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EGO WEST!

de
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The Westland is made up of magnetic dreams and fields. To the Ancients who succeeded the Greeks, *Ex occidente lux*, the light emerging from the West, was a maxim worth the torture of one engineer too many. One could not go around this maxim, but follow it in abstract awe. Rather than seeking in that West unending melancholies of dusk or mega-declines, the Romans placed their Empyrean as far West as light goes to ricochet back from the world's frontier to shed itself on the Egoland's master (the I).

Really, the maid of this title, the subtitle should have read 'pas de deux'; but that wouldn't have gotten the job done. Neither do these succinct bibliobios:

María Zambrano (1904-1991) and E. M. Cioran (1911-1995), two of the past century's foremost thinkwriters, have lived a good part of their lives in exile. Zambrano published her major works after she left Spain in 1939: *El hombre y lo divino* (Man and the divine), *Persona y democracia* (Person and democracy), and *El sueño creador* (The creative dream). Before that, she was born in Vélez-Málaga, grew up in Madrid and Segovia, studied philosophy in Madrid (1924-27, with Ortega y Gasset, and also with Julián Besteiro and Zubiri, whom she succeeded *in cathedram*), wrote for important publications of the time, the most famous being *Revista de Occidente*, made literary friends with José Bergamín, Luis Cernuda, Jorge Guillén and Miguel Hernández among other future victims of the times. Since the beginning of the Civil War she joined the Republican cause; once this one was defeated by the fascia of the Caudillo Francisco Franco, Zambrano left Spain, and lived in Cuba and Puerto Rico, in Paris and Rome (story has it that she was expelled from Italy because her neighbor – a fascist – had denounced her that she was sheltering too many cats in her apartment), then in Switzerland (where cat haters are as unknown as is tragedy, since William Tell hit the apple). Zambrano lived and wrote and taught in Latin America, and later went on to pick up the crumbs of this variety of experience, for Spain and Latin America are neither separated by the Ocean or by the Spanish language, nor are they united by the ocean and the language as parts of a metaphor traveling through history. Rather, the ocean is the neighbor of both, and lends itself, immensely, to this metonymy of being Hispanic. Zambrano's writing is oceanic. Then time

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passed, Franco's body too became sick, he spent months in bed watching Real de Madrid soccer games while caressing the skull of Santa Teresa, he died, and then Zambrano returned to Spain during the 80s, became the first woman to receive, in 1988, the Spanish Nobel – the prize Cervantes, and died three years later, bitter that she had not been hailed as Ortega y Gasset's chief follower. Very little of her work is translated into English.

E. M. Cioran left his native Romania in his mid-twenties, after publishing six books in Romanian, flirting hard with the political right, and caressing excess. In 1937 he moved to Paris on a scholarship and lived there until the end. He loved Dresden, where he had spent two years in the mid thirties, and was disconsolate to learn, in 1945, that the Allies had slaughtered that beautiful city; but he was addicted to Paris, a city where one can not work and still live. He published all his French works, from 1947, with Gallimard: *Histoire et utopie* (History and utopia), *La Tentation d'exister* (The temptation to exist), *La Chute dans le temp*s (The fall into time), *De l'inconvénient d'être né* (The trouble with being born), *Syllogismes de l'amertume* (Syllogisms of bitterness). Later in his life, recalling a hillside in his village, called Coasta Boacii (the name, meaning "the cow's hillside," sounds fully funny in Romanian), and asking bitterly about the meaning of it all – why live unknown, as he wanted, in a city of crazed Parisians while the whole rest of the world would have wanted to live there, too? – he asked: "A quoi bon quitter Coasta Boacii?" At least nine of his books are translated into English – for English is the happy ending of any translation, isn't it?

To Zambrano and Cioran, every thought worth this difficult name was a rebirth certificate.

Zambrano lived and died in Spanish. Cioran, who believed that the Fatherland is a tent pitched in the desert, stopped writing in Romanian, and renounced his native tongue to publish only in French. At the beginning of the 90s Romanian philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu went to Paris to make a movie on Cioran. The two spent long hours together and not only once, and not only on the side they play backgammon, a game that weds quickness to luck. When Liiceanu was under the dark cloud of bad luck, he could use at ease swear words, which Romanian abounds in as only Arabic, Turkish and Hungarian do. Cioran, *aber*, would have had at his disposal only the two words that French (per)uses for that purpose, until one day, when Cioran's luck became so wretched that he started to swear in his native tongue. That cannot be translated: what mercenary can blush in a language that's not his or push the scapegoat into Nietzsche's abyss with an imported swear word? Later, when Alzheimer got in the way, Cioran began to lose his acquired languages – first his mediocre Latin, then his German, and, finally, the French in which he had been hailed as a

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classic writer, pretty much like La Rochefoucauld or Saint Simon. At the very end – and every end that doesn't look like a Pentecost in reverse must be considered either fake or revocable – all Cioran was left with were sparse Romanian words, some of which were meant to swear and protect.

Enough with that! Translation, that thing we do, is the healthy work of futility.

María Zambrano might have been friends with René Char and Camus, but it was Cioran who left a mark of the stigmatum that Diotima's embodiment left on him at the Café de Flore. This mark is a short piece, "Maria Zambrano. Une présence décisive", recollected in his *Exercices d'admiration* (Gallimard, 1986: 165-168):

> Dès l'instant qu'une femme se livre à la philosophie, elle devient avantageuse et agressive, et réagit en parvenue… La malaise qu'inspire son cas, comment se fait-il qu'on ne l'éprouve jamais en présence de Maria Zambrano ? Je me suis posé souvent la question, et je crois pouvoir y répondre: Maria Zambrano n'a pas jamais vendu son âme à l'Idée, elle a sauvegardé son essence unique en mettant l'expérience de l'Insoluble *au-dessus* de la réflexion sur lui, elle a en somme dépassé la philosophie… N'est vrai, à ses yeux, que ce qui précède la formule ou lui succède, que le verbe qui s'arrache aux entraves de l'expression, ou, comment elle le dit magnifiquement, *la palabra liberada del lenguaje*… Un feu intérieur qui se dérobe, une ardeur qui se dissimule sous une résignation ironique: tout débouche chez Maria Zambrano sur autre chose, tout comporte un *ailleurs*, tout…. Qui, autant qu'elle, a le don, en allant au-devant de votre inquiétude, de votre quête, de laisser, de laisser tomber le vocable imprévisible et décisif, la réponse aux prolongements subtils ? Et c'est pour cela qu'on aimerait la consulter au tournant d'une vie, au seuil d'une conversation, d'une rupture, d'une trahison, à l'heure des confidences ultimes, lourdes et compromettantes, pour qu'elle vous révèle et vous explique à vous-même, pour qu'elle vous dispense en quelque sorte une absolution spéculative, et vous réconcilie tant avec vos impuretés qu'avec vos impasses et vos stupeurs.

The dialogue on utopia that the two had is responsible, says Cioran, for two or three years of extended readings on this topic – and, but this is only intimated in delicate silence – for his publication of *Histoire et utopie*.

Zambrano's standardized image has her progressively turn to mysticism and poetry of the philosophical language. Her term, "poetical reason" is regarded as a crucial antidote against the all set sphincter of restricted reason. This is true enough to be false. Zambrano has not turned to the poetical and the mystical – she has always been fascinated by both. But if we need to hack her chronology period by period in order to order the higher order of her life, so be it: I won't do it. Zambrano's writing starts by orderly silencing the many beats of mellow drums that surround

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and suffocate the "Idea"; thus, without falling for the "Idea," for the Idea that, sole and solely scorches the Earth, she would make audible both the music of the spheres and its opposite – clarity.

María Zambrano writes powerfully, with vehement and elegant acumen, to intensify the real until this one gives out a sense of unreality: this is the playground of extended reason. Her c. 1940-42 essay on Unamuno (don Miguel, who signed the pact with the other by erasing his own "I"), finds that, although her author had not left a *Guide* proper for the perplexed, he translated that testamentary genre into his *Vida de Don Quijote y Sancho*. Zambrano credits this essay with the quality of a guide that leads the reader, beyond the ethics of the good end evil, into uncommon spheres: it is "a *Guide* to madness, a *Guide* to shipwrecking, not to how to escape the shipwreck, to be perplexed, not to get out of perplexity. A *Guide*," she says, "to how to get lost, rather than find oneself" (*Unamuno*, ed. Mercedes Gómez Blesa, Barcelona, Debate, 2003, 126, *my translation*). The Spanish madness is trying to export Don Quijote's goodness to the scale of history. Following Unamuno's guidance and Zambrano's writing, reason is shaken to express the real (certainly, against Hegel's *RealReason*). For "existential" thinkers like Zambrano and Cioran, what restricted reason can't express, it deems unreal. Zambrano's poetical thinking aims at freeing the unreal through the work of style, the style of thought and writing. And only from that unreal stage can thought ricochet back into the real with Latinate hunger. Don Quijote's madness (or idealism) is not exempt from this passage to the real, which asks to build a castle in mid air in order too look out of its window and see the world down in the valley. The unreal thus lives poetically as "given in mid air"; without the poetical unreal, the real itself falls into the trap kept on 24/7 by the cunning of reason. To the Spanish thinker, the real is given by the unreal, and the travels to the unreality of exile were to be onto-writerly pilgrimages in the constitution of the real (make no mistake, she seems to say, the real is not out there, but hidden by its conditions of impossibility, in the clash between the solitudes of the "I" and a world which, after Don Quijote's death, is ruled not by Sancho, as Cervantes would have had it, but by Don Quijote's resentful, nagging niece).

Some say (without being right or wrong) that behind the cross there hides the devil; Zambrano left what was becoming Franco's Spain to join the exodus and the exile's bitter amusement park. She had to leave, as all the others did by 1939, yet in her case the exile was an *essai*, an attempt, that is, not only at survival but also at a life that retained memorially the heterogeneity of experience. Since Montaigne, this is what the essay was, and to Zambrano the real *essai* could not constitute itself without eluding the categorial and categorical attempts at pigeonholing it either in Franco's

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generically somber Church or in positivist thought's dismissal of "impurities." The exile became a gate to the castle in mid air. She had to go west, and, as Cioran did, she, as he, would have gone westward to the end of the earth, to the Kafkian Gates of Hercules to escape the strictures of genres and the slavery to the generic. And, you may ask, what's Kafkaesque about the Kafkian Gates of Hercules? What takes the altar out of Gibraltar? What takes the fun out of the funeral?

To Cioran, I'd like to think, these gates were a white wall which, unless one is able to contemplate for hours on end, dismisses one from championing the highest non-value there is, that of nothing. To Zambrano those Gates so extremely occidental would be figured as whirlwinds.

They two impart not the genius of Christianism or its opposite, but that of pursuing loss without remainders: Cioran, the loss within nothingness, more so than Unamuno, who, while advancing towards a time when his own "I" would have vanished, would be aware that he could not escape his name; perchance like Borges (whose misfortune of becoming famous and being studied in universities Cioran deplored); or like Robert Walser, who spent the last four decades of his life in a mental establishment (lovely name, it was in Switzerland) where he wanted not to write, but to be rather mad. Zambrano, on the other hand, pursued the loss without remainder in richness and volatility, as to disseminate herself around her life story, bookish or else. She was a fate carrier. Neither by getting lost like a petty- demon or bourgeois, in the details, nor by overcooking them, did she attempt to annihilate her ego. Look at her early fifties *Delirio y destino*, a book unlike any other, which is honored to shelter her own story and that of Europe, of philosophy and other solitudes facing each other. There is parataxis and there is juxtaposition; but then, there are Zambrano's sentences and works that look each other in the face. This mutual look is the *Grund* of her writing. And so her rhetoric explodes into the world: her writing looks the reader in the face, and the reader should look back in the book's face. This is no abyss looking back into the few who have the courage *désœuvré* to look straight down into it (for only the road to eternity is crooked). Her relentless face-à-face is the intimation of this richness.

Cioran's loss of the self is the telos cradled by nothingness; Zambrano's, by everythingness. O, do not tell me that at this point, 'everything' and 'nothing' are all the same. They are not; she was a woman. But the existential exile is, for both, touching a mystical chord, the one that resonates in the traditional Spanish lines (taken on by Teresa de Avila and, here, by Juan de la Cruz): "Vivo sin vivir en mí / Y tan alta vida espero / Que muero porque no muero." (I live not within myself / For I wish a life so high / That I die for I don't die). On this side of life, says the eminent mystic, we are exiled from the higher one. Both Zambrano and

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Cioran had a genius for exile: he to further it, she – to overcome it by writing over it. Philosophy had always exiled exile, there where theology pushed for a cure: both are associated fields of melodrama. To philosophers, the world enslaved to exile was the delta of a concept open wide to a sea of nothing. To theologians, it was the eternal present as a passage, as an interruption necessary to sacred history. But exile lived as sadness pure and as its overcoming, this was left to thinkwriters beyond genre like Zambrano and Cioran – after all, le génie, c' est le genre sans gêne. Neither Cioran nor Zambrano are to be epileptically betrayed by putting them into generic caskets. One can't dig deep enough in the graveyard of genres, but as we are born unto them, to think our way out of that sorry landscape is the closest one can come to the resurrection.

Both Zambrano and Cioran ricocheted back, many a time, from the ultimate limit of loss unto oneself, from the *finis terrae* of the eternal occident, wherefrom they exposed the mechanical enigma of our lives. If God is a lobster, man is fate's yo-yo. The extreme West is the Egoland – for instance Fichte's I or Hegel's subject (to which Schopenhauer's Indian devices were countermeasures paler than Kierkegaard's fork), or Paris the forgetful (blasted by Montesquieu's faux Persian), or Napoléon's "liberté, égalité, propriété." That Egoland partakes of the dubious firstness of the 'I' (the initial initial of the I, the Ich, the Idea…). The identification between the ego and the idea figures the ultimate horizon of jealous reason, and, in acknowledging Zambrano's overcoming of the idea, Cioran joined her.

Ego West? That is the center of a forgotten chiasmus and a ruthless coincidence devoid of any beyond. But then there is no beyond, as immanence is the expression of self overcoming: universe cleansed. The rest is the trivial ground for exile.

EGO WEST!

(Rezumat)

În anii 30, María Zambrano simpatiza cu stânga spaniolă şi Cioran cu dreapta românească, dar când s-au întîlnit la Paris după război s-au înţeles fulgurant, căci amândurora orice gând care îşi merită numele se scrie ca un certificat de renaştere. Vehemenţa existenţială, incandescenţa stilului, atragerea raţiunii în sfera opuşilor săi şi dorinţa de a se pierde îi leagă în stil şi efigie pe cei doi contemporani (Zambrano, 1904-91; Cioran, 1911-95). Geniul exilului, poarta de răsărit a castelului din aer, amândoi l-ar fi împins până la catapeteasma lumii: Zambrano până la porţile kafkiene ale lui Hercule, unde altarul e rupt din Gibraltar; Cioran până în pânza albă a unui perete gol. Amândoi au reculat din această ultimă limită a pierderii de sine, *finis terrae* eternului occident care articulează enigma mecanică a vieţii ce face din om un yo-yo. În *Exercices d'admiration*, Cioran o numeşte pe Zambrano „o prezenţă decisivă", pentru ca mai apoi diferenţele dintre ei să devină clare şi nesemnificative. Cei doi gândi-scriitori se întâlnesc într-un ring în care imanenţa e totul, restul e popular şi gândirea se trezeşte exilată din trivialitate.

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