

## LATIN-BALKANS WITH TEUTONIC NOSTALGIA

*Philosophically speaking, the 20<sup>th</sup> century begins impetuously under the sign of the German Nietzsche, and ends in cynicism and aporia, with the black humour of the Romanian E. M. Cioran. Between you and me, this is not bad at all for a small country bound to bring philosophy from abroad.*

*The funny thing is that E. M. Cioran, allegedly "le plus grand écrivain français" of our days, held philosophy as a system in an almost visceral contempt – philosophy taught coldly, flatly, as the history of sterile thought. Suffice it to open his first book published in France in 1949, following five other in Romania, to come upon a virulent and final Adieu à la philosophie, from which I quote: "Je me suis détourné de la philosophie au moment où il me devint impossible de découvrir chez Kant aucune faiblesse humaine, aucun accent véritable de tristesse; chez Kant et chez tous les philosophes. En regard de la musique, de la mystique et de la poésie, l'activité philosophique relève d'une sève diminuée et d'une profondeur suspecte, qui n'ont de prestiges que pour les timides et les tièdes. D'ailleurs, la philosophie – inquiétude impersonnelle, refuge auprès d'idées anémiques – est le recours de tous ceux qui esquivent l'exubérance corruptrice de la vie."*

*Therein lies, exquisitely synthesised (the whole chapter must be read), the fascination with the rigour of philosophy, though paradoxically exercised as contempt for logic and organisation; the whole Germanic will for system, undermined by Latin liveliness; the will for power, invariably altered by fatalistic disgust, "historical ennui", the "Mioritic curse" of "Wallachian nothingness".*

*Sanguine, Epicurean, garrulous, histrionic, unstable, jubilant with a pantheist heart, changeable and picturesque up to the raptures of ...pettiness, the Romanian spirit has always nurtured a nostalgia for Prussian rigourism, the myth of the Hapsburg administration, the spectacular discipline of Catholicism, and the icon of the Empire ruled from Vienna, while on the other hand often let itself be contaminated by pan-Slavist anarchism and the "(Asian) exit from time", a specific element of the "steppe horizon" which is so alien to Europe.*

*This is – among others – the reason why, in the short history of Romanian philosophy, two drives have constantly coexisted: synchronisation with the great systems of thought of Germanic origin, from medieval mystics to Renaissance humanism and transcendental idealism, in parallel with defiance of the system and the glorification of lived ideas, a blend of bookishness and authenticity, of erudition undermined by Erlebnis, which captivated Romanian philosophy especially between the world wars.*

*A good assimilator, quickly adjustable, the Romanian spirit has always known how to emotionally soften the mysteries of logic, to unite the contraries (what a terrific vogue concordia discors enjoyed here –*

*Cusamus' coincidentia oppositorum!*), to sensualise the ideas' excessive rigour. "On ne discute pas l'univers; on l'exprime. Et la philosophie ne l'exprime pas (...) Nous ne commençons à vivre réellement qu'au bout de la philosophie, sur sa ruine, quand nous avons compris sa terrible nullité, et qu'il était inutile de recourir à elle, qu'elle n'est d'aucun secours," says Cioran (*op. cit.*).

This double drive has been invariably connected to Germanic formativity, whether we have in mind the Transylvanian Enlightenment or the Hölderlin/Heidegger relation melting into the Eminescu/Noica relation, D. Cantemir and Van Helmont's heritage, T. Maiorescu and Hegel's or Herbart's heritage (albeit the Romanian critic was a translator of Schopenhauer), the formation of C. Rădulescu-Motru in the spirit of Wundt's researches and the German *Völkerpsychologie*, Camil Petrescu's oscillation (in *The Doctrine of Substance*) between Husserl and Bergson, Lucian Blaga's affinity with Frobenius, Max Scheler and German Expressionism, or Mircea Eliade's with C. G. Jung, or Cioran's with Spengler, Klages, Kierkegaard, or Stéphane Lupasco's with Heisenberg and Bohr, and so on and so forth.

Certainly, exceptions have their well-defined role; our first authentic system creator was Vasile Conta (1845-1882), who was equally indebted to German materialism, French positivism and English empiricism. This applies to the connection between Spencer and P. P. Negulescu and to the inter-war Bergsonian fashion as well.

For the most part, Romanians – like everybody else – learned philosophy from literature rather than specialised textbooks: such and such poem by Eminescu, or fantastic prose by Mircea Eliade brought them much closer to Buddhism and nirvana, to Samsara and Ahasverus than a dedicated treatise. As the same text by Cioran says, an exclamation of Job, a line of Macbeth, or a Cantata by Bach will supplant each an entire system of vain erudition of this "profession without a destiny" – philosophy.

As for the typical penchant of Romanian "philosophical" literature for the demonic, heresy, the irrational, the mystique of living, the Oriental fabulous (often cultivating a scientific spirit and rationalism in all the commonly accepted senses, yet sneering at them almost at the same time), at the junction of the Oriental epos, Latin sagacity and the delights of the Greek agora, between Buddhism and Levantine sensuality, once again we must cite Cioran, to whom philosophising is nothing but "le passe-temps d'une vipère élégiaque."

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Translated by Adrian SOLOMON