



## Tears and Saints

By E. M. Cioran

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### Tears and Saints By E. M. Cioran

By the mid-1930s, Emil Cioran was already known as a leader of a new generation of politically committed Romanian intellectuals. Researching another, more radical book, Cioran was spending hours in a library poring over the lives of saints. As a modern hagiographer, Cioran "dreamt" himself "the chronicler of these saints' falls between heaven and earth, the intimate knower of the ardors in their hearts, the historian of God's insomniacs." Inspired by Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil*, Cioran "searched for the origin of tears." He asked himself if saints could be "the sources of tears' better light."

"Who can tell?" he wrote in the first paragraph of this book, first published in Romania in 1937. "To be sure, tears are their trace. Tears did not enter the world through the saints; but without them we would never have known that we cry because we long for a lost paradise." By following in their traces, "wetting the soles of one's feet in their tears," Cioran hoped to understand how a human being can renounce being human. Written in Cioran's characteristic aphoristic style, this flamboyant, bold, and provocative book is one of his most important—and revelatory—works.

Cioran focuses not on martyrs or heroes but on the mystics—primarily female—famous for their keening spirituality and intimate knowledge of God. Their Christianity was anti-theological, anti-institutional, and based solely on intuition and sentiment. Many, such as Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, and Saint John of the Cross, have produced classic works of mystical literature; but Cioran celebrates many more minor and unusual figures as well.

Following Nietzsche, he focuses explicitly on the political element hidden in saints' lives. In his hands, however, their charitable deeds are much less interesting than their thirst for pain and their equally powerful capacity to endure it. Behind their suffering and their uncanny ability to renounce everything through ascetic practices, Cioran detects a fanatical will to power.

"Like Nietzsche, Cioran is an important religious thinker. His book intertwines God and music with passion and tears. . . . [Tears and Saints] has a chillingly contemporary ring that makes this translation important here and now."—*Booklist*

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### Editorial Review

#### Amazon.com Review

Cioran is best known for epigrammatic little books of philosophy that reflect a dour, pessimistic view of humanity in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust. As a young man, however, Cioran took a more cheerful view of the world, tempered by his enthusiastic study of ascetics and saints. Here he introduces us to the religious ideas of the Middle Ages, to luminaries like Catherine of Siena and Teresa of Avila. He also invites us to open ourselves to the possibilities of such ideas. "No obstacle is unsurmountable when angelic voices cheer you along," Cioran writes, encouragingly. "One does not hear voices in the cool breezes of calm thoughts, and angels speak only to musical ears."

#### From Library Journal

In her lengthy introduction, the translator deems this book a "discourse on spirituality, asceticism and suffering for the love of Christ." More specifically, the author asserts that saints maintain a "will to power which reaps nothing but empty and cruel suffering." Cioran looks for a reason to become a believer by exploring the lives of minor saints but ends up interpreting their tears only as a sign of their penchant for suffering. Ultimately, Cioran comes closest to becoming a believer through experiencing music, especially Bach. First published in Bucharest in 1937, this work caused quite a storm because many readers considered it blasphemous. Perusing the text in 1995, however, a few decades after God was declared dead on the covers of popular news magazines, some readers may find the comments to be more black humor than blasphemy. Recommended for subject collections.?Olivia Opello, Onondaga Cty. P.L., Syracuse, N.Y.

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#### From Booklist

The Cioran of *Tears and Saints* will almost certainly be as incomprehensible to conventionally religious readers as Nietzsche; but, like Nietzsche, Cioran is an important religious thinker. His book intertwines God and music with passion and tears. Though the book was published in Bucharest in 1937, it has a chillingly contemporary ring that makes this translation important here and now. The translator provides an excellent introduction and an appendix that briefly describes each of the saints mentioned in the text. Cioran focuses on the mysticism of European women from the early Middle Ages through the seventeenth century. His account is a relentlessly political one, cast like Nietzsche's in an aphoristic language at once poetic and philosophic. Like Nietzsche, Cioran probes the human dimensions of a God known only as a "Universal absentee." In the process, he illuminates a politics of loneliness that is important not only for its contribution to historical understanding of Christian mysticism or as a primary document from the political turmoil of Romania in the 1930s, but also for its potential contribution--both political and spiritual--to late twentieth-century struggles to be at home in the world. *Steve Schroeder*

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##### James Pierce:

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