw, included in his long stories about the moments in which he assisted at crimes, will be the point from which Mateias will succeed to un-puzzle the enigmas from Nadrag.

The critics found a resemblance between Paul and prince Maskin, because both "can support with great understanding the tortures to which he is subdued by the brute – Dabici teenager – and his shy kindness of good and confused animal, succeeds only to harden the aggressor, because this will make him feel infinitely guilty."(Ștefănescu, A., 1977: 198)

The obsession for power, the new religions of modernity, the tensioned, dark atmosphere and above all, the interest showed to the characters with an abyssal, complex, surprising psychology are all reasons for supporting the closeness of Nicolae Breban's novels to those of Dostoevsky, understood not in the way of imitating a well-known model, but in the sense of a creative taking-over of some elements and their embedment in new, original, valuable contexts.

BDD-A14506 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:07 UTC)

Bibliography

Breban, N., *Animale bolnave*, Editura Tineretului, Bucureşti, 1969
Breban, N., *Confesiuni violente*, Du style, Bucureşti, 1994
Cristea, V., *Domeniul criticii*, Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1975
Cristea, V., *Dicţionarul personajelor lui Dostoievski*, Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1995
Crohmălniceanu, O. S., *Pâinea noastră cea de toate zilele*, Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1981
Dimisianu, G., *Prozatori de azi*, Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1970
Ianoşi, I., *Dostoievski-tragedia subteranei*, Editura pentru Literatură Universală, Bucureşti, 1968
Maliţa, L., *Nicolae Breban (monografie*), Aula, Braşov, 2001
Manolescu, N., *Arca lui Noe*, 100+1 Gramar, Bucureşti, 1998
Martin, M., *Generaţie şi creaţie*, Editura Pentru Literatură, Bucureşti, 1969
Negoiţescu, I., *Scriitori moderni*, vol II, Eminescu, 1997
Niţescu, M, *Atitudini critice*, Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1983
Pavel, L., *Antimemoriile lui Grobei*, Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică, Bucureşti, 1997
Simion, E., *Scriitori români de azi*, Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1978
Ştefănescu, A.., *Preludiu*, Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1977
Ştefănescu, A., *Persoana întâi*, în România literară, nr.41, 10 oct., 1991
Ţeposu, R. G., *Viaţa şi opiniile personajelor*, Cartea Românească, Bucureşti, 1983
Ungureanu, C., *Proza românească de azi*, Cartea românească, Bucureşti, 1985

BDD-A14506 © 2014 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:41:07 UTC)