

“PRAYER IN THE WIND” – CONSIDERATIONS ON RELIGION AT EMIL CIORAN

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Motto: “I have just leaped outside my destiny...”

Abstract. The study starts from the philosophical elements of religion found in a “prayer in the wind” entitled this way by Emil Cioran himself. In this prayer his philosophical being adopts a self-critical perspective and departs from hate to find again the path, the sky, and the sun into a philosophical and religious endeavour. His world can only begin then, after the fog of hate and disbelief has left the thought free for the “starts” and “sun”. People cannot live just to avoid death. With this observation Emil Cioran opens his personal road toward religion. On this journey the first stop may be crash and suffering, but the next could be transfiguration and love. The interpretations selected in the study emphasise these particular elements of philosophy of religion at Emil Cioran.

Keywords: Emil Cioran, religion, philosophy, suffering, and transfiguration

Introduction

The exegesis of the theme and conceptualization of faith at Emil Cioran gains poetical accents beyond the philosophical ones. In his work entitled *The Twilight of Thoughts* he defined philosophy as a poetical meditation on the topic of unhappiness. The power of prayers and the power of faith are both challenged and rediscovered with Emil Cioran. *Per aspera ad astra* is the perfect descriptive for his philosophical approach. He wonders and he doubts. He strives for authenticity, but also for the higher status of the being: the creator. Within this context and from this perspective, the admiration and gratitude become from mere feelings, philosophical ontological categories. A prayer is for Emil Cioran a leap outside (his) destiny. “What is it going on with you, what has happened? – Nothing, I am all right, I leaped outside my destiny and now I do not know what to return to and toward what horizon should I run...” said Cioran in *The Trouble with Being Born*.

On the Grandeur and Delicacy of Creation in a Prayer

The prayer in the wind sent by Emil Cioran unveils a great deal of the beauty, the profundity and the tragedy of his attempt of relating to Divinity. “Protect

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me, God from the great hate, the hate that makes worlds spring. Alleviate please the aggressive trembling of my body and unchain me from the clenching of my own jaws. Please make that black spot that fires inside me go away, not to encompass all my members, giving birth in the flames of the unending blackness of hate a death spreading flame. Save me from the worlds born from hate, release me from the unending blackness that decimates my skies. Open a ray of light within this night and make the long lost stars shine within the deep fogginess of my soul. Show me the way to myself, open the path in my woodlot. Get downwards with the son within me and begin my world".¹ Oscillating between Prometheus and Sysyphus, Emil Cioran describes in his thoughts the very complexity of an unprecedented perspective on life, but also the general profile of the philosopher who has to think and rethink the world for and into light and enlightenment and never surrender to the lure of the "ultimate thought."

Emil Cioran is the beneficiary of a special connection with the Being, and yet he has big problems with the current beings and with the process, complex and context of being-into-life and being-in-the-world. He loves the human beings and then he loves them not; he loves God, or at least he holds God extremely important– witness is his aphorism: "I could, eventually, have true relations with the Being; but never with the beings" – but he also revolts. He is a troubled being and he is, in turn, troublesome as person and even more in his writings. His position is uncomfortable, spiritual, serious and unbelievably playful at the same time. In the book entitled *The Twilight of thoughts* he mentions: "In Churches I often think what a great thing would religion be if the believers were nor, but the religious restlessness of God, narrated by the orgue." (Emil Cioran, in *Caiete I. 1957-1965*)

Unique personality that sprung from a small culture directly into the core of the great French culture where he left a deep mark, Emil Cioran, fought for intense life. This difficult man was first of all difficult for himself, and as he never wanted citizenship, enriched two countries, asked himself in *The Book of Deceit*, published for the first time in 1936: "How could anyone live only to avoid death? How come that some people cannot endure so much life? Fight back against the consciousness of fatality, because only then, whatever you live could be either the terrible falling or the transfiguration".²

At once, with this Romanian philosopher, the great philosopher of transfiguration, one could also talk about generosity and greatness of introspection. But if this force of the introspection is often commented upon, the generosity of certain ideas passes unnoticed. Nevertheless, at this anniversary time, at this anniversary of a small eternity – the first centenary – the generosity of Cioran's thoughts is worth emphasizing and it is only fair to be associated with

¹ E. Cioran, *Cartea amăgirilor*, Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991, p.104 [my translations].

² *Ibidem*, p.82.

greatness. The emotion triggered by his ideas seems ever stronger. Whether during his student years Hitlerism seemed the best form of prolonged teenage bravery, in the ‘40s he refused to become a member of the Romanian legionnaires, the extreme right-wing organization, as the extremisms of youth vanish under the sun of mature introspection and profound meditation.

The essayist modestly entitled himself “the secretary of his own sensations” but he decisively plunged onto the philosophical heights of despair, with a force of world creator of similar to that of Mircea Eliade and Eugene Ionescu. Although he has studied mostly himself, “man”, “men” and the “other (being)” were always embraced by his thoughts. The Romanian philosopher Emil Cioran who has never been nominated for the Nobel Prize has probably wrote the most persuasive, complex and telling for the pacifist humanism: “Every man should want to be unhappy if he were to spare another of unhappiness. It is a thousand times more supportable to be saddened by another than to make someone else sad. And when you think that there are people in this world who are able to sleep when others suffer on their account! We should destroy the entire culture that allows it to talk of the ideals in a world where tears are shed. And how not to have the regret of purity in a world where you can *essentially* exist only in unhappiness?”¹

The human quality, the being and the being-in-the-world are essentially situated in unhappiness, but the philosopher affirms paradoxically that we beings are by our nature essentially situated within the will of love: “The general dimension of knowledge and the abstraction of the truth (and even if the truth does not exist as such there is a drive toward the truth) are attempts to love and to our will for love. Would Eros eventually destroy the Logos?”²

The Romanian philosopher needs to exist different co-ordinates, those of greatness: “To those who, unwillingly, have overcome life, philosophy is by far too little”.³ Reminding us of the cry of the poet and philosopher Lucian Blaga – “Give me a body you mountains!” –, for him, the fact that philosophy has limits does not obtrude access to the awesome and challenging contents of life. “As individuals, we fatally have the consciousness of our limitation and of the edging of our individuation; and, for this reason, it hurts and it surprises us when the intimate tension explodes in such lively contents, so deep and tremendous, offering us the impression of the inner infinite in the consciousness of the fatal ending of any individuation”.⁴

Emil Cioran is Prometheus. Yet, the philosopher is a Prometheus in a special hyposthesis; he is chained by the cliff, his flesh and liver are picked by the vulture and still he yells at Zeus, confronting the absolute. He is as critical with people as

¹ *Ibidem*, p.78-79 .

² *Ibidem*, p. 52-53.

³ *Ibidem*, p.17.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

he is with Zeus. The philosophical vision of Cioran is founded on the idea to bring the entire world on the brink of agony, to realize a purification of life from scratch, through the burning and insinuating flames of his sufferences, back to the roots, not to destroy them, but to renew their sap and their warmth. The fire put by Cioran to the world would not bring its wreckage, but a transfiguration of cosmic dimensions.

Cioran is also a revolted Titan: "To carry through Chaos my lonely laughter" (was all that Prometheus desired in Al. Philippide's vision). Prometheus, as embodied by Emil Cioran, wants but transfiguration. What does animate him is: "A tense hunger, with states of exaltation and visions, here is what a sad man cannot refuse himself, as a temporal delice, a hunger by which to win over the material attraction, a hunger to produce pleasures of flight, aerial pleasures, light and floating lonelineses – lonelineses of flight. All paths must be tried not to fall overcome by pain, sadness and disease. And our fight against all the above mentioned must be our heroism."¹

Driven by love and by knowledge, but unpleasantly impressed by mercy, Emil Cioran hopes in a triumph of knowledge, which is nevertheless a source of rich and diverse discontempts, because the philosopher comes to acknowledge, attack after attack, solely the horrors of the fight and the number of positions to be reconquered, ever increased. Within this context, in such a fight, a Prometheus is required to bring back the mortels the contradictory and hazardous fire of both knowledge and love: "Of momentum should our soul die, of momentum we should all die. Irresistible should be the enthusiasm of life and the despair should burn inside it. Closed should the mission be, only inside our last twitch, or in the grand twitch of our enthusiasm. None of us trully lived, if we do not die of momentum."²

"God represents the initial source of sin and error. The fall of Adam is, first of all, a Divine disaster and only secondly a human one. God has placed His possibilities of imperfection, all the rotten matter and all the loss" (Emil Cioran in *Tears and Saints*). A momentum of a revolted Titan lays here the perfect engine to ensure the continuation of the fight and to undermine the mediocrity that obturates the ample breath of the absolute: "Unless the resorts of this mediocre and serene life burst off open, closed will be the avenue toward our absolute feelings. And the resorts of the renewed life so strained and tight should be that with their freedom any move should imply the absolute!"³

In his Prometheus state, Cioran sublimates the will to power in a higher vibration that of the ecstasy, within a framework of the absolute feelings: "There is not the *power* that should define the pulsations of this life, but the mutual

¹ *Ibidem*, p. 20-21.

² *Ibidem*, p.75.

³ *Ibidem*, p.78.

ecstasies le of the human beings to bring them closer together with immaterial vibrations”.¹ Revolted Titan, Cioran, embraces the holiness of life: “...life, the unique God, the unique reality and the unique cult; sin as crime and death as disgrace.”² This is the imperative, but the reality discussed is a distant mirage vanishing before the current reality. The tearing apart experienced by Cioran is double: he is discontent with the condition of creature, and at the same time he is already deeply disappointed by the human accomplishments within this context of the humble condition of creature. In his despair, he stated: “The first condition of our freedom: emancipation from God; we cannot create anything as creatures. Until now, we did just compromise the work of creation.”³

What is left, then, for the revolted Titan? The philosopher of deceit understands that all is left is a heroism of marginality. He assessed: “Life is only lived with intensity when you feel that your individual being cannot stand the unbearable richness of feelings. To live to the edge of the being is to move your center in arbitrary and in the infinite, in a total arbitrary.”⁴ The art of living at the edge of being is painful, paradoxical, heroic and damaging for the mediocre and banal existence: “From hereon existence starts to become a risky adventure in which you can die at any time and from hereon becomes painful the jump into the infinite. There is no jump into the infinite without the breaking of the barriers of the individualism and when you feel how you *are* too little in comparison to what you live. For the human being is meant to live sometimes more than he can bear: and are not among us some people who live with the feeling that they cannot continue living?”⁵ The condition of deceit does not eliminate, but just renders more distant, dramatically, the dream of the absolute experiences: here is situated the source of Cioranian tragedy: “Whoever has understood that this world never surpasses the condition of deceit has but two possibilities to pursuit: to become religious, saving himself from the world or to save the world, destroying himself.”⁶ Indeed, any disappointment is an ultimatum brought to God’s attention.

Although thirsty for the absolute feelings, man can live merely with quarters of eternity – even when that man is Emil Cioran. “When man will be able to speak of deceptions as of reality, then he will be redeemed. When all it will be equally essential to him and he will be equal to the whole, then he will not understand anymore the myth of Prometheus.”⁷

The art to live at the margin of being, with the fire of the Prometheic elan in the middle of the human experiences and feelings that aspire to the greatness of

¹ *Ibidem*, p.79.

² *Ibidem*, p. 143.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 137.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 37.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 146-147.

the absolute experiences retains a lot of the heroic stubbornness of Sisyphus. A symmetrical replies to the prometheic hatred of the gods, the hate of Sisyphus, the father of Odysseu; for gods and death reminds us, via a different set of coordinates, of the turmoil and the spiritual contorsions of Emil Cioran. For the guilt of making public the kidnapping of Aeginei by *Zeus*, Sisyphus brought divine hatred on himself. Cioran denounces this divine anger that maintains the being in this condition of creature. Cioran vindicates emancipation against the limitations and absurdities of the humane universe, atuned to the diapason of the absolute feeling, but enchained by the deceptions of the daily and experimentable world.

Albert Camus described within the person of sisyphus the absurd hero by excellence. From this perspective, Camus said: "I leave Sisyphus at the basis of the mountain. Always, someone could find again his burden. But Sisyphus teaches us what true faith means, the kind of faith that denies gods and erects the cliffs. He also concludes that all is well. The Universe, deprived of master from now on, does not seem either steril or useless to him anymore. Each of the atoms of that cliff, each of the mineral excrescences of that dark mountain constitutes a world in itself. The very fight for the heights is sufficient to fill up the heart of man. We have to imagine Sisyphus happy."¹ Cioran rebuilds the universe without a master. The metaphorical stone that he is rolling is precisely his condition as a creature; as we have explained previously, this is understood considering the limitations and absurdities situated at the heart of human condition, which he is always resenting, renewed, with a tragic acuity, with a sensible philosophical organ that is incapable of getting better adapted. This is the reason why life is always surprising for Cioran and it hurts him constantly. He is always awake, at duty, always taking the hits in full. His absolute aspirations roll downwards and the torture of acknowledging the limited, absurd and paradoxal human condition of creature is replayed. Paradoxically, love for the human being and for life transpires with every criticism, from each contempt and anxiety. As did Camus, Cioran also understood that there is only one philosophical matter serious enough: the suicide. This is a paradox: the separation from life, while ending the trap of limitations, also ends all possibility of creation, the only avenue to come closer to God and fulfilled life. This dance of ideas around the human limitations and the struggle with them only underlines the paradoxical nature of the happiness of Sisyphus.

In a similar manner with Sisyphus, Cioran enjoys – in all the meanings of the phrase – the lucid conscience of the destiny of being, as well at a personal level, as at a general and humane level. The philosopher is obviously conscious of the dimensions of this own unhappiness. This state of consciousness is precisely what transforms his drama into victory, in the heroism to focus on the source of

¹ Albert Camus, *Mitul lui Sisif, traducere*, prefață și note de Irina Mavrodin, București, Editura pentru Literatură Universală, 1969, p. 91.

freedom represented by his refusal to hope and by the consciousness of the absurde, developed though in defferent terms, of the prowess. Emil Cioran is Sisyphus, glad. Camus explained once that easily: Sisyphus is happy when he goes up the hill, when the world makes sense because he embraces his burden. He embraces it, literally, to move it toward the top, and figurately when he accepts it and when he assumes it as Cioran does. He considers himself a sort of revolted existentialist being and similar to Prometheus he intends to laugh at the supreme moment, in front of the absolute nothingness, of the final agony, and of the ultimate sadness.

We have at Emil Cioran the philosophical search oriented to the great unknown surrendering us at all times, that one can partially find in the Psalms of Tudor Arghezi. In the psalms the poet says: "Anyways, the lute can speak,/ Pushed with the bow, or pinched by the strings/A restless heavenly passion/ My arm throbs and my soul burns."¹ In a different psalm, transpires another facet of the welter and beat: "For faith or for denial,/I am looking for you, dignified and useless./ You are my dream of all, the most beautifull/ And I do not dare to shot ou off te sky in a huddle"². In Cioran's prayer, as well, there is a determinate search for faith, as important as the sun and the stars, with a defining ontological mission, a fair dream that just starts a world. For Cioran's world cannot star but once with faith. More clearly, we have a similar comparative dimension also in the best known of Arghezi's psalms: "Alone, now, within your grand story/ I remain around to measure myself to You,/ Without the stark intention to win,/ I just want to feel you and to yell: "He is!"³ The being-in-the-world gets closer to the absolute being through destiny and needs the absolute presence whose existence certifies his very reality.

As well Arghezi as Cioran have not established an idillical spiritual relation when they turned their beings to God. Their Christian philosophy understood the deep and problematic stakes of the relationship, the stakes of a confrontation with no hopes for a victory between the human and mortal creator and the eternal Creator of all things and the depressing consequences of this turmoil. But, if at Arghezi we have a philosophical and lyrical poetry, at Cioran there is a cynical philosophy that gains only closer to God its lirical accents.

Conclusions

Emil Cioran does not have the pretention to hold the key to the ultimate truth, and he does not believe that he is the provider of equilibrium, nor he justifies his deviations, his drift, or sufferance since he has no such duty, for no

¹ <http://www.aboutromania.com/arghezi.html> - my transaltions.

² *Ibidem.*

³ *Ibidem.*

one. He claims his sufferance in the desert, for he does not recognize his brothers: "Any work is indebted to a deregulation. The writer is the parasite of his own sufferings", he said, in his *Notebooks I 1957-1965*.

Who would have thought that Prometheus meets Sisyphus? At Cioran, and partially at Arghezi, too, this happens, successfully. Cioran said: "Not only that the sun does not conquer darkness, but it increases to sufferance the nocturnal aspiration of the soul. If the deep blue would serve as our bed and the sun as our pillow, the voluptuous feeling of ending would call the night to fulfill the need for vast tedium," said Emil Cioran in the *Twilight of Thoughts*. And, at all risks, we still find out from the prayer how important is the solar light of faith and how much need has the spiritual world for the solar light of faith. He prays for this light of faith to set away the hate that has the power to create worlds.¹ It could be a simple black spot, and yet, the hate is so dangerous because it can "light up" and "stretch and dissipate into all the members", conducing to the endless darkness that burns, with a "killing flame" that ends the skies of the philosopher.² The philosopher is a creator, borns skies, but in the absence of the redemption power of faith, his skies die, do not last, and they are put off by hatred, even when that hatred starts from a mere point. He prays to be saved first of all from aggressivity and bitterness, both signs of his bodily incapacity of rising.

"Open a ray into this night" asks the philosopher, hoping for his creation to last, benedicted by the spirituality of faith. Faith makes "the lost stars rise into the deep mist of the soul".³

Then and only then his creation will be complete, as a blessed creation, able to open for the flesh and blood creator the path to himself. This is also the meaning of the last phrase of the prayer: "Come downwards with the sun within me and start my world."⁴ And if this prayer is made "in the wind" it is not by any means a lesser sign of greatness, for it gets closer the mortal creator the absolut One.

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¹ E. Cioran, *Cartea amăgirilor*, p. 104.

² *Ibidem*.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

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