

THE CIORANIAN “FRAGMENT” AND THE STRUCTURE OF GNOSTIC REPRESENTATIONS

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Abstract. The Cioranian stylistics seems to belong only to a choice of the author, to a judgment of “efficiency” concerning the expressing of the thoughts, assumed, in fact, by the author, in some of his interviews or conversations. It is known Cioran had a good knowledge of mysticism, which, once, he systematically researched, and that he spent a long time researching the gnosis. My paper aims to bring to the light, by a simple outline of interpretation, the analogy between the structure of the Cioranian fragment and the structure of the Gnostic (symbolical) representations. The idea of a formal relation between both structures has a methodological sense for this study. The conclusion refers to the idea that the time is the ground for Cioranian philosophical attitude. The content of this attitude is the worry about his own existence.

Keywords: origin of the Cioranian thinking; pure lucidity; Gnostic representation; time and “second eternity”; worry

The temptation of speaking on Cioran’s thinking by means of the models of philosophizing is very attractive. This perspective of interpretation is used by many students in the horizon of the philosophy. But in the case of Cioran the things are more complicated, because he doesn’t belong to a certain philosophical place: a model, a method, a current etc. that has coordinates established in the history of the philosophy. Many researchers observe this fact and try to interpret the “fragments” of Cioran by relating them to his own philosophical, cultural, educational, political options. This represents a good way for a research, but it shows, however, a certain impossibility of an efficient interpretation, because it seems to imply a self-reference, that can be vicious. If we agree with this manner of putting forward the theme in what concerns Cioran’s work, then we can affirm there are two ways to discover the origin of Cioranian thinking, that are commonly presented in the exegeses of his work: 1) by identifying the relation between Cioran’s thinking and the models of the history of philosophy (for example, nihilism, skepticism, pessimism, Gnosticism); 2) by establishing the connection between the work and the philosophical, cultural, ideological etc. options of the author. The first way appears to be better in order to interpret Cioran’s fragments, because it admits from the beginning a characteristic of the

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work, namely a philosophical characteristic.¹ Therefore, we can use with success the method that presupposes, as a main condition, the rapport of this thinking with some models of philosophizing. But this method, as I showed above, is not fit formally to this case. Cioran's thinking seems to "participate" at many philosophizing models, but first of all it is shaped by its *origin*, which acts in any fragment and has an intense relation with the influences received by the author from the philosophical Romanian interwar milieu. Of course, it is not the question of an absolute influence that takes away the author's originality and the possible relation of his thoughts with some philosophizing models. Furthermore, Cioran was deeply influenced by Nae Ionescu – a well known thinker and professor of that period in Bucharest. If we inquire on the origin of this thinking, the two ways of exegesis can participate to a new space of interpretation. Moreover, both are possible only on a powerful base that offers the following concept: "origin of thinking", which in this case is, of course, the origin of Cioran's thinking.

I do not intend to insist on the relationship between the two thinkers mentioned above, though what I'm trying to show is that a certain reaction of Cioran against his professor had an important impact to his thinking, namely to the origin and structure of the aforementioned fragments. As a matter of fact, it is known that Cioran belongs to what's called the "Nae Ionescu School", as well as Mircea Vulcănescu, Mircea Eliade, Constantin Noica a.o. From this point of view, a debate on the relationship between Cioran and Nae Ionescu is not a difficult task. Nevertheless, it is not the question of a simple "scholastic" relationship, at least between the later thinkers, but of a significant attitude of Cioran, that belongs to the principle of his thinking, in both its matter and structure. Further on, I shall confine myself to the second aspect of this principle, namely the structure of Cioranian thinking put it in the fragmented form.

The thinking has its own rules and elements of operation. It is possible an action of a foreign principle, that is not a rule of thinking, just into its own structures? But any thinking contains an attitude, if its "subject" (support) is interested in the effect of his thoughts. Moreover, the thinking - or a philosophy - emphasizes its attitude in order to transform it in a principle, if its main problem refers to the individual existence. This is the case of Cioran's thinking. And it is naturally, I think, to speak of an attitude that characterizes the Cioranian thoughts. And precisely this attitude represents the origin of the thinking which I deal with in this study.

An attitude is not a fact that has immediate evidence. It is rather an element of the individual personality that remains hidden, although it belongs to the work

¹ On this topic: Kees Bakhuysen (2007), *Cioran, comedian or martyr?*, www.philograma.wordpress.com; Tomislav Sunic (2004), *Emile Cioran and the Culture of Death*, www.rosenoire.org/articles/sunic-cioran.php; Michael Wiesberg (1995), *Hommage à Emile Cioran*, www.planetcioran.blogspot.com; Luis Fraga (1988), *Cioran: un hurlement lucide*, www.planetcioran.blogspot.com.

or writing both visible and knowable for any reader or student. But the interpretation has the task of revealing the hidden elements and projecting them on the "object", together with the interpreter's own techniques of self-seeking. The philosophers of the contemporary hermeneutics claim that the interpretation implicates its author. Since the interpreter asks a question, he thus questions himself (on himself). Moreover, the attitude that is implied in a philosophy "works" until the level of the expression. This is why we should reveal the attitude of Cioran's thinking while discussing it.

The two kinds of exegesis mentioned above are very important if we interpret them in relation to the idea of the origin of this thinking. In fact, they are not simple generalities about the philosophical work, detached just from the philosophical works that have a general sense. They represent rather the applications of a methodology to a philosophical reconstruction. On the one hand, the milieu in which a philosopher (thinker) grows up, by means of the influences he suffered (on his life, learning, thoughts and beliefs etc.), carries the conditions of possibility of his future thinking. This is why these conditions determine the very aspects of the origin of his thinking. On the other hand, the influences are filtrated by means of the philosopher's way of life. If we are taking this into account, we can observe that the two conditions formulated above don't maintain their "natural" senses. In Cioran's case, it is his own (personal) very strong and intense experiences which he remembers in his dialogues with various contemporary personalities. Among those experiences, the sleeplessness is the most significant because it is put in relation with the pure lucidity, concerning the fact that God cannot be accepted, that Cioran will practice later, in the French period.

Thus, the two ways of exegesis in Cioran's case become (or can be thought) not in an order of sense preservation, because precisely their sense changes, but in an order of an interpretation that must dislocate the "natural" sense: 1) the pure lucidity that denies God's validity (as well as the validity of being); 2) the impossibility of the belief (in act). The first is an acquired capacity or a skill employed by Cioran in all his texts.¹ The second is a characteristic of Cioran's individual existence. Both of them shape and structure the origin of his thinking and have a deep relation with the thinker's life in the Romanian interwar period. Of course, the first depends on this cultural milieu in a greater measure than the second.

We have in this moment an open way to our problem: the fragmentariness of the Cioranian thinking and the structure of the Gnostic representations. The origin of Cioran's thinking, as it is outlined above, must be used in our approach as a

¹ Here is an example: "Quand je frôle le Mystère sans pouvoir en rire, je me demande à quoi sert ce vaccine contre l'absolu qu'est la lucidité." – E. M. Cioran, *Syllogismes de l'amertume*, Paris, Gallimard, 1976, p. 103-104.

starting point for an attempt of interpretation. Of course, if the fragment (and its structure) has indeed a relation with one of the two elements of the origin. I think there is a same relation; but only if we take into account the aspect of the origin which concerns Cioran's attitude against Nae Ionescu's attitude. In other words, the pure lucidity accepted by Cioran, that deny God's validity, and Nae Ionescu's belief. The Gnosticism represents for Cioran only an expression of his pure lucidity, but an expression that was searched and considered by Cioran one of the most suitable ways of life in a certain period.¹ It's the question of the middle French period, when the Romanian thinker published some of his important books.

Gnosticism became interesting for some of the Romanian thinkers, not as a historical hypostasis of heresy, as it emerged in the history of culture, especially in the Christian tradition, but as a form of resistance against the plays of the hope, detachment, and salvation. Against the hope in the detachment from "the trouble with being born", the detachment from the awareness of the lack of meaning of life, the salvation from this "second eternity", that is not opened neither towards the time, nor towards the veritable eternity from which the people feel. The Gnostic representations do not have directly the same "negative" characteristic; they do not have a direct relation with the threefold structure of Cioran's attitude: against hope, detachment, and salvation. However, precisely the last ones (hope, detachment, salvation) have the whole "negative" potentiality for Cioranian fragments, as I showed, and also for the Gnostic "attitude" that supports them. In what way?

There is a well known fact that Gnosticism is, in a sense, a heresy in the area of Christianity. But in this context this aspect is not significant in a great measure. The structure of representations of the world, divine and man is significant here. And the representation focused here belongs to the Gnostic fragment (writings). In fact, in this context what I directly take into account is only the representation of God. Why? Precisely this representation is important in Cioran's fragments in a certain period of his philosophical creation. There is a great diversity of Gnostic representations, ideas and beliefs. In this approach, I do not intend to expose them, but to unfold some of their characteristics, namely those belonging to the horizon of God's representation, in order to establish their structure and compare it further to the Cioranian fragment.²

¹ "I deal with gnosis, it is true. The result is the little book *Le mauvais démiurge / The Poor Demiurge*." – *Neantul se afla în mine / The Neant there was in me*, in vol. *Convorbiri cu Cioran / Conversations with Cioran*, Bucharest, Humanitas, 1993, p. 123.

² For the characteristics of Gnosticism, vide: Adolf von Harnack, *Istoria dogmei. Introducere în doctrinele creștine fundamentale*, București, Editura Herald, 2007; trad. rom. Walter Fotescu. Partea I, Cartea I "Pregătirea". Also, Ioan Petru Culianu, *Gnozele dualiste ale Occidentului*, București, Editura Nemira, 1995. Alexandrin, *Istoria filosofiei oculte...*; Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, Beacon Press, 1963, Ed. II.

If we consider Gnosticism beyond the historical bounds of Christianity, its main features can be stated as follows: 1) the duality of the Divine, divided into a Good God (which is the True God) and a Bad one (which acts as a Demiurge); 2) the mentioned duality was shifted from cosmogony to the actual world, which thus became good and bad at the same time; 3) human itself is a dual being; there are two principles that work in his nature according to both hypostases of the Divine; 4) the major goal of the human being is not the immediate salvation, but the awakening from the causes for which man is a damned being; the salvation becomes possible through this awakening, that is through *gnosis*; 5) man is submitted to the fallen existence that follows his/her dual nature. All these characteristics are rooted on a duality since their fundamental meaning is conditioned by the duality of God’s representation. Moreover, the duality becomes primary to the representation, and not to the thought, idea, argument, theory etc., because the main form of the Gnostic conception is a mythical one, and any myth relies on those “sensible ideas” we call representations. This is not a reason to reject the “theoretical complex” of Gnosticism in any of its form. All of its complex forms: thoughts, theories, problems, solutions, arguments, visions, etc., are based upon genuine representations.

Precisely this duality feature is to be recognized in the Cioranian fragments.¹ However, it is not the question of a dual representation, but of a dual expression, that comes from author’s ideas and individuality. In the case of Cioran, the duality characteristic of his expression reveals itself not by myth or representations. In his fragments, Cioran expresses thoughts, judgments, problems, solutions, arguments, visions in a dual way. In his case, the duality becomes the structure of thinking whose expressions establish the structure of the fragment.² The dual way is only a form of expression. Its content – thoughts, judgments, problems, solutions, arguments, visions – is paradoxically ordered in affirmative and negative sentences that have the same “object”.³ But the paradox is not just visible anywhere and anytime; it is hidden in words, in the Cioranian style. For example: “«Monsieur, que la nature nous a mal conçus!» Me disait un jour une vieille. - «C’est la nature elle-même qui est mal conçus », aurais-je dû lui répondre, si j’avais écouté mes reflexes manichéens.”⁴ Here is another example, that occurs in

¹ Cf. Simona Modreanu, *Le Dieu paradoxal de Cioran*, Paris, Éditions du Rocher, 2003.

² “Le démon est le représentant, le délégué du demiurge don’t il gère les affaires ici-bas. Malgré son prestige et la terreur attaché à son nom, il n’est qu’un administrateur, qu’un ange préposé à une basse besogne, à l’histoire.” – E. M. Cioran, *Le mauvais demiurge*, Gallimard, 1969, p. 12.

³ This is what he wrote in a Romanian book: “On anything – and firstly on the solitude – you are forced to think negatively and positively at the same time.” – *Amurgul gândurilor / Twilight of the thoughts*, Romanian edition, Humanitas, 1991, p. 26.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 135. Also: “Il est, tout compte fait, plus agreeable d’être surprise par les événements, que de les avoir prévus. Lorsqu’on épuise ses forces dans la vision du Malheur, comment affronter le Malheur même? Cassandre se tourmente doublement: avant et pendant le désastre, alors qu’à l’optimiste sont épargnées les affres de la prescience.” / *Ibidem*.

the last fragment of *Le mauvais demiurge*: "Nous sommes tous au fond d'un enfer don't chaque instant est un miracle / We are all of us together on a hell's bottom where each moment is a miracle. / Suntem cu toții pe fundul unui iad unde fiecare clipă e un miracol." It is rather a literary paradox, but at the same time a "stylistic" one, and, of course, a philosophical one.

Many other fragments from the work just quoted are ordered in a similar manner. However, an analysis of other Cioranian texts results in the same conclusion: the fragment – as the unity of the Cioranian style – has a dual paradoxical structure, which reminds us of the structure of Gnostic representations, as it was shown above. We can accept this formal relation for two reasons: on the one hand, the confession of the author himself, who claimed he was inspired by Gnosticism; on the other, the attitude that Cioran opposed to Nae Ionescu's truth related to the indubitable existence of God, as well as his own incapacity to believe.

The formal analogy between the structure of the Cioranian fragment and the Gnostic representations is not a goal in itself. Its only purpose is to draw attention to a distinctive trait of the Cioranian fragment, and to open the way to a new possible interpretation. Therefore, my only aim in the present paper was to point to the relation between the two facts mentioned at the beginning (the pure lucidity that denies God's validity and the impossibility of the belief in act) and their place in the "origin" of Cioran's thinking. The period of his growing up, known as the Romanian period, is very important in this matter. By examining it, we can get some elements in order to understand an essential fact related to Cioran's thought, namely the meaning of the dual structure of the fragment and the negative attitude against hope, detachment and salvation. The relevance of this relation from any other perspective does not represent an issue here. In the present inquiry, I confine myself to outline a theme for further research. However, this formal analogy can also reveal some content aspects of the Romanian thinker's work.

The relation between the two structures – of the Cioranian fragment and of the Gnostic representations – seems to be founded on the researches of Gnostic literature, to which Cioran dedicated himself in the French period. But it is shown that the origin of his thinking is the most important fact in this respect. And the origin put together an attitude against a solution at the problem on the divine existence and a Cioran's individual characteristic, namely its impossibility of believing. This is how a negative attitude against hope, detachment and salvation becomes possible; further on, a certain phenomenality of life emerges. The (individual) existence consists in a flow of facts of the life structured by the worry (anxiety) about the own existence: but until the fall into the "second eternity" happens. In this case, the flow of facts of life seems to stop. Therefore, the ground of the latter (the life) is time itself. This image of the facts of life flow is close to the images derived from Gnostic mythology, whose meaning is related to the

struggle for an awakening that can make possible the salvation of man from time. And in this struggle, hope, detachment and salvation get a negative sense if they concern the given world and the common human life. This is the case for the Gnostic representations and also for Cioran’s fragments.

The idea of time as the ground of human life is very important in Cioran’s thinking, but it is emphasized especially in *La Chute dans le temps / The Fall into the Time* (1964), the work published by Cioran immediately before *Le mauvais demiurge / The Poor Demiurge*. From this perspective, Cioran is very close to the philosophers of his time, especially to those belonging to the horizon of phenomenology, existentialism, and hermeneutics. This last observation can be valid considering the meaning that time has. For Cioran, as well as for the representatives of the philosophical “schools” mentioned above, time is the individual human existence itself.

We arrived at a significant matter in what concerns both the Cioranian thinking and its place in the contemporary philosophy. Of course, this problem needs another plan of discussion, different from the one opened in this paper. But we arrived here on the base of the formal similarity between the structure of the Cioranian fragment and the structure of the Gnostic representation. The close vicinity of the latter does not transform Cioran’s thinking in a code that can be revealed only by its comparison with Gnosticism. In fact, the first has a semantic movement, both at the level of words (expression) and thoughts (“philosophical” attitude). And the attitude, put in suitable expression, is structured by the worry concerning “the own”. The man exists only by the subjective stream of worry. The constant element of our life - of our veritable life – is the worry (the anxiety). The Cioranian fragment expresses exactly this attitude.

But we can discuss about the constructive ground (principle), the term that supports the attitude which get a sense to the anxiety. What is the principle of anxiety? The early texts of the Romanian thinker keep it rather hidden. But in the late texts, this principle comes to light: it is connected to time. In the inner Cioranian thinking time is the fact that structures, organizes and grants meaning to both his thought, as a whole, and his “fragments”. Finally, time is the man, as he is given in history and, therefore, in the second eternity, where he arrives through “the fall into time”. Cioran’s thinking is a philosophy of time structured by the problem of the human existence worried of his own, of his fallen condition.

In this paper, I merely intended to point toward a way of researching the Cioranian thinking on the base of its fundamental sense, given by the idea that time is after all the principle of this philosophical reconstruction.

