

REFLECTIONS ON THE SPIRITUAL RENAISSANCE IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA

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Abstract. The present essay is a speculative attempt to draw a profile of the Romanian spiritual inscape which became visible in the years following the 89 Revolution. Both the spiritual effervescence and the spiritual disenchantment are symptoms of a metaphysics which has constituted an underlying structure of mainline culture and which has surfaced in prominent works of the spirit or in historical events. The tree of life which polarizes the Romanian spiritual inscape is sacralization of history. With the help of three Romanian thinkers, Eliade, Staniloae and Cioran, I will make an attempt to find the meaning of the present phenomenon. Eliade will provide the theoretical frame of the inquiry. Staniloae will confirm my interpretation based on Eliade. Cioran comes last as a paradox and enfant terrible. The paper ends with an invitation to further reflection.

Key words: Romanian spiritual profile, sacralization of history, Eliade, Staniloae and Cioran

The Romanian Revolution or Christmas-New Year Eschato-Cosmogony

The Romanian revolution happened in December 1989. I use the verb happen because at least for the majority of Romanians the revolution was a spontaneous, unplanned event. It was a happening which turned the celebration of the victory of Ceausescu's communism into a popular uprising. The decor and participants remained the same. Only the text changed from one of praise into one of judgment. The aspect of an art performance was supported by two peculiar circumstances: the revolution was broadcast on the national TV network and its first, though temporary, leader was a well-known actor in the Bucharest National Theatre. But this art performance effect can be subordinated to that of a ritual performance. There are several elements in the unfolding of the Romanian revolution which invite such an interpretation. The time of the revolution was the interval between Christmas and New Year; the place was the centre of Bucharest and the presidential Palace; during the revolution the president was submitted to an ad hoc trial and killed; the entire population participated directly or indirectly by watching the uninterrupted broadcasting. Certainly, any revolution enacts this ritual pattern which is more or less internalized by its participants: the

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reactualization of primordial chaos, the ritual combat, the expulsion of the demon, the mood of extreme excitement ranging from terror to exhilaration. The peculiarity of the Romanian revolution consists in the accidental (was it really accidental?) coincidence and instant homologization of historical event with *historia sacra* due to the time period – between Christmas and New Year's Eve; the place – the Palace at the center of the capital city – and the participation – the entire nation. By the overlapping of the revolution's time, space and mode of unfolding with the sacred time and space, the Romanian revolution became a paradigmatic enactment of the New Year's eschato-cosmogonic ritual.

As Mircea Eliade maintains in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, the homologization of profane and sacred history within the economy of the ritual is the essential expression of archaic consciousness. For archaic consciousness participation in a transcendent reality, the reality of *illo tempore*, the archetypal beginning, means participation in Being. This participation is ensured by the ritual repetition and reactualization of the cosmogonic act. The ritual thus confers upon historical time a transhistorical meaning. Ritual repetition of archetypal ontology annuls the unreality of the profane through sacralization.

The televised revolution was an occasion for nation-wide participation in archetypal, sacred time. Nevertheless, this participation was only mediated. Subsequent unfolding of events deepened the split between the active and the passive element in the population. Demographically the division between actors and spectators corresponded to divisions between young and old, intellectual and non-intellectual, urban and rural, white collar and blue collar. This division indicates the ways in which the two groups, broadly speaking, received and continued to live in the sacred time of the revolution.

Rigidity developed by age and lack of intellectual training fostered conservative attitudes. This type of consciousness failed to internalize revolution. The fictional pattern that has been systematically imposed on it was too strong to be annulled; confronted by demands of self-revaluation, the victims of communist ideology withdrew into the old fictions of self and world. Desire for peace and order in the country, fear of conflict, preference for paternalistic governmental care, mistrust of the other – intellectual or foreigner – skepticism toward the importance of personal engagement in change and the future, taking past – Medieval or even pre-Roman – historical heroes for political models, regret for former regime, fatalism – all these attitudes translate into an withdrawal from historical Becoming and can be viewed as a *sui generis nihilism* (Munciu: 103-201).

On the other hand, the active sector of the population, the performers in the revolutionary event, identified as the young and the intellectuals, became the ferment of a spiritual effervescence. The young did not have the time to get eroded by the communist fiction; the intellectuals, versed in self-reflection escaped the stereotyped ideology. These two categories were the bearers of an

awakening consciousness whose symbol and ground was the revolution. They were the dynamic element for whom the revolution was turning into an inner event and whose spirit had been unchained.

The Church is one of the loci in which spiritual freedom could express itself. Though Romania is a country with a variety of ethnic cultures and Christian traditions, nearly all ethnic Romanians are Orthodox/Byzantine Christians. That means that out of a population of 22.8 million the Orthodox make up 20.3 million or about 90 per cent (Bria: vii). Nevertheless, the Orthodox Church is not the only leader or beneficiary of the spiritual liberation. Once freed, the spirit could not be contained within the confines of Orthodoxy, nor within those of Ecclesia itself. Indeed, the freed spirit manifests itself in different ways:

1. First in the ample effort of the Church to re-christianize consciousness. The vast program for re-christianization takes numberless forms: religion is introduced in schools, new theological institutes are founded, churches which had been dismantled or pulled down are rebuilt, new churches are built, women have access to theological higher education, the monastic movement is strong, Christian artistic and philosophical self-expression is open to all, newspaper articles and televised debates on spiritual issues are regular and frequent, Christian publishing houses are founded and active.

2. Second, the door to religious interdenominational dialogue has been opened. The Orthodox Church is challenged to reformulate and restructure itself in confrontation with the Greek Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Churches, as well as with foreign evangelical groups which made their presence felt in the country after the revolution (Bria: vii-ix). If the predominant mood of Romanian Orthodoxy is one of utopia and jubilation (Bria: 50), it ranges from enthusiasm to anxiety, from joy to sorrow, as in all real remaking;

3. Third, the Church is confronted with the problem of interfaith debate. Alternative spiritual movements are recruiting thousands especially among the young whose roots during the communist regime have been only nominally Christian. In spite of often conflictual relations with the Church, these movements cannot be contained. 20, 000 Yoga practitioners gather periodically in meditation and prayer at Sarmizegetusa, Romania's pre-Christian historically acknowledged spiritual site of worship, with the specific purpose of reawakening the spirit of Romanians.

Thus, after a revolutionary event which was a paradigm of a cosmogonic ritual, the map of post-revolutionary spirituality has spread out between the two poles of hope, faith, religious fervor, on the one hand, and disappointment, skepticism and spiritual sterility, on the other. There are two questions I am posing, 1. Do these two forms of post-revolutionary reactions point to different metaphysics? and 2. are they transitional, circumstantial phenomena? Or do they manifest spiritual attitudes inherent to Romanian spirituality?

1. In answering the first question I maintain that the two seemingly opposed forms of engagement and disengagement with history, namely, the disappointed retreat into fatalistic attitudes and the spiritual effervescence of a belief in the restructuring of Romanian life on a spiritual foundation, be it Christian or not, are symptoms of a common metaphysics which is that of archaic cultures;

2. Referring to the second question I opine that Romania has preserved this metaphysical posture throughout its spiritual history to the present day.

To support these claims I will make recourse to Eliade's texts, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* and *Zalmoxis, a Vanishing God*.

Eliade's schema of contrasting the archaic and modern hermeneutics of history has become too familiar to need detailed exposition. I will only point out those articulations of his study which are pertinent to the present attempt at interpretation.

Eliade acknowledges the survival of archaic ontology in Southeastern Europe, precisely in agricultural societies such as Romania where out of the 22 million 47 per cent live in rural areas. Eliade notes:

A very considerable fraction of the population of Europe lives today by the light of the traditional anti-historicistic viewpoints (1974:152).

He views the persistence of this ontology as a form of resistance to the terror of history to which these societies have been exposed.

How justify for example the fact that southeastern Europe had to suffer for centuries and hence renounce any impulse toward a higher historical existence, toward spiritual creation on the universal plane for the sole reason that it happened to be on the road of the Asiatic invaders and later the neighbor of the Ottoman Empire? (1974: 151)

In rural Southeastern Europe the persistence of archaic consciousness is seen as an adequate metaphysical response to the meaninglessness and terror of history.

His conclusion justifies the archaic metaphysics as a remedy to the nihilism and despair that befall modern profane historical consciousness. This conclusion sounds prophetic:

It is not inadmissible to think of an epoch and an epoch not too far distant when humanity to ensure its survival will find itself desisting from any further making of history... will confine itself to repeating prescribed archetypal gestures, and will strive to forget as meaningless and dangerous any spontaneous gesture which might entail historical consequences (1974:154).

Returning to our topic we can see both the post-revolutionary disenchantment and the spiritual enthusiasm as forms of rejecting an engagement with history as history, disrupted from a trans-historical meaning. This hesitation before profane history continues and fulfills the revolutionary event. As Eliade notes, in the aftermath of the ritual performing there is a reluctance to resume profane time. The consequence of this reluctance manifested itself both as a sterile

withdrawal from active personal engagement and as an attempt to actualize the sacralization of history originated in the ritual. Thus the two attitudes can be circumscribed by the archaic horror of history deprived of trans-historical ground. Absurd or childish as they might often appear, the value of these symptoms of archaic consciousness resides, Eliade believes, in what they reveal: the belief in an absolute reality opposed to the profane world of unrealities, the desperate effort not to lose contact with Being (1974:92).

It becomes clear, then, that this archaic metaphysics is not only transitional, circumstantial; rather, it is embedded in a pervasive crypto-metaphysics. To further substantiate this permanence, I will point out the main metaphysical articulations of Romanian spiritual history unveiled by Eliade in Zalmoxis, a Vanishing God in which he presents the essentials of the religion of the Geto-Dacians and the most important mythological traditions and folkloric creations of the Romanians (1986:vii).

I will limit my observations to three of Eliade's essays in this collection, namely, Zalmoxis, Master Manole and The Clairvoyant Lamb or Mioritza.

Zalmoxis: Romanian Modern Re-appropriation of Mythical Imagination

Using the references found in Herodotus, Strabo and Plato's Charmides, Eliade reconstitutes the mythicized identity of Zalmoxis, the god of the Geto-Dacians, the autotochonous population, the almost mythical ancestors of the Romanians ô conquered in 106 by the Romans (75). To summarize: Zalmoxis is a daimon or a theos who inaugurates a new epoch in the eschatological terms of a mythico-ritual scenario of death as katabasis, descensus ad inferos (occultation) and return to earth (epiphany) (30). The cult instituted by Zalmoxis assures the initiate a blissful post-existence in a paradisiacal beyond (44).

Eliade mentions two peculiar phenomena in the life of this myth: the disappearance of Zalmoxis and his cult after the early (before 270 A.D.) assimilation of Christianity in Dacia, and its reappearance in modern Romanian culture. The vanishing of the god, he suggests, was due to its absorption by Christianity, since all the aspects of the religion of Zalmoxis – eschatology, initiation, Pythagoreanism, asceticism, mystical erudition (astrology, healing, theurgy) encouraged a comparison with Christianity and thus lent themselves to an almost total Christianization (69).

The second event in the life of the myth is the modern recovery of its primordial religious prestige. This recovery of the myth indicates, Eliade believes, a modern renewal of the mythical consciousness of Romanians. This mythical renewal appealed to Zalmoxis as an incarnation of the religious genius of the Geto-Dacians. The interest in a myth of profound spiritual origins – Zalmoxis is

related in several ways to Pythagoras and also to Orpheus and Dionysius – indicates the Romanian propensity for an archaic, traditional metaphysics which will be further detected in their identification with similar folkloric motifs.

Master Manole and Mioritza: Death as Rebirth in the Spirit

If the myth of Zalmoxis as such disappeared in the premodern cultural consciousness of Romanians, the eschatological myth continued to emerge in numerous folkloric metamorphoses.

The ballad of Manole and that of Mioritza are two masterful illustrations of the continuity and coherence of the mythical preferences. The fact that both ballads whose common motif is a violent death serenely accepted represent the high point of Romanian folk poetry (189-90) is not accidental. The immediate and spontaneous adherence of a people – both the folk and the intellectuals – to these mythical scenarios reveals, Eliade considers, its deeper soul more than many of its historical accomplishments (189).

Master Manole: Sacrifice, a Prerequisite of Lasting Construction

Present in different variations in the whole Balkanic space, the Romanian version of Manole is a myth of sacrifice and cosmogony. Eliade prefers a prose translation to the existing rhymed ones.

The ballad tells of a prince and ten builder companions in search of a proper site to erect a monastery. Once they found it, they start working. But the walls built during the day are collapsing at night. The prince threatens to wall the builders in alive. Manole, one of the builders, is told in a dream the condition for construction: the wife or sister first to arrive in the morning with food and drink for the builders shall be walled in. The following morning Manole sees his own wife, Ana, approaching. He weeps and prays for a strong rain, then a strong wind to stop her. Neither can stop Ana. He walls her in while she is expressing her growing pain. The monastery is built. Asked by the prince if they could build another one, the masons say yes.

To ensure the uniqueness of the monastery and prevent its reproduction, the prince takes the ladder away leaving the masons on the roof of the monastery. The masons build themselves shingle wings but the wings give way and the masons fall and die.

In the ballad the myth of eschatology is combined with the myth of construction of a monastery as the privileged locus of communication with god. The presence of the monastery fuses the archaic myth of the center and axis mundi with the Christian motif of celestial Jerusalem. Eliade explains the convergence of pre-Christian and Christian elements. Thus:

Until the most recent times the peoples of the Balkano-Danubian area were conscious that a Church or a monastery represented both the Cosmos and the Heavenly Jerusalem or Paradise (178)

Master Manole is an instance of the survival of archaic mythical thought and of the pagan-Christian synthesis in what he calls eminently conservative parts of Europe among which Romania and the Balkans must be reckoned (188). He also notes the archaism of the mythical idea of the sacrifice indispensable to ensure the historical longevity of a construction, be it technical accomplishment or spiritual undertaking (182-3).

Mioritza, the Clairvoyant Lamb

Mioritza has enjoyed the total and spontaneous adherence of the Romanian people, both at the level of the folk and at that of the intellectuals. Eliade mentions both its wide, though controversial, reception by Romanian historians, folklorists, philosophers and poets on the one hand, and the appearance of new variants, on the other. This exceptional status is indicative of a creation which is still living in the consciousness of Romanians and makes it the ô archetype of Romanian folk spirituality (241). Eliade offers as in Master Manole's case a prose translation. I will approximate it.

In a paradisiacal setting, the threshold of paradise, heavenly gardens, there come three shepherds and their flocks of sheep, one Moldavian, the other two Wallachians. The two Wallachians plot the murder of the Moldavian for his courage and richness. The Moldavian is warned of the plot by his lamb. In response he asks the lamb to show his murderers the place he wishes to be burried. He continues with a grand vision of cosmic wedding. He also asks the lamb to tell his mother that he married a peerless queen, the bride of the world, in a beautiful land, a corner of paradise without mentioning the cosmic participation which would reveal his death.

Eliade discusses three elements in the constitution of this ballad. The first is the presence of pagan, archaic, sometimes scarcely Christianized religious elements (251). They form a new religious creation which Eliade terms cosmic Christianity. Cosmic Christianity is identified as a feature of peasant Christianity in Romania and Eastern Europe. It projects the Christological mystery upon the whole of nature and neglects historical elements of Christianity only to dwell instead on the liturgical dimension of man's existence in the world (251).

Elements of this cosmic Christianity are implicit in Mioritza in the transfiguration of the cosmos, death as cosmic nuptials, mystical solidarity between man and nature (251). These elements do not indicate pantheism, Eliade notes, since nature is not ontologically sacred but transfigured through participation in mystical union through sacrifice. They point to Christian mysticism.

The second element to be mentioned is Eliade's interpretation of the message of Mioritza. He departs from the theorists who see in it an epitome of passivity and pessimism (255) and reads the message of the ballad as a triumph over the ô terror of history (254) through the transmutation of an historical event into a sacramental mystery (254).

The third and last remark is Eliade's explicit affirmation of the relation of mythic imagination to historical destiny. The Romanians' wide adherence to Mioritza is an expression of their recognition in this mythical solution of the most effective response they can make to destiny when as so often in the past it proves to be hostile and tragic. And this response each time constitutes a new spiritual creation. (256)

Eliade's Vision of Romanian Spirituality and its Post-revolutionary Relevance

Eliade provides several nodes of articulating a spiritual history of the Romanians which are relevant in mapping post-revolutionary spirituality in Romania. I will make note of two of them.

1. Romania has preserved forms of mythical thought and behavioral pattern camouflaged in a Christian form; this form of archaic Christianity is a cosmic Christianity which expresses itself as a form of Christian mysticism beyond and above Ecclesia; its most pertinent and peculiarly Romanian expression is the acceptance of eschatological extinction as a condition for the return to paradise.

2. The terror of history is annulled by the mythicization of historical events. Thus historical events are homologized with the sacralized history of the ancestors.

As a conclusion to Eliade's study on Romanian mythography one can say that Romanian mythical imagination is that of a traditional religious society which lives in the strong time of a *historia sacra*. The flight from historical becoming is operated through myths of sacrificial death and rebirth into the totality and beatitude of the beginnings. Through the fusion of pagan and Christian myths, cosmic Christianity has formed the ground of a metaphysical consciousness. Through this pneumatic Christianity Romanian spirituality is potentially receptive to other spiritual mystical traditions.

Eliade's trajectory as a thinker can thus be viewed as an enactment of his vision of Romanian spirituality itself. This vision situates Romanian spirituality and Eliade himself in an ambiguous position toward normative theology.

Dumitru Staniloae: Orthodox Idealization

This Romanian archaic metaphysics proves its vitality in Staniloae's Orthodox assessment of Romanian spirituality. Dumitru Staniloae, the major contemporary Romanian theologian, follows a traditional Orthodox line of

thought. In the years after the revolution, Staniloae renewed his efforts at interpreting Romanian spirituality. In his 1992 book, *Reflections on the Spirituality of Romanians*, Staniloae presents Romanian spirituality as an exemplary form of Christian orthodoxy. He argues that, ontologically, the essential formative dimension of the Romanian spirit is balance, equilibrium. In contrast to Western individualism and pantheism, Romanian culture expresses a metaphysics of interpersonal communion, a metaphysics of relatedness as a generic feature of the spiritual and geographical space and one that is instinctively Orthodox. Staniloae draws an idyllic spiritual map of an archaic universe in harmony with itself and with its natural and cosmic environment; conflict and contradiction are smoothed and transcended; a complex harmony of grace and seriousness, softness and lucidity, nostalgia and humor, in which the human and the divine, the living and the dead are engaged in a natural, loving dialogue.

Staniloae's picture of Romanian spirituality is a dream of Edenic existence. Although presented as a realistic assessment, it has all the marks of an ideal projection. As such it is a mythical construction as if patterned on the co-ordinates established by Eliade's mythography. Hence Staniloae bears witness to Romania's imagining itself as participating in its own myth of return to paradise, in *historia sacra*. Staniloae's Romania is an actualization of its mythical metaphysics. Romanians seem to have brought the kingdom of God on earth. Staniloae, as a Romanian Orthodox theologian could not escape the power of the archaic, pre-Christian myth of origins in spite of an Orthodox theological rhetoric.

Emil Cioran: Romania's Judgment and Transfiguration

The power and vitality of Romania's mythical imagination becomes even more spectacular in the case of Emil Cioran, a Romanian exile and nihilistic thinker. In counter-distinction to both Staniloae and Eliade, Cioran attempts to distance himself from archaic Romania. In his first book published in 1939, *Romania's Transfiguration*, Cioran reverses the evaluation of the rhapsodic portrait of Romania. He adopts the Nietzschean suspicion to unmask the origin of the Romanian mythical Imagination as an ontological lack, a new coinage for the slave ontology. A slave himself by birth, Cioran is merciless in his debunking of Romania's fictional idols worshipped in self-delusion.

Romanians live like plants – Passivity, self-depreciation, sterile lucidity, reflexivity in excess, wisdom preventing spontaneity, luke-warmness, somnolence, inertia, lyrical intimacy with Being, resignation in front of death, fate, history, fatalism – all these features, present in the image lovingly drawn by Staniloae's idealism and forgiving Orthodoxy as well as that fostered by Eliade's fascination with the archaic, acquire a negative connotation.

The young Cioran speaks from the positions of what Eliade calls modern, historical consciousness. He dismantles the idyllic and justificatory discourse of

Staniloae's and, respectively, Eliade. Identifying Romania as a minor nation which has been unable to impose itself historically, to live in time, Cioran brings under judgment its unconscious, therefore pernicious, adherence to self-defeating and self-justificatory myths.

His evaluation of archaic culture is at odds with Eliade's. Cioran considers the mythical thought characteristic to agricultural societies responsible for having created and deepened the structural deficiency, the ontological lack () of Romanian spirit. This ontological lack has prevented it from historical actualization for two thousand years. He writes:

Popular cultures are breathing in myth, in presentiments of history. They conceive Becoming substantially and dispense with history through eternity. They do not progress, they only change. Only the primordial has value, the sum of telluric and chthonic elements in the aura of a people. Popular cultures are primitive and reactionary. They remain locked in themselves (63)

He sees historical Becoming and cultural articulation as a salvific liberation from the attachment to cosmos present in precultural elements, from the uncritical attachment to a spiritual sense (55). Orthodoxy and Byzantinism did not compensate for this ahistoricism; on the contrary they encouraged it. The result was Romania's impotence to generate itself in time.

Cioran does not forgive any of the mythical images relevant for defining the Romanian. He mentions Mioritza only to lament its destructive influence. For Cioran, Mioritza is a poetic and national curse (66) which has carved an open wound in the Romanian soul. Mioritza he writes reveals the Romanian telluric and subterrean skepticism, the resignation in front of fate and death, disbelief in the efficiency of individuality and power, distance from all aspects of the world. (66)

After this total condemnation of Romania, Cioran has the vision of Romania's salvation as a Transfiguration. What does this theologically loaded term mean for Cioran? In what relation does it stand to the myths which brought Romania under judgment? For Cioran Romania's Transfiguration does not mean abolishing its archaic metaphysics, its mythical imagination, since a nation's myths are its truths (). Transfiguration means bringing it into the light of collective consciousness. He believes that this leap in the consciousness of the nation can be brought about by developing our tendencies to a maximum in order to discover ourselves (), by living religiously our drama in order to be saved (), by exacerbating it through awareness thus converting the negative into the positiveö (). The conscious unveiling and acknowledgement of its ontological lack will bring about Romania's salvation. Transfigured Bucharest [will] be [a] New Constantinople (204). In his later work, Cioran will not clarify the contents of his early prophecy, nor will he ever refer to it unless to recant it. Romania's Transfiguration is heralded in an early writing which has never been translated into English. In a note added to the 1990 edition Cioran detaches himself from his

early text which he views as the most passionate but the most alien to me. I cannot find myself in it, although I can easily perceive my hysteria () .

Nevertheless, one can read the mature Cioran as wrestling to fulfill this early prophecy. His later work exacerbates and gives expression to the agony of living in the limbo between time and eternity, skepticism and mysticism, between the nothingness of before and after history on the one hand between the precreational nothingness as plenitude and the nothingness as falling out of history on the other.

Cioran's poetico-philosophical ontology is that of a double failure, of an exile from Paradise and an exile from history.

A mystic manque is a mystic exiled to history, unable to forget Paradise, one who cannot cast off all temporal ties, caught between mysticism and history, he wanders in the no-man's land (1995:67)

An exile from eternity as well as from time, he lives in the in-betweenness which brought about the stasis, the paralysis of Romania's spirit. The heterogeneous elements, the mystical and the historical do not harmonize as in Staniloae's idyllic vision.

We are constituted of elements that all unite to make us rebels divided between a mystic summons which has no link with history and a bloodthirsty dream which is history's symbol and nimbus (1956:41).

Cioran never tires of asking himself the question whether ô we must take history seriously or stand on the sidelines as a spectator (1975:116), whether we should resist the ô temptation to exist (1968:206-22) in time or not. He laments the Adamic preference for the Tree of Knowledge over the Tree of Life which struck humanity with a wound that could not be healed, alienating consciousness from the unreflective totality of life (1970:33-53). As a failed mystic, trapped in history, Cioran's obsession remains the primordial silence, beatitude and totality of precreational existence. Circumscribed within the archaic myth of origins, his metaphysics is mystical. He confesses:

It is not of God that I dream; it is of the deity of the immutable essence which does not deign to create or even exist... (1970:172)

I dream of the depths of the Ungrund, the reality anterior to the corruptions of time and whose solitude is superior to God (1956:144).I dream of a golden moment outside of Becoming, a sunlit moment... (1975:67)

Cioran's God is the Godhead of the mystics, and of archaic consciousness, for that matter, the Ungrund, the pleromatic nothingness prior to creation

If in his early writing he lamented the Romanians exist like plants () let's hear him now:

The regret of not being plants brings us closer to paradise than any religion (1995:115).

To recover Paradise one must undergo death. Eschatology is the prerequisite of cosmogony. If he lamented Mioritza's resignation to and unhealthy enjoyment

of death, Cioran sings now a hymn to extinction whose cosmic amplitude echoes the condemned poem:

The dawn of death breaks within us cosmic trance, the bursting of spheres, a thousand voices! (1956:217)

Since this cosmic dissolution implies the dissolution of word and consciousness, Cioran has a vision of linguistic apocalypse, of a book whose syllables...would suppress literature and readers alike... would be both carnival and apocalypse of letters... (1956:112), of a great autodafe of all things and names (1975:121). Silent contemplation will recover primordial nothingness pregnant with being since only the illiterate [Carpathian shepherds]have given me the frisson of being which indicates the presence of truth (1956:136)

If the nothingness of precreation is fullness, the true nothingness is that of time identified with duality, the devil, hell, the non-divine dimension of divinity (). In this perspective Romania which he calls ô a country without history () logically becomes a locus of Paradise and of mystical beatitude. Or, on the contrary, a locus of the second and deeper hell, that of the second fall. Following the first Fall out of eternity into time, the second Fall is the Fall out of time into the nothingness of sheer void, the infra-eternity of absolute doubt and insomnia.

We will stop here. Cioran's questions, anxieties and longings come together to forge the blueprint for the present Romanian spiritual inscape. Should Cioran's agony be viewed as that of the Romanian spirit caught between its archaic mythical metaphysics and the challenge of modern historical consciousness ? And if so, is such a revelation transfiguring? These questions are no more than an invitation to reflection. I will not venture an answer.

We have enough evidence to prove that Cioran's recurring motifs are precisely the myths that Eliade showed to be constitutive of Romanian spirituality. The myth of origins, eschatology and cosmogony, cosmic and mystical Christianity. They all circumscribe a propensity for the sacred and a pronounced eschatological sensitivity. Hence a hesitation toward Becoming, a shyness toward history. Also the belief in the transfiguring power of the spirit.

Archaic metaphysics as reaction to the terror of history, Orthodox harmony as divine gift or ontological lack – post-revolutionary Romanians are validating all three definitions. Spiritual effervescence and spiritual paralysis today are faces of one coin. Both manifest the refusal to live in profane time. Both indicate the belief that the terror of history needs to be exorcized by a transhistorical meaningfulness, that renewal in spirit is the only guarantee of renewal in body. The difference is that the latter remains trapped in the empty carcass of a cosmogony which has not been internally reactualized through direct and continued participation.

Eliade would see the spiritual effervescence as a symptom of Joachim de Fiore's pneumatic age. How would Cioran see it? As spiritual confusion and

hesitation? As fear of history transposed into intellectual garrulity? As naivete, an expression of lack of self-understanding? Maybe. But he also believed that only such a collective self-confrontation and self-questioning can be salvific. By bringing Romania to self-knowledge and maturity, it can push it into history and thus into its own Transfiguration, enthroning Bucharest as the New Constantinoples.

A grandiose vision, valid only inside the circle of faith, ultimately unconvincing. But if nothing else it proves the living power of the nostalgia, archaic or Christian, for Paradise of a country which has lived in the shadows of history.

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