

EMIL CIORAN OR THE DRAMA OF A ROMANIAN CONSCIENCE

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*„A man that didn't survive the drama
of conscience is a naive”
Emil Cioran¹*

Abstract: *The idea of our article aims the unique attitude of the thinker Emil Cioran about the “transfiguration” of Romania, emanated from an unhappy conscience that lived the drama of remaining Romanian. Cioran remains a universal thinker that saw intuitively the demarche of history, but also lived and felt in a Romanian manner; that is why the “transfiguration” is a present imperative.*

Keywords: *conscience, Romanian destiny, culture, history, transfiguration.*

Declaring himself “specialist in death at twenty years of age” Emil Cioran had access to a philosophy about conscience, destiny, Man and God. “The human tragedy is knowledge”, says Cioran. I have noticed that all I have in my conscience is diminished through feeling.

For me, the best title of a book is “Conscience as fatality. This title is the abstract or a concentrated formula of my life, says Cioran. I believe that I was my entire life more than conscious and that was the tragedy of my life”.²

We began our article with this confession because it might be a sort of philosophical testament of the thinker, for whom this year, we celebrate his centennial.

1. Emil Cioran remains one of our greatest thinkers, no matter what options we have, being part of the generation that marked the intellectual history of modern Romania, linking it to Europe.

His life must be understood in the European spiritual and political context in which he lived, a period in which there were the two great wars, great spiritual and ideological lies and reversals of value.

But what makes our thinker interesting in the Romanian and European spiritual background is his uniqueness and universality. “I am metaphysically stateless – says Cioran³, just like those stoics from the end of the roman empire that felt *citizens of the world*, what is a sort of saying that they were not citizens of any state.”

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¹ Apocalipsa după Cioran, interviu de Gabriel Liiceanu, 1995.

² *Convorbiri cu Cioran*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1993, p.40.

³ *Ibidem*, p.29.

The charm of Cioran is offered by his authenticity, naturalness of style. We find ourselves in Cioran, no matter if young or old, Romanian or French, Spanish or Russian, because he was a brilliant psychoanalyst, getting with a frightening deepness in the eidós of the human being, in the deepest layers and beliefs. What concerns his inner experience, Cioran is part of the gallery of so-called spirits of Dostoyevsky because his dramatic life was a permanent convulsion, a permanent clash between his peasant fury the inner instinctive part built in a Transylvanian way and the layers stacked by adopting the pessimist, and sceptic occidental ideas of Schopenhauer or Nietzsche.

As a proof, there are his permanent explorations, for 10 years, in the wildness and loneliness of the nature in his beloved Transylvania, called *paradise*, and the years lived in the occident, having a rough life- in a loft, denying any titles, honours and eating in a student cafeteria.

2. All of his books, from *Pe culmile disperării* (the first and the most philosophical) till *Căderea în timp*, prove a scattered conscience of a superior spirit that lived his life with a high intensity. So, for Cioran, understanding remains a second problem, in the first place being the attitude toward life, the question how life can be endured. For this, the Romanian thinker says: “*I do not know other two big problems but: how to endure life and how to endure yourself. There are no greater difficulties*”.⁴

Being passionate of a sort of tragic anthropology, of understanding the essence and the destiny of Man in the world, Cioran lets us understand that man has to accomplish two things during his life: an historical conscience (Cioran learned it from Hegel) and a conscience of being part of the transcendence, the way that Jesus Christ preached: “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what belongs to God”.⁵

He lived this ambivalence, which is actually the metaphysical human drama. This is why in his soul, the reasons of concern and fluster that gives the configuration of a Romanian conscience are: one determined by the agonizing participation at the drama of his people or even of the era in which he lives, an era that he would like to see under different auspiciousness, and the other reason is determined by his unique structure, by the antinomy of him, always thinking of God but not being capable of believing in him.⁶

Cioran admits that he had moments of serenity, of joy, that were moments of contemplation. In these moments, he believed that he passed over history and existence. He believed that history offers to man only fear, concerns, convulsions and that the few seconds of silence are the ones when the human overtakes the moment, getting closer to the ocean of eternity – with all his happiness and silence. Because of these fears, as a result of them, at 24 years old, Cioran wrote his intriguing book „*Schimbarea la față a României*”. The book is increasingly special and unique through the tone he wished to send to the people of this country.

⁴ Ibidem, p. 254.

⁵ Învățăturile lui Iisus din Noul Testament, (Evanghelia după Matei, 22, 17-22).

⁶ G. Pohoată, *Emil Cioran the nihilist thinking of God*, Cogito, no.3, 2011, p. 5-12.

Besides, Cioran admits that if he wouldn't bet on a national awakening, even starting from each person, for him, the problem of Romania would have been closed for a long time.

Also, it is unique if we compare it with other works of his, because, in opposition to the sceptic and nihilist tone of them, it shows a positive perspective, proving hope, and suggesting expectation. *Schimbarea...* has a special place in his creations. Even the author considers the text "the most passionate and foreign" of all. All the accusations, more or less real, that could disturb the contemporaries, even if they were confirmed lately, are from the subjectivity of the author, from the impossibility of participating without interest in the death of a culture but also from his patriotism, because Cioran never stopped hoping that Romania's faith will change.

Till Cioran, the crucifixion of Romanian thought, history, values and the beginning of Romanian spirit wasn't made with so much vigour and bitterness. "*From the passion that I have for Romania, I cannot accept to be sentenced forever to a mediocre destiny that it was given till now...*"⁷

The apocalyptic tone is explained by the complexes of the man born in a small culture. Cioran is "ill of Romania". This is the reason for the exaggeration and the messianic approach. He loves "the history of Romania with a rough hate" and dreams about a universal Romanian spirit.

In general, human condition is too dramatic, but when it is added the particular destiny of the one born in an inferior culture in comparison to other cultures, it becomes hard to endure, especially when it is doubled by a demiurgic thirst: "*it is not easy to be born in a second hand country. Lucidity becomes tragedy. And if a messianic fury does not choke you, then the soul drowns in a great lack of consolation*"⁸

Being conscious and on the position of Vladimir Soloviov that said that nations are not what they think they are, but what God thinks about them in eternity, Cioran doesn't want for Romania an eternal rescue from mediocrity, but at least in time.

Considering that the past of Romania is time without history, because defending and keeping cannot be similar to killing history, the Romanian thinker doesn't see a possibility of change in the future unless hidden virtues and talents of this people are brought to light.

Cioran proved to be a fine knower of Romanian virtues, but the psycho-moral portrait made in *Schimbarea...* is dominated by negativity.

Cioran is scared by the density of the inherited defects. Most of the characteristics that Eminescu highlighted for the Romanian people (scepticism, religiousness) were understood by Cioran as defects. The line, from which Eminescu was part, couldn't intersect the one of Cioran. Even more, they were parallel.⁹

Eminescu understood the bad part of the Romanian reality but explained it through lacks of "worth and qualities", through the prevalence in great positions of foreign persons. He never discussed about the Romanian gene and didn't

⁷ Cioran, Emil, *Schimbarea la față a României*, Ed. Humanitas, 1993, p.31.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 32.

⁹ Necula, I., Cioran, *De la Identitatea popoarelor la neantul valah*, București, Ed. Saeculum I.O., 2003, p. 101-102.

extend evil toward the entire history. Even if he never overlooked backlashes from history, the state of vegetating and moral vice were due to lame, unwise rulers, not to a general viciousness of the country, of productive and healthy forces that started to get oriented toward the custom of land. This is not the same approach with the one from Cioran, which is on an opposite position.

Paradoxical, even if we are a young people, we proved to be ill of scepticism; we are tired of the wise contemplation of our own fault, because we convert infertility into virtue and from fatalism we make a moral triumph. Here, lucidity has become abhorrence, and extreme honesty- masochist pleasure. Our shallow, Byzantine religiousness is reduced to a pastoral orthodoxy.

Cioran's comparison with Eminescu is justified by the fact that the thinker from Rășinari put a big price on Eminescu; so much that he tried to hide the perplexity that he managed to rise from a small horizon, marked by frivolity and scepticism. "Without Eminescu, wrote Cioran to Noica in March 1970, our people would be small and almost disregarded."¹⁰

It is amazing that Cioran declared himself a descendant of the poet, but broadening the frame, we can notice that the declaration does not harmonize with something else but the pathos of despair and the nihilism. A parallel lecture or Cioran and Eminescu raise¹¹ some comparative observation that we consider important to understand the message of our text. So, in the nationalism of Eminescu (traditionalist, conservator and orthodox) was from the past and the memory of historical living, Cioran develops in his work a pro-occidental nationalism, faced towards Romania of tomorrow. He legitimated the abolishment of tradition and burn of steps in order to make a faster synchronization with the rhythm of European evolution.

While Eminescu spoke about a basis of national energy from traditions and customs, Cioran spoke about "Romanian adamism" characterized by a culture that doesn't have precedent, about the "lacks from history and physiology" that must be filled with a messianic content, assuming the destiny and removing what is Balkan from us.

3. Quoting from Nietzsche, Spengler, Soloviev, Cioran was obsessed by the "impetuous destiny of big cultures", built on force and an aggressive style, regretting that his own people is in lack of a beast- passion. It is shattering when in *Schimbarea la față*, Cioran said that "the Romanian people is a being with a lot of water in his blood". Cioran wanted to belong to a people full of life and keen to affirm. This is the source of his riot towards "sentimentalism", "resignation" and "mediocrity" of his ancestors. The demiurgic thirst of glory, the cult of force ignoring the ethic and overtaking the politic side by the spiritual one, was missing from the Romanian belief.

In order to overtake the shadowing condition in universal history, Romania has to be part of its historical spiral in an upward moment, affirming till self-destruction of instincts, ideas and accepting any sacrifice. The prophetic side

¹⁰ Cioran, E., *Scrisori*, p.298 (după I.Necula, op.cit.).

¹¹ Eminescu M., *Opere*, vol. IX, Bucharest, Ed. Academiei, 1980.

of Cioran is radical! Even if his thinking is criticized for the harsh and vehement side, for the Romanian people the imperative “transfiguration” is present, that proves that Cioran didn’t make too big mistakes when he referred to the incapacity of Romanians to fight to build a destiny. That is why we should start to build a brand new Romania that is not based on a borrowed ideal. Cioran says that our only obsession that could cure us from the organic lacks must be our supremacy in the S-E part of Europe.

To accept those judgements that encourage the fact that the thinker was for an imperialist Romania and to see introspective and to realize with realism and lucidity that the force to be better was never alive and it isn’t now even today; that is why the “transfiguration” of Romania is the chance not for supremacy but to our survival in the world.

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