



## E.M. Cioran. History and Exile

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### Abstract:

*Integration and alienation, identity and rupture, belonging to an original model and the continuous tendency of surpassing it, are some of the determinant peculiarities of Cioran's ideation, which is legitimized by assuming an identity both originating and intentional uprooting, by transgression of ethnic boundaries.*

**Key words:** Cioran, philosophy, identity, exile, melancholy

The identity aporias that reveal Cioran's writings do not have a fluctuating essence, being born of paradox undulations and baroque compositions of oxymoron. Love also implies hate or rebellion, as attachment has the necessary corollary right repulsion or passionate resentful involvement:

"I exceedingly liked to be put to the test: and the ultimate test seemed to me to be born in my country. But the truth is that I needed tireless time of madness, the madness intertwined with action. I felt the need to destroy. I spent my days sprouting images of total destruction."

From the compensatory hatred for the minor destiny of the country where he was born, Cioran moves to self-hatred that transpires with deliberation in most of his aphorisms. His broken, illegitimate identity, is legitimized by this very fortuitous duality passion / detachment, giving originality to the entire work of Cioran's, as the revelations of exasperation

and hatred are the binder of a resentful philosophy and, at the same time, a philosophy of lucid merciless:

"It happened to me: I became the center of my hate. I hated my country, everyone and the whole universe: the only thing left to do was to hate myself: what, in fact, I did on the verge of despair."

The need to configure an identity is legitimated, for the author of the *Transfiguration of Romania*, from the consciousness of a rupture, of a strong identity frustration, identity and rupture are the terms of an ontological and gnoseologic equation inextricably linked to the paradoxes of a thought that is born of negation rather than affirmation, of nihilistic enthusiasm rather than metaphysical optimism.

One of aporia becoming almost common place in the reception of Cioran's work is the relationship between integration and alienation, identity and rupture. The lonely and great skeptical of our time, Cioran expressed in his aphorisms the fundamental inability to attach to any strong national identity, in a disillusioned emotional projection, where the refusal of setting translates into a fundamental need to search for own roots, even if they often identify themselves with ontological nothingness:

"When you think of other small countries, which have done nothing and indulge themselves in unconscious or empty, unjustified, pride then you cannot withhold admiration for Romania's lucidity, which is not ashamed to mock itself, to reveal its nothingness with disdain, or to compromise itself in a dissolving skepticism."

Very illustrative for the dialectic of identification and distancing from the image of his country, is the volume *Mon pays (My Country)*, bilingual edition appeared at Humanitas Publishing House, 1996. "Specialist of obsession", as he defines himself, Cioran testifies in *Mon pays*, the Romanian identity obsession, the passion that he felt at that time, for his own country, with its marginal destiny, with its historical geography damaged by the hostility of a timeless and metaphysical hybris:

"I was far from turning thirty years, when I happened to make a passion for my country, desperate passion, aggressive, in which there is no escape and which harassed me for years to come. My country! I wanted at all costs to hold onto it - and there was nothing to cling to. I could not find any fact, nor the present or

the past. Full of anger, I assigned a future to it, invented it, embellished it, without a moment of believing in it. I ended up by attacking it, the future, by hating it, I spit on my utopia. My loving and delirious hate was devoid of purpose, my country was turning into powder when meeting my gaze."

Attachment to his own country is, for Cioran, one of those paradoxical, contradictory and oxymoronic feelings in which love and hate, attraction and rejection overlap/intermingle up to becoming indistinct. His passion, often denigrating, has no purpose than assuming, by his own country, of a fate that would leave the shadow cone of the anonymity of history. Strength, vitality, grandeur are rather projections of historical legitimacy of his own nation:

"I wanted it strong, without measure, crazy, like an evil force, a fatality that would have made the world tremble, and she was small, modest, devoid of attributes that make up a destiny. When I turned to her past, I discovered nothing but servitude, resignation and humility, and when I turned to the present, I faced the same defects, some mutilated, others remaining intact. I examined it ruthlessly and with such a frenzy to find *something else* in it, that this frenzy made me unhappy, so was *far-sighted*."

Between the visionary and transfiguring pride of the young philosopher and the mediocre destiny of the country he belongs to, the distance is considerable. In fact, Cioran does nothing but to outline, in his early books, an ideal image of Romania, a projection rather ideal, a utopian geography, maintained and supported by its visionary zeal:

"Then I came to understand, that my country does not stand up to my ego, that anyway, facing my requirements, it proved insignificant. Wasn't it then when I intended to write that I wanted to meet in her "France's destiny and China's population"? (...) Instead of directing my thoughts to a more consistent appearance, I was attached to my country, feeling that she would give me the pretext of endless torment, and that, as long as I dreamed of it, I would experience an inexhaustible source of suffering. I found a handy inexhaustible inferno, where my ego could reach exasperation *at my expense*."

The attachment for Romania is perceived as a gnoseologic punishment as a form of donquijotism and illusory

prophetism. A country without destiny, Romania is no less a product of ideological consciousness that seeks its own legitimacy by assuming ontological indissoluble link with their country ("And this love became a punishment and a claim against my ferocious donchihotism. Talking endlessly about the fate of a country without fate: I became, in the pure sense of the word, a prophet in vain "). The philosopher's identity is linked to the exasperation of the matrix space that legitimizes his fervors and despairs. Referring, in *Mon pays*, to the *Transfiguration of Romania*, Cioran outlines his experiences and excessive obsessions with lucidity which the destiny of his own country has caused. "The thirst for unrelenting" that led to the philosopher's passionate passions, tortures and his vigils, which increasingly resemble, as stated, "someone else's", from the angle of the affective and temporal and emotional distancing, transposes Cioran in a space of rationality that discerns, in the past mirrors, the troubled face of the adolescent thirsty for the absolute and disgusted with certainty:

"I wrote a book about my country that time: perhaps no one had attacked his country with similar violence. It was a madman's aberration. But, in my negation there was such a flame that now, after years, it's hard to believe that it was not a reversed love, an upside down idolatry. It was, that book, like an assassin's hymn, it was the theory spewing from the kidneys of a patriot without a country. Excessive pages, which allowed another country, my enemy, to use them in a campaign of slander, and maybe, of truth. I did not care! It was unrelenting thirst. And to a certain point, I was grateful to my country that gave me the opportunity to such great torment. I loved it because it could not meet my expectations. It was a good time: I believed in the reputation of unfortunate passions."

Considering that Cioran's work "shows a surprising consistency of themes and attitudes", Sorin Alexandrescu, in a chapter of *Looking back, modernity*, does nothing but to state the essential feature of the thinker: the constancy in scriptural reactions, the permanently renewed persistence to designate the same themes of meditation, the relevance of a style that is equal to itself, recurrent, refusing any avatar, a monadic style, and equally open to a plurality of readings. It is also known that Cioran's work is only a sum of parts, devoid of any willingness/will of construction, fragments "built" deliberately

in this way, from the philosopher's repulsion to any system, to any ontological or epistemological authority, either manifested in the real world, or materialized in a world of ideas. The freedom of association, the very subtle taste for the paradox, the ideation deprived of morgue confer to Cioran's phrase its inner tension, its dynamism of living and utterance. One may also say that between Cioran's biography and writing there are numerous bridges, lineages, links, either subtle, implicit or more apparent. Hence, from this parallelism biography / writing results the thematic dichotomy that always pursued Cioran, history and utopia are dichotomous ambivalences that feed, with increased energy, the philosopher's substance/essence. Always ruined before a hysterical history, utopia is, gradually, acclaimed and denigrated. Its signs are rearranged, as history is ignored or rejected with hostility. The text itself turns into a confrontation setting, not deprived of pathos, between history and utopia, which is clearly expressed by Sorin Alexandrescu

"Cioran's enunciation places, *here* and *there*, intermingle/weave/, but do not change their value: now Cioran sees Bucharest, from Paris, with a certain melancholy. The subject can be found *here* or *there*, always in a situation of inferiority towards the Other: any position of enunciation is probably doomed. Your regime destroyed Utopia, but it always lives for you, Cioran seems to say, because you, *there*, hope for the utopia of a better *here*, or, we know here in the West that utopia no longer exists in the world. History followed a different course than the one dreamed by Cioran in his youth and created a negative utopia, which destroyed the very idea of Utopia."

Between the active involvement in history (and messianism) from *The Transfiguration of Romania* and the ignorance of history, it is circumscribed the destiny of the thinker, who will have to face two decisive options, which will permanently follow/profoundly mark him. A first option is that of the exile, this "non-place" as Sorin Alexandrescu defines it. A second choice is the setting into the canons of another language; the uprooting being followed by a fierce search for a new identity. Or perhaps are we dealing here with a camouflage maneuver, with a kind of pseudonym technique, subtly filtered in the linguistic strategies offered by the new idiom? Sorin

Alexandrescu believes it is about the thinker's aggression against himself:

"The choice of language as well as the place of enunciation are an act of violence directed by Cioran against himself. For the Scythian who he was, it was hard to come to terms with this refined idiom, the civilized who he became regrets the freshness of the lost idiom. The speech does not adhere to human beings, all accommodation is a loss. "Subjugated/enslaved" by the new language, the Scythian dies: and, with the language, the landscapes of childhood and the incendiary witticism of youth sink in the past, become memories."

The consciousness of the exile, the consciousness of the marginal, is, in fact, thus dominated, decisively marked by the impact of the contradictory flow of melancholy, feeling that places the human being in a space - both ontological and scriptural – of an overwhelming uncertainty, a fact noted by Sorin Alexandrescu

"[...] the operator of melancholy plays an important role in Cioran' thinking. I saw that all the positive terms considered defining for this thinking collapsed before they could establish a coherent universe of meaning. Melancholy, on the contrary, nestled in the negative, seems to be able to distinguish among the different *roles* that Cioran likes to play, all located in the social marginality and metaphysics, the *marginality* of the prophet, the failure, the exiled, the skeptic (*le douteur*), the role that Cioran assigns in *La chute dans le temps*."

As many psychoanalytic connotations as one may assign, the fact is that *melancholy* is the product of an assault on consciousness, trauma that will dwell in the abyssal self of the thinker and will mark his writing, destiny and how he will relate to the world or peers. The emblematic metaphor for this postulation of melancholy as the generating element of being and of Cioran's writing, it seems to Sorin Alexandrescu, the image of a "lonely man behind a window, motionlessly looking at the moving, elusive, ephemeral, world outside". It is the metaphor of the absolute solitude, the presence of the self in front of the otherness who he seeks to abolish by undefining, forgetting, by the dissolving exercise, this time, of the eye. Cioran's condition of marginal being, of being that vehemently

denies any institutionalization, outlined by Sorin Alexandrescu in the study *Cioran the day after the revolution*, is, without doubt, one that implies a rejection of modernity. Cioran is a thinker against his age, an age of pluralisms and simulacra. It is clear that Cioran is aware of the relativity of his speech, oscillating between marginality and universality. From this angle, the comparison between Cioran and Diogenes, the cynic, is not unfounded. Both Cioran and Diogenes are beings that deny any social commitment, that stay in the social shadow, even if Diogenes, unlike Cioran, has spectacular gestures. Cioran is, one may say, an anti-modern by definition, that perceives the world of modernity as a world of devalued signs, of simulacra, of empty appearances, where the speeches, of a disconcerting plurality and overwhelming polisemantism, cannot be heard, seen, understood. Hence Cioran's nihilistic vocation, his anti-modern radicalism which, however, does not propose a compensatory program, an explicit alternative, as Sorin Alexandrescu notes:

"Both at the level of all his reflection themes and writing subjects, Cioran does not offer to such a despised modernity, any postmodern value, any affirmative alternative, based on a different social dynamic, but some clearly anti-modern values, inspired by an eternity without transcendence and by a wisdom in which faith has not ever been experienced."

A well represented category in the history of philosophy is that of the Aesop or resentful philosophers. The philosophy of Aesop's is the "resentful philosophy of the sick and ill formed in the history of philosophy," writes Gabriel Liiceanu in *Diary from Păltiniș*. Of those philosophers whose thinking was heavily influenced by disease, and body miseries and pettiness (Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Sartre, Jaspers). Not to mention Socrates, who also experienced numerous rebellions of the body. One of these great sick men, whose illnesses, humor and bad habits induced a very particular philosophy, is Cioran. How are body tribulations reflected in the pages of Cioran's aphoristic, which is the ratio between the wound and the letter, the relationship between ulceration and thought? What proportion is established between thought revelations and body avatars, between meditation elevation and fall into the abyss of corporality? Illness, suffering, pain, are, in fact, for

Cioran, consciousness revelation, are catalysts of philosophical ideation. Cioran's "career of suffering", early begun, is part of a personality who deliberately puts ideas and ideals into psychosomatic disease. Marta Petreu correctly outlines Cioran's career as a patient:

"No job (except in 1936-1937, High School "Andrei Şaguna" Braşov), without a definitive profession, no income, no property, no nationality and no country, thus defined mainly by negation, Cioran was instead rich in malady symptoms and diseases. A career of suffering, in other words, a sick identity, used as an excuse for his humiliating - in his own eyes - inactivity. Similarly, not once did Cioran say he was free from any livresque influence and entirely shaped by his disturbed physiology and diseases."

For Cioran, disease is not only organic mess or insidious deterioration of the body. It is rather a sign of spiritual awakening, revelation being the innermost core of it, the disease is not without a certain "spiritual fecundity", as the philosopher noted. And this understanding of the disease is present in the very first book, *On the verge of despair*, where Marta Petreu emphasizes,

"[...] the disease is present from beginning to end, the book is made up of the metaphysical discoveries which the young author made due to his disease. Suffering radically worked in himself, waking him from the organic sleep, from the beatific unconsciousness of the age and the charming naivety of health, to transpose himself in a state that flattered his pride: lucidity."

Not only Cioran's inventory of diseases is worth of interest, but also, how these diseases, symptoms or suicidal tendencies have an impact on his philosophical ideas. The insinuating sliding from the area of organic disorder toward the perimeter of the concept *lived*, fervently assumed, is totally revealing to the destiny of the Romanian philosopher of French expression.

The disease that followed Cioran all his life and marked both his pace of life and creation, is, however, insomnia, illness resulting from an excess of lucidity and, like in a vicious circle, enormously amplifies this state of lucidity, pushing it to the limit of endurance. Sleep is equivalent to hope, while insomnia is prone to despair. Sleep is the state of the fundamental indivisibility of beings, insomnia, and pain in general, is a

separation, a “principle of individuation”, so if an essentially healthy body integrates the individual in the mechanism of its human life and nature, the disease is an element of exclusion from the territory of vitality, a man's way of separating from his own life, its own drastic individualization. Authentic, lively, revealing philosophy results, says Cioran bluntly, in *The heights of despair*, from the tragic agony of disease, from the rustling labyrinth of the body, as the spirit is nothing but the sublimated expression of a disorder, an imbalance or organ failure (“Everything deep in this world can arise only from disease”). From this accountability and illustration of the spiritual benefits of disease derives the philosopher’s response to sentimentalists that disguise their authentic feelings, intense and deep emotions or replace them with parade sentimentality, aestheticism without foundation. That is why, what really matters for Cioran is the philosophical reflection, “organic and personal expression following the variations and fluctuations of nerve and organic mood”, as the philosopher expresses. It is clear therefore that corporality avatars, the tribulations of the tormented body crushed by disease are, for the Romanian thinker, a gateway - marked by suffering, pain, and lucidity - to the revelations of metaphysics, as Marta Petreu noted: “For Cioran, diseases and pains become an instrument of revelation, namely the metaphysical revelation.” Noting that the consequences of pain are greater than those of pleasure, Cioran names (disorderly, but under the stylistic disorder it is hidden a genuine rigor, shooting straight from the unalterable austerity of archetypes) “the consequences of pain” and disease. Moreover, Cioran states that there are hierarchies and degrees of disease, depending on their ability of spiritual revival, of revelation of metaphysical latency of human consciousness. On the other hand, the suffering caused by ecstasy (the approaches to mystical ecstasy are as obvious as disturbing) cause not only the separation, individuation that pulls the man from his original paradise of indivisibility, but lead to the retrieval of the ultimate fund of experiences, one that reveals the essentiality of being, its origin and primacy. The gnoseologic benefits of suffering and disease therefore consist in the transgression of the rational limits and the assumption of a mystical condition, as Martha Petreu writes: “Suffering has activated in Cioran the archetypes of mystical

living, with its complete expressions, with its chromatic, spatial and cognitive metaphors." Individuation and indivisibility are, in fact, the fundamental terms of the metaphysical equation that illustrates Cioran's case, along with several other philosophical sounding words such as: heights, abysses, rising, falling, flying, diving, empty, full, etc. The disease is, for Cioran, rather a tool to trigger a state of grace, self revelation and inner perfection than pure cell degradation. It is true, it is the state of grace of a religious being, but "without God", of a "mystic denied". In this way, the consciousness of his own body and illness that follow him led the philosopher to spiritual perfection, to an ecstasy not without mystical meanings. For Cioran, corporality depths were always a corollary of authentic reflection, disinhibition, put on page with perfect rigor and stylistic mastery of the sentence. Disease, "mystical vehicle" as characterized by Marta Petreu, may be reduced, eventually, to a gradual, imperceptible and inevitable near drawing to death, the "essential evil" of the human condition. Marta Petreu notes that "our non-birth nostalgia" the drawback "of having been born- and the accusation that the world is the product of "an evil demiurge" come, in his case, from this incurable disease: the mortality of the human being, the unbearable "feeling of dying." It's a "scandal", it is the scandal itself, that makes Cioran cry." The disease is thus to Cioran, a metaphysical way of singularization, a propensity to the horizon of solitude and nihilism. Viewed through the illness, suffering, which stimulated and configured the metaphysical enthusiasm, Cioran is the metaphysical exile par excellence. For Cioran, exile was, without doubt, to the same extent, inner tear and release, sanctuary and damnation, resignation and revolt towards an uprooted destiny. The lack of national determinants, which exile brings, the loss of identity that a stateless person feels are compensated in some way, by retrieving it into a space of universality, of generic humanity, free from the grip of national landmarks. Therefore, Cioran's exile gradually turns into an exile with metaphysical connotations, so that the terms *here or elsewhere* lose their strictly geographical determinations, gaining rather symbolic shapes, as Sorin Alexandrescu observes:

*"The non belonging* could still express a social loneliness, the desire of an indefinable *elsewhere*

makes us foresee new horizons and the metaphysical exile opens the way to ontological discussion. The path that leads from a concrete historical fact to metaphysical drama is long, the Romanian texts show that it was rigorously followed by Cioran. Living the *concrete experience* of the exile and constantly deepening it, he discovered in its depths the *metaphysical* meaning of the exile."

Melancholy is, as Sorin Alexandrescu noted, a recurrent topos in Cioran's philosophical fragments. This mood of undoubted ambiguity, with fluctuating contours is made of boredom in the absence of the beloved or a spiritual principle of completeness, of longing for something undefined and of propensity to an absolute, hardly glimpsed in *ură/ ugly* and *dor/homesick*. Integration and alienation, identity and rupture, belonging to an original model and the continuous tendency of surpassing it, are some of the determinant peculiarities of Cioran's ideation, which is legitimized by assuming an identity both originating and intentional uprooting, by transgression of ethnic boundaries. Attraction and repulsion of personal origins, this is the archetypal model that generates the semantic potentialities of Cioran's texts, in which the paradox, the irony with cynical reflections and existential seriousness are intertwined.

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