



An Infamous Past: E.M. Cioran and the Rise of Fascism in Romania

Marta Petreu

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A writer who does stupid things in his youth is like a woman with a shameful past?never forgiven, never forgotten. E. M. Cioran, the renowned Romanian-French nihilist philosopher and literary figure, knew this better than anyone. Alongside Heidegger, Sartre, Paul de Mann, and others, Cioran was one of the great scholars of the twentieth century to be seduced by totalitarianism: he experienced a most disturbing intellectual and moral drama. More than any other study of Cioran, Marta Petreu's intensive investigation of his life and work confronts the central problem of his biography: his relationship with political extremism. The scene of Cioran's excesses is Romania and Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, a time of xenophobia, anti-Semitism, racism, Nazism, and Stalinism. In an incendiary book published in the mid-thirties, Cioran openly praised Hitler and Lenin and compared the leader of the fanatical Romanian Iron Guard to Jesus himself. This book, *The Transfiguration of Romania*, is the focal element of Ms. Petreu's analysis, which she carries on to Cioran's posthumously published *Notebooks*, characterized by the regret and remorse of his twilight years. In straightforward and lucid prose, grounded in a wealth of documentary evidence, she provides the entire history of a painful individual and collective drama. For many of Cioran's yearnings would later be realized in Ceausescu's dictatorship of Romania?to the regret of the Romanian people. Norman Manea's Foreword reminds us of Cioran's stature in Western intellectual circles and explains the critical importance of *An Infamous Past*.



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