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The New Gods



Synopsis

Dubbed "Nietzsche without his hammer" by literary critic James Wood, the Romanian philosopher E. M. Cioran is known as much for his profound pessimism and fatalistic approach as for the lyrical, raging prose with which he communicates them. Unlike many of his other works, such as *On the Heights of Despair and Tears and Saints*, *The New Gods* eschews his usual aphoristic approach in favor of more extensive and analytic essays. Returning to many of Cioran's favorite themes, *The New Gods* explores humanity's attachment to gods, death, fear, and infirmity, in essays that vary widely in form and approach. In "Paleontology" Cioran describes a visit to a museum, finding the relatively pedestrian destination rife with decay, death, and human weakness. In another chapter, Cioran explores suicide in shorter, impressionistic bursts, while "The Demiurge" is a shambolic exploration of man's relationship with good, evil, and God. All the while, *The New Gods* reaffirms Cioran's belief in "lucid despair," and his own signature mixture of pessimism and skepticism in language that never fails to be a pleasure. Perhaps his prose itself is an argument against Cioran's near-nihilism: there is beauty in his books.

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Customer Reviews

My favorite quote from *THE NEW GODS*: "It is difficult, it is impossible to believe that the Good Lord--'Our Father'--had a hand in the scandal of creation. Everything suggests that He took no part in it, that it proceeds from a god without scruples, a feculent god. Goodness does not create, lacking imagination; it takes imagination to put together a world, however botched. At the very least, there

must be a mixture of good and evil in order to produce an action or a work. Or a universe. Considering ours, it is altogether easier to trace matters back to a suspect god than to an honorable one."This is a reaction that's generally referred to as gnosticism or Manicheanism. And I can dig it.

This book has been around for thirty years, and it needs to be reprinted in a nice new edition. Most of Cioran's works have indeed been re-released recently. Unfortunately, this one has not been. And that is a shame given the power of the title essay. The other essays are okay. But the title article is the best. I doubt that I have ever read a better 16-page essay than "The New Gods." Its marvellous prose shines through everywhere. When I read that Saint Gregory's oration against Julian the apostate "makes you feel like then and there converting to paganism," my jaw dropped. I got a copy of that oration right away! Cioran explains that early Christian apologetics are simply a set of libels camouflaged as treatises. But there was one thing that made Christianity different: hatred. Without that hatred, this new religion would merely have traded in "the old gods for a nailed corpse." Cioran is not the first to criticize Christianity. But he then goes on to defend Paganism. He explains that under Paganism, fervor is shared among Goddesses and Gods. Only under monotheism does this fervor degrade into faith and aggression. People, being capricious, would shift from one God to another if given the chance. And Pagan Goddesses and Gods do not demand to be worshipped, just respected: in general, one does not kneel before them but merely hails them. As Cioran states, the human soul is naturally Pagan. And thus he has a conclusion: we humans will return to Paganism. The only thing Christianity had going for it was hatred, and that is no longer going to be there to sustain it. We'll ask the Goddesses and Gods to return to us. And maybe we'll even stop the bizarre Christian practice of burying the dead in broad daylight.

The other day, my girlfriend said 'You're always putting a downer on things!!', when I mentioned that the word 'mortgage' is Latin for death bondage (death bondage was the norm in ancient Rome, you see). But this was an insiders joke among Latin fans because words change, don't they?, and when I was a teenager, mortgages were short term things that you could pay off in 10 years and so the definition was different and nothing to worry about. Ok, but, erm, that was before the property boom of the 1990's which led to the crash of 2008. Since 2008, we are indeed in a 'grip of death' (another translation for 'mortgage') because if you do get on the property ladder, you will be old and very nearly dead when you pay it off! This is why my girlfriend told me off. If you like the above mental masturbation and nihilistic pyrotechnics, then you will love E. M. Cioran. Cioran has been called 'the last worthy disciple of Nietzsche'; but Nietzsche wrote for the 19 Century; E. M. Cioran writes for the

20th. He is a worthy successor to Friedrich Nietzsche. Highly, highly recommended!

Just one great idea. That's all we can really ask of any great writer/philosopher. Cioran's great idea was that it might just have been better to never have been born at all. By cherishing despair, he kept himself alive until he was no more.

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