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**Cioran – The Last Great Aesthete of our Metaphysical
Lamentations**

Fragments in a Cioranian Key

Translation from Romanian by Marcel Chelba (with the help of DeepL)



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Fragmets in a Cioranian Key ¹

Thanks to my contemporaries, I too have reached the heights of despair – but I have tried hard not to raise my voice, not to let this *Appendix*² take the form of a criminal complaint against Humanity or, worse, a metaphysical contestation of God's ontological and moral authority. Not because it would be dangerous or futile – since there are no higher courts to which to appeal – but because, in the hustle and bustle of our modern culture, such an approach would sound a bit commercial.

Job's desperate cry of pain, Ecclesiastes' fatalism and Jesus' final disappointment on the cross have long since become *somme success* brands in the modern culture market, without which the entertainment and media industry would quickly go bankrupt.

In philosophy, the aesthetics of lamentation has become a bit lame – it has exhausted its persuasive resources.

¹ This text was written with the occasion of the Cioran Centenary (2011). The first lines I wrote on the blog of Constantin Aslam's show "Izvoare de filosofie" on Radio România Cultural. Then, invited to participate at the Faculty of Philosophy in Bucharest with a paper on Cioran, the text took the present proportions. Subsequently this text was published in **ANNALS of the University of Bucharest, Philosophy Series, Vol. LX, no. 1, 2011, pp. 29 – 32.**

² In the meantime, I have included this text in a larger work, entitled *Appendix*, which is Volume III of the *Kantian Tetralogy* (a series of works of which only Volume I has so far appeared: *Critical Introduction. On the Possibility of Metaphysics, as Science, in the Perspective of Kantian Critical Philosophy*, Crates Publishing House, Reșița, 2004, not yet translated into English). Finally, because I have always felt the need to return to Cioran, this text has reached the proportions of a book in its own right (*Cioran – The Last Great Aesthete of our Metaphysical Lamentations. Antimetaphysics and the Soteriology of Despair*), which I hope to publish as soon as possible.

Nobody believes in tears and saints anymore.

Cioran was the last great aesthete of our metaphysical lamentations.

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Cioran can also be read in a tragi-comic key, but that would be a shame. We would miss the point.

Cioran is not a depressive, modern clown, but a prophet of the Apocalypse who wants to be taken seriously.

When he says "The man will disappear – was my unshakeable conviction until now. In the meantime I have changed my mind: he must disappear", Cioran seems like a cabotin, a clown who is put on his heels and easy puns (a "jovial pessimist" he has been called with sympathy), but when he comes back and says "If after me, after all I have said, someone will still believe in something, it means that it is really something that must and deserves to be believed in", you realise that before he was not joking at all.

Cioran plays with the destiny of the world and his own, as in the cemetery of Rășinari (his native village) with the skulls of those dead forgotten by history, which the village gravedigger sometimes brought to light when digging the grave of a new dead.

He says "I am finished" (or, more broadly, "we are finished") – but, in his heart, Cioran is waiting for a reply from History.

Cioran exaggerates, probes the abyss, tries to push things to the limit of the absurd and unbearable, precisely because he wants to be contradicted.

The *formula for happiness* that mobilizes Cioran's creative imagination – very close to the *optimistic fatalism* (metaphysically sublimated) of the "Miorithical Shepherd"³ (from which Cioran draws organically) – is the prison governor's motto in Stendhal's *La Chartreuse de Parme*: "pas d'illusions, pas de désillusions – no illusions, no disillusiones." And if destiny contradicts you, all the better for you – I might add.

A pleasant surprise is more pleasant the more pessimistic you were, just as an unpleasant surprise is more unpleasant the more optimistic you were – and conversely, a pleasant surprise is less pleasant the more optimistic you were, just as an unpleasant surprise is less unpleasant the more pessimistic you were.

³ See the old Romanian ballad **Mioritza**.

Well, the greatest possible happiness is when you get a capital wish, against a background of absolute scepticism.

This is why Cioran must be surpassed and disproved by history: because nothing could make him happier up there in heaven.

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Pessimism, as a metaphysical attitude, is like salt in the dishes: it intensifies in us the faculty of happiness, amplifies joys and sweetens sufferings. Optimism is like vinegar: good for cutting through the nausea and the fetid smell of our daily lives.

The probability of being happy is inversely proportional to our ontological predisposition to happiness. It is a law of nature. That is why "happy natures" usually end badly, with a "life without biography" (in Noica's terms)⁴.

Cioran was in fact a happy nature trying to leap over the baleful shadow of his own destiny - to build out of the most radical pessimism possible a shield against depression and, at the same time, a lightning rod of the highest possible happiness.

The sceptic is better placed ontologically.

When he receives a blow from fate, the optimist says: I'm finished – the pessimist says: it could be worse.

Pessimism is the moral privilege of happy natures.

The sceptic is actually a realistic optimist.

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When, for his stubborn indolence, at the end of a whole day of nagging and whining, he found himself gratified by Xantipa (who was doing some laundry) with a bucket of filthy water on his head, Socrates,

⁴ For Constantin Noica's distinction between "happy natures" and "unhappy natures" see Marcel Chelba (2009): *Ultima idee a lui Constantin Noica și drumul fără de sfârșit al filosofiei (Constantin Noica's Last Idea and the Endless Road of Philosophy)*, în culegerea de studii *Modelul cultural Noica*, îngrijită de Marin Diaconu, București, Editura Fundația Națională pentru Cultură și Artă, 2009, pp. 99-118.

unmoved, told her: *Surely, after so much lightning and thunder, the rain should have come!*

How can you not adore such a man?!

When Cioran foretells the end, he does so with the same divine irony – with the same absurd syllogistic humour.

This is why Cioran depresses a naive optimist and makes a pessimist on the verge of suicide ashamed of his little existential inconveniences and smiles like a child caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

There are said to have been a few individuals who committed suicide after a "Cioran" reading. But how many will he have saved?

Cioran wanted to pull us by the sleeve, not push us into the abyss.

There is no question whether Cioran is right or wrong.

The point is whether his anti-metaphysical therapy is good for you or not.

If Cioran depresses you, then it is better to put him aside for later – when you have enough strength to live up to his bitter syllogistics.

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Cioran's work is a wager with history, which he will win anyway – whether he is refuted by history or confirmed.

If it all ends badly for Man, Cioran will have the satisfaction that at least he knew it beforehand and had no illusions. If it ends well, then all the better for Man. But the end will come. That is for sure.

Cioran's work will in any case remain a permanent subject of reflection in the mind of God – a perennial question in the long line of His eternal and immutable truths.

If it is true that nothing in the world is without God, then the life of Cioran, the insomniac, was nothing more than a shadow of God's doubt that perhaps, somewhere, he was wrong.

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Cioran was in fact looking for a strategy - a certain attitude to oppose the chaos around him - one that would be to his advantage in

his clash with destiny, with his failed life in Romania and with his bad place in the world.

Now, when you have fallen badly in life, the only thing that can save you is the idea of the end and of doom. Only the eternity of death is ontologically stronger than the temptation of living.

"You cannot know what a man has to lose in order to have the courage to face all conventions, you cannot know what Diogenes lost in order to become the man who indulged everything, transposing his most intimate thoughts into deeds with a supernatural insolence, like a god of knowledge, libidinous and pure."⁵

But we know what Cioran lost: he lost his country, his language, his ancestors, his sense of belonging to a sacred history. This is the source of his metaphysical insolence. Since Cioran, this is the state of mind of modern man in the new mental limits of the so-called open society.

At the age of 22, Cioran was a self-proclaimed specialist in the problem of death. He had already reached the wisdom of Ecclesiastes.

Since childhood, scepticism had become for Cioran the most optimistic metaphysical and moral strategy possible.

The rest, after that, came by itself.

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Although Cioran's philosophy has therapeutic rather than conceptual aspirations, his metaphysical insolence is nevertheless aimed not at a simple aesthetics of lamentation, but at a kind of metaphysics of morality turned inside out – and the roots of this antimetaphysics are to be found in his Romanian, not Western, biography.

Ignoring Cioran's biography as a *side issue* does major hermeneutical damage to his philosophical work.

⁵ Emil Cioran (1992), *Tratat de descompunere*, București, Editura Humanitas, p. 101. (English translation by me.)