

Cioran

A Dionysiac with the voluptuousness of doubt

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Translation

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Series in Philosophy



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*In memory of my wife
Doina Marieta*

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“A civilisation starts in myth and ends in doubt”

*“For me, refusal has always been more
powerful than enthusiasm.*

*Spirited alike by the temptation of the absolute
and the persistent sentiment of vacuity,
how could I dare hope?”*

(Cioran)

Preface

Cioran's code

Reading – or writing a book about Cioran – you cannot but help wonder if Cioran himself would have approved of such an enterprise. To comment on a thinker proclaiming the futility of all things and the primacy of delusion, is not this “the heights” - to use the word in the title of his first book - of futility?

However, it seems that neither Cioran nor other masters of “despair” are indifferent to the reception and posterity of their work. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche vituperated while holding in their hand the still-invisible “ace” of their future glory. Kierkegaard seemed to preach from the pulpit of future recognition – about which he had not a single moment of doubt. Cioran himself is very attentive to the “echoes” of his writings, he censures certain writings, retracts certain theses, cultivates an enormous correspondence with his admirers, encourages studies and academic writings about his work.

Could these people who give us, through their writings, the feeling that they have looked into the shadows of being, into the abyss of existence, be just as sensitive to fame as all the others, as those they repudiate, whose petty arrogance is, in so many brilliant and scathing lines – denounced, deconstructed, ridiculed? How to explain the split between the burning, scathing content of their words and revelations, and this Godforsaken “authorship”?

Above the vain-gloriousness of a writer – no matter how small he is – there stands nothing else except the pride of the Devil. One cannot exclude the idea that it be the origin of the “writing” itself, of literature, for if God is the Word, the Devil – aping Him – “created”, by overturning the original, *the written word*. The ancients were no strangers to this fundamental, radical opposition - which we, as modern people give to so many forms of writing, we as *those who write even when we speak*, definitively forgot: the contradiction between *speaking and writing*. Plato evokes it in a number of dialogues, embodying – as on so many other occasions – the “paradox of the liar”, he himself being a sophisticated writer who makes the apology of orality, giving – by his (written) homage to the utterance – more credibility to his writing.

The absolutely inflexible refusal of the great teachers, the great initiates to write anything is revealing. As if they knew all the dangers associated with this “devilish” practice, Buddha, Jesus, Socrates, Confucius never wrote a line. The

Islamic religion also rejects the idea that the Qur'an could have been written - it was *dictated* to the Prophet, then *in-scribed* by others in the pages of a book. In almost all traditions, the original word is the spoken word, while writing is secondary and "dirty". Oral teaching predates and prevails over the written tradition, until late in history the oral doctrine is secret, esoteric, and the written one - exoteric, public, secular. "The real truth" is not to be communicated except by word of mouth, and this *true truth* is reflected in the written doctrine as faithfully as a face is by its shadow.

The scenario of the sacred texts, which communicate a primordial *original truth*, is simple: these are the *trans-scriptions* of a previous speech - be it that of a master, or of the deity itself. The "authority" of such texts springs from outside, is inherent in them only to the extent that it is also transcendent. Such "literature" (sacred and sapiential texts) is credible only insofar as it is a literature without an *author* - in the sense that we moderns have in mind. The value of such writing derives from the fact that someone else *has said* what is written in it.

As we shall see, Cioran belongs to the paradoxical category of *enlightened writers*. From this contradiction in terms results the fundamental ambiguity of Cioran's work, as well as the strong fascination which such writing elicits in the reader. Ion Dur notes that Cioran is quick to avoid any possible influence under which could be ascribed to him, whether he talks about Camus, labelled as provincial and half-learned, or about Nietzsche, repudiated as "an iconoclast with adolescent traits". Neither intuitionism nor Bergson, sources little noticed until now and which Ion Dur has the merit of revealing as the main sources of Cioranian thinking, escape from this frenzied denial of all predecessors. What, however, is the reason for this supposed dismantling of any suspicion about the *originality* of his thinking?

Cioran is *constrained* to such an attitude by his *fundamentally ambiguous* situation: the type of truth he professes to uphold, the content of his writing is one that maintains the order of *revelation, illumination* - hence *utterance*. On the other hand, a writer is placed, by definition, by the "grammar" he uses, in a sequence, a timeline, a history. *The enlightened* one *speaks* from the timeless space of primordialism; he is a contemporary only of God and the Devil. The fact that he is not the author of sacred or sapiential texts that replicate his words reinforce, in the mind of the reader, this impression: "an illusion of perspective" which pushes away, into a primordial distance, "the paramount source" of recorded truths. *The enlightened writer* represents a special typology to which Cioran belongs together with Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer. *The enlightened writer* practices an oral-mystical style (not accidentally Nietzsche's book is called *Thus spake Zarathustra*), bibliographical, *originary*; therefore, *the enlightened writer* will contest - either explicitly or most often tacitly, in the

absence of any referral, or any reference to the forerunners - the truth of any statement predating its occurrence; *the enlightened writers*, like the founders of religions, desire to cultivate in the spirits of their readers the impression that all that was said before them was error, illusion or, at the most, a semi-truth, a stunted sketch of the *integral truth* which, through them, is now revealed to mankind. The terminology of an *enlightened writer* will be composed, for the most part, of *strong* terms such as “climax”, “peak”, “abyss”, “fire”, “ice”, “illusion”, “foundation”, “death”, “life”, “becoming”, “being”, “non-being”, “destruction”, “creation”, “good”, “bad”, “last”, “prime”, etc.

“Paramount - primordial” literature does not support the presence of an author. Its truth-value derives from an external, transcendent instance. Or, in the case of the “enlightened writer”, the author is the one who *enunciates*, *expounds* the truths in his text. It is not by chance that, both in Cioran's case and in the case of the others, we find a preference for aphorism, for “the word of spirit”, for the “pointed joke”, analogy, “formula” and paradox - that is, precisely for those figures characteristic of “oral style”. The philosophers' closed judgments repel them because their writings are rival not of philosophy treatises, but of the Gospels, the Qur'an, and the Vedas.

The special merit of the present volume is the fact that its author has managed to decipher the fascinating “code” of Cioran's writings. Ion Dur crosses, hermeneutically, several of its layers: “the gift of anguish”, the “histrionics” of the author, the epistolary “sincerity” exercised in such a way that the boundary between *writing* and *letter* becomes invisible, his persistent loneliness, even amid conviviality ...

What is the “secret” of Cioran, how can one decipher his stylistic code? Could it be understood, as Ion Dur wonders, in the light of that six-month prison experience about which Pamfil Şeicaru tells us, an experience that forever perfected his pessimism and scepticism? Is Cioran a gnostic? Or is it perhaps a fruit of his biography - as he repeatedly wants to make us believe - more precisely of that “original”, disastrous experience of disease and insomnia? Or, on the contrary, is it an outgrowth of that bibliography he explored with such an insatiable thirst? And, the question of questions, is Cioran a philosopher or a renegade philosopher, a poetic soul - wandering inside a cuttingly lucid and sharp mind?

Cioran's revelation does not stop here: the secret of his effervescent writing is “the lack of measure as vitality”; his metaphysical revolt is, “in fact”, a rebellion against his provincial condition, a condition that marked and pursued him for his entire life. From the list of decouplings, one should not remove resentment, the revenge that Cioran would like to take both in the face of life (which he cannot enjoy) and in the face of death (which he cannot overcome). Cioran's will is

broken into two parts - from within, by his own morbid temper, and from “without”, by the fatality of death. Between these two irreparable fatalities germinates the resentment or, more precisely, *the vengeful sense of existence*.

Ion Dur reaches a surprising first conclusion: Cioran is the name of a unique game of masks: *disguise is his true nature*. *Mask* and *ambiguity* fundamentally define Cioran. A mask without any face would then be the authorial correspondent of a doctrine of deceit without essence, of appearance in which the essence is, eventually, factitious and possibly factual. *Un-masking* is a potentially infinite process because Cioran would not have a real face. Thus, the break-up with philosophy would “hide” an inability to elaborate a coherent system, just as the break-up of Romanians with Romania has “utilitarian” motivations: a concern that his “shady” past (his adherence to the legionary movement) would be revealed. But, in turn, the latter conceals more and more masks - meant to protect and reveal at the same time his true identity, which is *ambiguous*, protean, the identity of a master of self-deceit and avoidance.

Finally, Ion Dur also draws the second conclusion: Cioran is an author, he is a *writer* and, like any writer, he is also an *actor*, i.e., an expert of dissimulation. Indeed, thus we find the “key” allowing us to decode and decipher Cioran. His essential ambiguity derives from the double status he claims for himself: that of an *enlightened being* and that of *writer*. The “image” that we've been waiting to meet beyond the masks he puts on can only be absent, non-existent - precisely because he is the *very author of his own texts*, of a “primordial” literature which, as a rule, is based on a source located beyond it.

From behind Cioran's writing *speaks no one*, precisely because Cioran alone is the author of his texts. Cioran can rightly be called a “mystic without a God”. The divergence between the reader's expectations regarding primary literature, grounded in a transcendent moment, and the *autonomy* of enlightened writers' texts is anticipated, expected and greeted by them through the annihilation of exteriority: enlightened writers are self-styled prophets announcing the death of God, knights of nothingness, preachers of immanence. And their readers are bound to search their writings for an always promised truth, which they *know* they will never find. And to know, along with those who announce it, “just the joy that precedes it, that joy and madness and fear.” (Cioran, *The Temptation to Exist*)

Horia Vicențiu Pătrașcu

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Abstract

The exegesis of Cioran to date may be seen as a grid for what might be called a Cioran *syndrome* in Romanian culture. The author, claimed both by Romanian and by French culture, is, at the same time, a *function* of Romanian culture, like Mircea Eliade or Eugen Ionescu.

Much has been written about Cioran, but very little about his youthful publications (his time in Romania), which includes the political compromises that he made with the legionary movement, and its rightist ideological orientation. These are texts that caused serious questions to be asked in the West about the author's Romanian past.

Distancing itself from everything that has been written up till now about Cioran's writings, the chapters in *A Dionysiac with the voluptuousness of doubt*, try to deconstruct the polytropic of Cioran the journalist. Cioran appears as a complex character, contradictory and tragic, atypical in the manner of his deep reflection, scepticism and seeming complicity with the assumed reader.

In the preliminary chapter "Shortcuts" I omit some controversial topics regarding Cioran's metaphysical meditations, Cioran the philosopher. In some *raccourcisseme* I plead for the following ideas, amongst others: the need for *critical editions* of Cioran's works; the need for the impartial reception of both his journalism and his books without ideological prejudices and political and ideological judgement (Cioran must not be turned into an ideological punch bag); the analysis of *grief*, the fundamental reason for engaging in thinking as explored in the manuscript *Amurgul gândurilor (The Twilight of Thought)*; what philosophy meant for the young Cioran and how he approached it; what are *the stages of loneliness* in Cioran's work.

I deal with Cioran's youthful publications, which have a particular aspect and sense. They form an indivisible whole, with books written by him in Romanian, as well as texts from newspapers and magazines which appeared, sometimes not changed in any way, in the volumes of essays and aphorisms. Moreover, Cioran's journalism and, with it, the work written before his final departure in France, contain many of the ideas that Cioran subsequently developed and rewrote in French.

The books published by Gallimard disclose the character of a writer who became his own disciple, but in another language, freely living his own "theory".

I am interested in the texts of his youth in the chapter "The Overture of The Tragic", where I primarily analyse how Cioran responded to the phenomenon

of religion in the third decade of the twentieth century. At that time, when he was young, he begins an *exercise of divine disobedience*, which will continue throughout his whole life. Cioran, the son of an Orthodox priest, was not against God, but he was addressing The Great Silent One (just as he does in *Demiurgul cel rău*) (*The Evil Demiurge*).

Cioran was not someone who was defeated but had the ontological status of an *outraged man*. He was always situated *against* or *against the grain* (*à rebours*), to everything that was created from Adam onwards, a radical, dissatisfied even with the thought of suicide. Illness and pain subsumed into suffering, with metaphysical dimensions, boredom, melancholy and grief caused by an existential overflow lived on the edge of *the falling away of time*— were negative states that fertilized in Cioran *optimism and vigorous philosophical meditation*. As I show in the chapter “Bouts of Insomnia” Cioran's scepticism is atypical. We are not dealing with behaviour filled with gestures and reflexes of defence or failure.

In two chapters (“The Ambiguity of the epistolary Self” and “The erotic adolescence of a septuagenarian”) I analyse the correspondence or “epistolary mania” of Cioran. Correspondence is part of his work and not an appendage to it, just as was the case for Goethe, for example. The philosopher appears to me in *Scrisori către cei de acasă* (*Letters to the ones back home*) (1995) to be a disguised thinker, one wearing a *mask*. And here I find homesickness and the image of someone who suffers from “metaphysical statelessness”. In the exchange of letters with Friedgard Thomas, the last great love of the philosopher, I discover a frivolous Cioran, a “skirt hunter”.

In the section “Impervious to the French Spirit” I examine the mistaken approach towards Cioran by a Romanian journalist living in Spain, Pamfil Șeicaru, who also writes about the months spent in prison by the philosopher, because of an error committed by retreating German troops about Cioran's identity.

In “Waiting for Cioran's Reply” I describe how Cioran's work was received in France immediately after his death, especially those works written in Romanian, with specific reference to his right-wing interwar publications and to the book *Transfiguration of Romania*.

The essay also contains a philosophical analysis of some major themes of Cioran's metaphysics, through which I come with the idea of the *philosophical dandyism* of the author, as it was expressed by those who were part of the generation of Mircea Eliade. I was particularly interested (see the chapter “Between falling in time and falling into the temporal”) in Cioran's vision of time, which he did not approach systemically, but as an essayist interested in *style*, in the *how* of our means of expression relates to our historical development. As I show and how he “falls” into *temporality*, into *time*, through his right-wing political sympathies, to show what Julien Benda called “treason of the intellectuals”.

In the second part of the book, I bring to light a chapter that Cioran suppressed from the “final” edition of *Transfiguration of Romania* (1990). I transcribe the manuscript of that chapter, following Cioran’s handwritten original manuscript (“Nationalism, Judaism, socialism”) and I make a *parallel reading* of this with the same chapter from the first edition (1936). It seems to me as a gesture of honesty for those who want to have access to Cioran *according to the original*.

The type of academic readership it would appeal to: the book is very useful for teachers and students in *faculties of journalism and letters*, as well as researchers interested in the work of Cioran. In countries *where there is an intensive teaching of philosophy* in high school, it can be used as a reference book for students.

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