

CORNEL MORARU

Petru Maior University of Targu-Mures***Cioran – Breaking off Identity. A New Beginning***

*The paper attempts to focus on a deep modification in Cioran's thinking that is simultaneous with his decision of writing only in French. In this moment of linguistic conversion a genuine "identity rupture", also marked by a slight change of his name: from Emil Cioran to E.M. Cioran. In order to illustrate correctly this moment the author analyzes thematically the first two books published by Cioran in France: *Tratat de descompunere* and *Silogismele amărăciunii*.*

After the literary work of his youth, the so-called "Cioran's second birth" follows (Patrice Bollon), the author starting to write only in French. This is not only an act of abandoning oneself and abandoning a past that he wanted to forget forever. There is also a profound existential change, in the quest for the real identity – always deeply hurt and put to trial – in a method of expression absolutely *other*, that signifies for him a new difficulty and a new exigency of being. Beyond the tragedy of adopting a foreign language at the age of 37 ("*linguistic commotion*" as Gabriel Liiceanu calls it), it is the exact inner impulse that he needed that moment in order to surpass a crisis that seemed insuperable. Reaching a period of surfeit according to the old method of thinking, Cioran was conscious that only through another language "one can gather strength, can renew". When he tried in vain to translate Mallarmé's poetry, he came up against the expressive limits of Romanian language. Cioran chooses the French language after a frenzied five years specialization in English and in spite of the fact that he mastered German perfectly, that he had learnt as a pupil in Sibiu. That was a normal thing keeping in mind that he was living in Pascal and Montaigne's France in the past ten years and decided that he would never leave it. This moment meant breaking off identity and intellectual:

"Yes, that was the moment when I began to write *Précis* and I soon realize it is a very difficult experience. One can change the language in the 20'ies, but at 35-36 years old that I had ... I thought I knew French perfectly and it was then when I realized I didn't. But I didn't give up. I knew I was not coming back to Romania again. And I realize that, if one really wants to change the language, he/she has to give up his/her mother language. This is a fundamental thing. Otherwise it doesn't work. One cannot keep on speaking Romanian and writing French. It is an incompatibility. Passing to another language can be done only by giving up one's own language. One has to accept this sacrifice."¹

It was a sacrifice with happy endings that soon appeared. Now on Cioran not only writes in a new language but begins to write *differently* – totally differently from his former writings. Even the Romanian translations of his French books, from *Tratat de descompunere* (*A Short History of Decay*) to *Mărturisiri și anateme* (*Anathemas and Admirations*) show this difference. We do not necessarily refer to the style. If there is a problem regarding Cioran's style, this has no direct link to the language the philosopher uses. It is more a question of

¹ Gabriel Liiceanu, *Itinerariile unei vieți: E. M. Cioran urmat de Apocalipsa după Cioran (Ultimul interviu)*, ed. a II-a, Editura Humanitas, București, p. 94.

temperament and the intensity of ideas. The intensity remains the same, but the temperament disciplines itself in the new method of expression. Cioran admits that he adopted a language that did not fit him at all from a temperamental point of view (a language for lawyers and logicians, as he says). But this is the exact thing that totally changed him. It is the time when the fear of ridicule and improvisation increases. He understood that he had to be more cautious and careful to what he says or how he says, in other words to write more accurate: he rewrote four times his first book, the others at least two times. Reaching full maturity, he is more and more afraid of what he – truly – calls “snugness of delirium”. There are moments when Cioran begins to speak persistently about himself as the other, showing an extroverted nature. In the long run, the reflexivity relies on a kind of super-ego (the ego’s ego, as he says somewhere). It is more like an impersonal ego than a profound one, analyzed by some critics. Furthermore the main issue is “how to escape the absoluteness that represents you?” Convinced that such a change is not entirely possible and also convinced of the failure of philosophy generally speaking (both “the concept” or “the ecstasy” does not seem to him anymore current and the great systems are nothing but “radiant tautologies”), Cioran adopts the method of an “emotional Eleatism”, seemed to come from Eminescu’s *Glosa*. Especially the aphoristic writing in the first texts published in exile soon brought him the fame of a master, an expert and a remarkable moralist (or “immoralist” as Maurice Nadeau wrote in a review to *Précis de décomposition*). The thinker astonishingly folds on the forces and intuitive energies of the new language that he awakens in a creative way. But he does not have too great illusions. He is aware of the fact that we live in a “pleonastic universe where the questions and the answers are equivalent”. No matter which are the themes and the ideas, the instinct of a metaphysician does not leave him. “The emotional Eleatism” corresponds to a method of dense, unmistakable writing: that *écriture* for which only the new language could give prestige. All these point to an author to whom one cannot “put a label”. His books keep on being some existential experiences in the right sense of the word. The only urge is to think together with Cioran (and even against him), on a continuous reflection that has as main goal awakening to consciousness. In opposition to the lyricism present in Romanian writings, now one can feel a huge effort of purification and ascesis of language. From a while, the man himself gave those who knew him the impression that he is quasi-timeless², as well as his works.

Thus the work in its final form gives the strong impression of a thematic unity. The outstanding *A Short History of Decay* represents a new starting point, but also the concise synthesis of an already formed thinking. The same questions and revelations will be resumed and enhanced forever. But it is useless and this is not Cioran’s way to search for an absolute metaphysic principle to arrange them. The allergy to abstractions and concepts taken for granted represents the emotional issue where the work endlessly takes its “food”. It would be a mistake to make Cioran a systematic thinker who he thought he wasn’t.

Under these circumstances, the thinker does not refuse himself to any comprehensions and rational interpretations, in spite of the fact that we consider difficult to follow him on his own way. At least on a first level of reading, we can identify and describe the main themes and ways of meaning in E.M. Cioran’s works. These are circle-like routes, generally

² Cf. Patrice Bollon, *Cioran, l’érétique*, Gallimard, Paris, 1997, p. 14 and the next

redundant, but unconventional and always challenging. But we do not cherish illusions: a certain blocking is going to appear as much as we try to avoid it. In its intimate level, Cioran's thinking closes in a tragic space, without any emergence. Because it has no genealogy, it also hasn't the power to regenerate itself and to spread – beyond the already critic point – to other spaces of experience and knowledge. It is part of a horizon of agonizing eschatological expectation. This apocalyptic horizon of the existence beyond the existence and of the history beyond the history represents Cioran's transcendence. The entire self reflexive "poetological" effort takes place in the proximity of the radical evil, in the attempt stricken by a serious heresy to find the being's no return way of access and salvation. Cioran's "negative exercises" do not either take precisely to a place, to a haven, or stop at least for a moment, from their dash and desperate fury.

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Because we spoke about a new beginning, let's stop a little on Cioran's first books that brought him an unexpected prestige.

Paradoxically the breaking off identity (young Cioran's identity) resumes the old one, that with the philosophy, that was done in dramatic terms "after a personal catastrophe ..., loss of sleep". In other words, abandoning philosophy corresponds – especially now – to an overdose of consciousness, but also to a such intense lyricism that overflowed the limits of any knowledge. Young Cioran followed Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, refusing the thinking of a system or prefab concepts. But it is more than a refusal in his attitude; it is a revolt of metaphysic nature. The truth is that he had no choice. He finds himself convicted in front of the inevitable, the experience of useless sounding at the edge of the absoluteness. The themes of his work are themes of vivid thinking, of free existential commitment, an enlightened mind's themes who writes in a simple, natural way, with common simple words, as he used to say. Now, in the new Parisian context, Cioran harshly accuses the excess of technical terms in philosophical reflection. This is not the goal of philosophizing – to fabricate concepts that actually pauperize the spirit. Cioran always speak with a reckless frankness in the name of the lyrical and autobiographic ego, that he cannot ever separate from, not even in his late writings (in spite of the above mentioned impersonal instance: "the ego's ego"). This monologue does not have a beginning or an end; it is a performance of fervours and continuous verbal outbreaks. According to his sayings, it happened that Cioran wrote many books not only one.

This way of thinking, in a continuous ebb and flow makes the identification of themes difficult. However, there are some successful attempts of thematic analysis of Cioran's writings. According to Simona Modreanu, Cioran's fundamental themes are structured on "two great semantic fields – the divine and the human – although their interferences are permanent and multiple"³. Among all the following stand out: obsession of the essential (a super theme), Gnosis and the Bad Demiurge, Time and Falling into History, the issue of suicide, melancholy ("time becomes sensitiveness"), musical ecstasy, the ego's relations to the world ("the art of dual personality"). It is not a complete description, we can add many more. Specific for Cioran's lack of categorial thinking, there is a fluctuation of reflection around some obsessions that became real constants of the spirit from book to book. These

³ Simona Modreanu, *Cioran*, OXUS, Paris, 2003, p. 32 and the next

metaphysic constants – sort of inborn ideas of emotional nature – can also be called themes; it is not their existence that counts, but the strain they bring about: the so called devastating “Cioran effect” some exegetes speak about⁴.

In order to make things easier, we will say that Cioran’s every book is organized around a dominant theme. In *A Short History of Decay*, beyond the celebration of “breaking off philosophy”, the negative frenzy reaches all the forms of existence. The book should have been entitled – the author says – *Exerciții negative (Negative exercises)*. Cioran’s nihilist enthusiasm thus arrives to new extreme solutions. The theme of decline and temporal dissolution corresponds to a paradoxical principle of universal decreation, according to which the laws of life “are generated by decomposition”. This irreversible process culminates in apocalypse. All the existent ideologies, doctrines and religions (some “blood-stained farces”) are subdued to a merciless test of disillusion. Awakening to consciousness and the theme of lucidity keep up this, however, deceptive exercise of “defascination” as it will be called in another book. The man himself is seen as a supreme expression of the idea of exhaustion. This has to perpetuate his “calling to tiredness” and dramatic inner tearing “into nothingness or into the ridicule of being alive”. Nothing good waits for him in the future, he is a human being convicted to failure: “Man adventured outside the predestined roads, outside the instincts and he ended up in a blind alley. He burnt the stages ... in order to catch up with the end; animal without a future, got stuck in his own ideal, get lost in his own game. Because he wanted to surpass ceaselessly, he stood stock-still; he has nothing to do but to summarize his follies, to expiate them and to do some more ...” A whole chapter is dedicated to the “faces of decline”, another to the “second hand thinker”, obsessed by the “holiness and grimaces of the Absoluteness” (the title of a chapter) till the grotesque (a metaphysic grotesque). All these are nothing but variations on the same theme, easy to be traced from the first to the last page of the book: the theme of the world’s decomposition and its ephemeral nature.

“The anatomy of decomposition”, as Ion Dur called it, does not finish together with the *Treatise* dedicated to it. Here the principle of disintegration was only the subject of an ample self reflexive theme, in a more rigorous way than in other writings. In one way or another, the obsession of decomposing the Meaning will appear in Cioran’s next books. In *Silogisme amărăciunii (All Gall is Divided)* one can notice a change in register and tonality of ideas. Now the ontological issue of language and especially the style is in the foreground: adopting the aphorism as a genre of discourse and method of knowledge. This is how an exegete tries to define this new “technique of survival”: “Syllogisms are conclusions that listen to deductive method; they are in fact conclusive figures that infer the particular from the general. In Cioran’s work there are statements of aphoristic concision, always serious and somber, with paradoxical wordings that limit themselves to a single sentence, rarely more than three”⁵. The lack of echoes at the publishing of this book warns Cioran that he is in a “blind alley”. The aphorisms bring a dense thinking, but also a relaxing feeling of exhaustion and end. In its essence, bitterness is a form of surfeit. It seems that *All Gall is Divided* (1952)

⁴ Ion Dur, *Hârtia de turnesol. Generația '30*, vol. 1, *Emil Cioran - inedit. Teme pentru acasă*, Saeculum, 2000, p. 203 and the next

⁵ Richard Reschika, *Introducere în opera lui Cioran*, trad. de Viorica Nișcov, Editura Saeculum I.O., București, 1998, p. 56.

comes too early for what the others expect from Cioran, after a fulminating and so promising “début” with *Précis*. Jean Rostand was right in his review: “This book will not be understood”⁶. Its main merit is that it establishes the state of spirit in Cioran’s work. The theme of decline appears again, with influences from Spengler and Freud: “One thousand years of wars strengthened the West; one thousand years of <psychology> brought it at the end of the abyss”. Even more dramatic is the separation from Nietzsche, although the author self ironically mimics respect: “Adolescence indulges in juggling with the attitudes, and at the philosophers it likes the side of rope walker: at Nietzsche we liked Zarathustra, his pose, his antics of a mystic buffoon, a real *jumble of peaks* ...” Some other obsessions assumed as themes of reflection: suicide, the intellectual’s decline (that is the supreme decline of the man), ambiguity of faith (“Without God everything is nothingness. And God? The supreme nothingness.”), the issue of religion in modernity (“Now there are only theories ... Religion boycotts faith”), sexuality, music – to come in the end to the “sources of the vacuum”. Everywhere there is a bitter disillusioned irony, but with a tragic mysterious mainspring. The circle of loneliness becomes “circle of loneliness” (an entire chapter) through a paradoxical play on words, suggesting a possible method of intensifying the tragic through irony. Only apparently the register of these syllogisms is a minor, game-like one – probably because of the poetic charm induced by the aphoristic expression and “the easy weapon of paradox” (that once was used by the saints – Cioran defends himself). In an aphorism it is said that “the game of the truths should be governed by reasons of *euphony*”. This means that “style” and truth are the same. This is the reason why the thematic analysis at this level does not have a special significance: the themes are melting in the dominant state of spirit, following an attenuation of despair and fright through conversion into bitterness, doubts and aesthetic relativism⁷. The most substantial chapters, “The West” and “The Whirl of the History”, the only ones more coherent from a thematic point of view, are exceptions. They combine the aphoristic form of the discourse with the essayistic one.

The following books - *Ispita de a exista, Istorie și utopie, Căderea în timp* (*The Temptation to Exist, History and Utopia, The Fall into Time*) are essays. This time the themes are clearer and obviously outlined. The tendency towards objectivity is even more obvious although *The Temptation to Exist* begins in a “masked” monologue, “to think against yourself” – or maybe exactly because of this. Now Cioran wants to be “on the peaks of indifference” or the Taoist way of giving up, but *the passionate* who always survives does not leave him any moment of tranquility. He invokes the great masters in the “art of thinking against themselves, Nietzsche, Baudelaire and Dostoevsky”. But we shall speak about these at some other time.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Cf. Cioran, *Silogismele amărăciunii*, trad. din lb. franceză de Nicolae Bârna, Humanitas, București, 1992, p. 119.

However we shall not put an end to this before coming back to a fundamental theme in *Treatise* – “the faces of decline” – that defines one of the constants in Cioran’s thinking and announces again the great theme of nihilism where Cioran’s reflection gradually plunges⁸.

The truth is that the issue of decline was a constant obsession for the Romanian-French biting thinker and moralist; thus we can find equivalent reflections in all his books. Cioran’s nihilism often took extreme aspects. He was not accidentally invited to contribute with a text, *La Clef de l’Abîme* to the famous *Apocalypse*, published in Paris, 1960. In the text of *Treatise* the register of the ideas seems well-balanced, and the apocalyptic enthusiasm is under control. Rarely does he swell exceedingly: “I only like things rushing and crumbling, the fire that arouses and pines them away. The long standing world exasperates me; its birth and death delights me”.

Cioran defines the decline in terms that remind Nietzsche’s ideas about “decline” and “modernity”. Nietzsche always showed a special interest in “the symptoms of decline”, obvious in the conflict between Christian morality and existence without laws and norms. “Morality denies life” he says. Nietzsche believes that “trans-essential values” are not the real values, but only some semblances of these. Man has a great ability to self cheat / self deceive as he gradually loses his will of living. For him, Wagner – a “modern Cagliostro” – is “the great decadent” and Socrates “the first decadent” (as an involuntary forerunner of Christianity). But he admits that decline is a reality, the other face of human evolution. He says about himself, in *Ecce Homo*, that he is “a decadent and a beginning at the same time” and somewhere else: “a decadent who defeated himself”. For Nietzsche modernity is in itself a decline. It inherits the spirit of resentment, the hostility towards life from the Christianity. Modernity is anti-Christian only at the surface.

Cioran has similar opinions. He starts from the critique of Alexandrianism, with examples from old civilizations, especially the Roman, but he also insistently and caustically refers to twilight of modern European values. In his eyes the phenomenon takes metaphysical proportions as the decline seemed to infest the root of life itself. The conscience falsifies the instincts and the reign of lucidity ends in a bad way for the human being, in *abstraction* and *complexes* of all types. Moreover, in modern times, one of the most absurd aspects of nihilism appeared: “the nihilism of gorging” by favouring the pleasure of the senses too much. The human being has an inborn propensity to tiredness more than the species that he belongs to and that he unconsciously betrays. He is a hopelessly ill person. The entire European man’s route is an involution from “*Iliad* to psychopathology”. The appearance and triumph of Christianity enhanced more and more the separation between life and spirit. Harsh words, that we almost could not dare to write, are addressed to Holy Fathers of the Church or to emperor Justinian who ordered to close the Philosophic School in Athens: “It is the most painful moment in the history of Doubt”. Cioran mostly deplores the absence of any transcendent or immanent meaning in history and he sadly reveals only “the mingling between waltz and slaughter-house that makes and stimulates its becoming”. The moralist’s last verdict leaves no possibility of salvation: “We are more rotten than every era, more depraved than any empire”. The future will be the same: “future itself is a cemetery, a virtual cemetery, as everything that

⁸ Cioran, *Tratat de descompunere*, în românește de Irina Mavrodin, Editura Humanitas, București, 1992, pp. 169 – 188.

one expects to be”. Not even the survivors of the impending cataclysm that is waiting for us will ever find the tranquillity: they “will carry on their miserable lives, subhuman race, slick gents of apocalypse”. As usually Cioran’s nihilist attitude reaches the deepest levels of negativism. The moralist himself seems to feel good in his role of “funeral sophist” and thinks of himself as “the real herald”, that is “the one who announces the Chaos”.

According to Cioran, the language, as the reason and its abstractions, acts like an instrument of decline. The words, that subsequently become philosophic concepts (Plato, Kant, Hegel) reveals from the very beginning the direct, vivid contact with things. Man should give up for good his condition of creator in order to remove this cancer, as the mystic does when he accepts “the vow of silence”. Thus man’s disastrous terrestrial adventure ends – Cioran asserts slightly pompous. And as the man is the most recent creature of all, it is obvious that he will be the one who first leaves the scene of existence.

We only spoke about some of Cioran’s ideas concerning “the faces of decline”. These are astonishing not only through novelty, but also through their intensity. They cause a real shock of conscience to the one who is not ready to receive them. The author has no problem in reiterating and the reader got used to such a redundant discourse. The cadence and rhetoric of the text, the abrupt ecstatic method of passing from one reflection to another is more impressive than the logic of reasons (renamed by us in discursive terms). As in a trance, the ideas – no matter how common they are – become *revelations* with a serious ultimatum message.

This ecstasy of lucidity is intended to be an exercise of “de-fascination” but the result is again the seduction with the help of paradoxes. Through fragment and aphorism, specific aspects of discontinuous thinking, Cioran – surprisingly – seeks the absoluteness. An unwonted mixture of spontaneity and perfection gives an unmistakable stylistic feature to his writings. Cioran’s “style” is not only an issue of language. One can add the frenzy and stunning variety of ideas to recently discovered power of that *écriture* (as a result of adopting another language). Thus Cioran is an abyssal thinker, dissimulated in a misanthrope who gracefully carries a mask of an aesthete of nothingness.

There is also a remarkable method in his writing and reflections. In the first paragraphs of the text he seems more aloof. He starts with the old eras of decline (towards which he shows a type of aesthetic complicity) while the analysis follows general, paradigmatic aspects. Stylistically speaking, Cioran seems to be under that “emotional Eleatism” as he called it in a previous book. As reflection goes on, one can notice a loss of breath. Interruptions are more and more often and abrupt, the text is breaking up, but on the other hand the moralist’s remarks gain incisiveness and receive the aspect of a personal humour difficult to be defined. In a certain point, towards the end, the discourse almost becomes confession, in a first person narration: “I can feel the age of Life; I can feel its old age, its decrepitude (...). And I can feel the species’ entire pressure and I assumed its entire loneliness” etc.

Being celebrated at the publishing of *A Short History of Decay* (1949) as the real philosopher of nothingness and absurd, Cioran certifies, through his obsessions and humour, the uncertainty of European spirit of the time, in an unprecedented panic of all values (compromised by war and Holocaust). Although the moralist does not have an assertive

discourse, the text on decay has to be read as a reflection towards the – more or less guilty – conscience of this devastating crisis, without a key. It becomes clear that in Cioran's work there are no neuter ideas, only *experiences* of a total existential commitment.