IDEOLOGICAL MISTAKES OF LOUIS FERDINAND CÉLINE AND EMIL CIORAN

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Abstract: 2011 was a year of reference for both Emil Cioran and Louis Ferdinand Céline. We celebrated the centenary of the Romanian philosopher who chose to exile himself in Paris and also the 50-year anniversary of Céline's death. In fact, we witnessed controversial issues in France linked to the question of whether we should include the 50th anniversary of the death of Céline among the official commemorations of 2011. While Cioran has been forgiven for having supported the Romanian far right (the Iron Guard), some French intellectuals cannot forgive Céline for his collaboration with Nazi Germany during the Second World War. In fact, the anti-Semitic rage of both Cioran and Céline cannot be ignored. Cioran and Céline gave up defending their political ideas after the defeat of Germany. But, while Cioran produced a new text on Jews in 1956, this time extremely laudatory, the extermination of Jews left Céline cold, and it is perhaps this aspect that makes him rather unique among the writers of the interwar period who were influenced by Nazi philosophy.

Keywords: Louis-Ferdinand Céline, Emil Cioran, Fascism, anti-Semitism, Iron Guard

1. Philosophers in Support of The Fascist Doctrine

The period between the two world wars was marked in Europe by writers' hesitation to choose between the nationalist revolt of Germany and the philosophy of Hitler on one side and Stalinist brutality and the ideological thirst of the Russian nation on the other.

Awareness of murders committed by adherents of Nazism was a process that took time. People realized very late that there was a relation of immediate causality between the economic crisis of the 1930s and the expansion of the national socialists. The genocide against Jews contributed to the awakening of the collective consciousness concerning the atrocities generated by the Second World War and engendered collective hate against writers supportive of Nazism.

The economic crisis of the 1930s accentuated unemployment, which then affected a quarter of Germans. Georges Bensoussan, a French historian of Moroccan origin known for writings such as *Histoire de la Shoah* [1], thinks that almost all German philosophy of the nineteenth century was influenced by pessimism and anti-Semitism. The fight against "the foreign element", the Jew, may be tracked back to 1517 with *Thèses de Wittenberg* (*The Ninety-Five Theses*), when Martin Luther opposed the Pope and the Germans began to believe themselves an elected people who must fulfil a mission on earth. From that moment, German philosophers started to accompany politicians in their elitist psychosis. The death of God professed by Nietzsche fuelled later racism and the ideology of *the new man*[2]. This

[1] Georges Bensoussan, *Histoire de la Shoah* [History of the Holocaust], collection « Que sais-je? » (Paris : Editions Presses universitaires de France, 1996).

[2] For the ideology of *the new man* as seen by Nazism, Marie-Anne Batard-Bonucci, Pierre Milza, (eds.), *L'Homme nouveau dans l'Europe fasciste (1922–1945)* [The New Man in Fascist Europe], (Paris : Fayard, 2004).

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philosophy animated the Bolsheviks, the fascists, and the legionaries (and the three ideologies behind these groups which were supported by a large number of young people). The ideology of the new man finds itself at the heart of any totalitarian program because it feeds the belief of the individual in the key role played by him in history[3]. Anti-Semitism was fuelled by the identity crisis of Germany, a country with a fairly old anti-Semitic tradition, but France and Romania were also considerably anti-Semitic. Regarding anti-Judaism, which feeds anti-Semitism, this stance was also defended by a large number of well-known philosophers.

The nationalist philosophy of Hitler received support from Nietzsche's sister, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche. She was responsible for the falsification of Nietzsche's important texts and also for the failure of those texts to truly reflect the philosopher's thoughts[4]. However, Nietzsche[5] was not entirely innocent. During his youth, he let himself be influenced by Wagner, though Nietzsche's anti-Semitic remarks are rather driven by the type of Judaism (lifestyle, tradition, etc.) that fuelled the existence of Galilees.

Nazi philosophy, which considered itself as spiritual, found therefore its sources in the philosophy of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and others. Nazism received from philosophers the intellectual justification it needed. Decisions made and the facts of Nazism were founded on the spiritual character of the movement, on the exacerbation of the emotional rather than of the rational, a situation with which Cioran disagreed. For him, Nazism and Bolshevism were characterized by a lack of spirituality, which he found instead in the ideology of the Iron Guard. Many Western thinkers consider the rise of Nazism to reflect a spiritual crisis[6], a regression to primary instincts. In fact, Nazism managed to turn the spiritual character in its favour using theological arguments.

Nazism opposed Judaism with positive Christianity, a religion of love. In this context, the mandatory nature of law, which falls from top to bottom, must be deleted and replaced by the love that moves in the opposite direction, from bottom to top. Nazism pretended to base itself on a positive Christianity[7], considered as a struggle against Catholicism and Protestantism. Nevertheless, Nazism ended up by making use of assassinations. The idea of death and sacrifice was imposed by Nazism in order to align with the urge to change Germany, a country plagued by mass poverty and disillusioned with the democratic system. In France and Romania before the 1930s, we can also see a clear separation between political and philosophical commitments of young intellectuals as well as a conflict between the young generation and the old. After the 1930s, German writers started to engage in political

[3] A very complete study is the one coordinated by Jean Clair, *Les Années 1930: La fabrique de "l'Homme nouveau"* [The 1930s: The Making of "The New Man"], (Paris: Gallimard, 2008).

[4] Only Franz Overbeck, professor of theology at the University of Bâle and friend of Nietzsche, opposed Elisabeth. But, the opinions of Overbeck would be confirmed only after the crash of the Reich. Later on, the German philosopher Karl Schlechta would furnish some explanations in *Le Cas Nietzsche* [Nietzsche's Case], (Paris: Gallimard, 1960) (translation in French by A. Creuroy).

[5] Nietzsche's rehabilitation was done by a very important corpus of translators and philosophers such as Walter Kaufmann and Yirmayihu Yovel in *Les Juifs selon Hegel et Nietzsche* [Jews according to Hegel and Nietzsche], translation in French by S. Courtine-Denamy, (Paris : Seuil, 2000).

[6] See, for example, George L. Mosse, *Les racines intellectuelles du Troisième Reich: La crise de l'idéologie allemande* [The intellectual roots of the Third Reich: The Crisis of German Ideology], (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, Mémorial de la Shoah, 2006).

[7] Positive Christianity was defined by one of the main ideologues of the Nazi Party, Alfred Rosenberg, who wrote in *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, [The Myth of the 20th Century], (München: Hoheneichen-Verlag, 1943) that positive Christianity wanted to eliminate the Jewish roots of Christianity. It is about a kind of "racial revolution" envisaged by Nazism. See, Peter Viereck, *Metapolitics: From Wagner and the German Romantics to Hitler*, (New Brunswick : Transaction Publishers, 2004).

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struggles and a philosophical justification always accompanied their decisions. The same was the case in all of impoverished Europe.

Nazism found its legitimacy through the support of many philosophers and writers. One of the most famous supporters was the German philosopher Heidegger, who had published some ultra-nationalist texts and dedicated quite important lines to the theme of death as a necessary sacrifice. The same was done by "the young generation" in Romania between the two world wars. But, Heidegger did not have the courage to defend his totalitarian ideas until the end. Moreover, all the intellectuals who supported national socialist doctrines rejected them quickly once the war was lost by Germany and a fortiori once the genocide against the Jews was made public.

2. The Historical and Ideological Context of Céline and Cioran in the 1930s in France and Romania

2.1. The example of France

France ended up quite fragile after the Great War. According to Alan Riding, "while the Soviet Union gave birth to Stalin, Italy to Mussolini and Germany to Hitler, France had no less than thirty-four governments between November 1918 and June 1940"[8]. Disastrous French politics fed extremism. We also agree with Alan Riding, who believes that the decline of France started with the 1789 Revolution. Also, the anti-Semitic wave, which covered Europe in the twentieth century, did not leave the French people indifferent. The Dreyfus Affair divided writers into supporters and detractors. Among the anti-Dreyfus writers, we enumerate Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras, who greatly influenced French writers in the 1930s.

Among the French population, fascism was encouraged by the increase in the Jewish population of foreign immigrants who were not received well by the rich French Jews or by the French in general who came to consider every Jew as a foreigner. This uncertain atmosphere was also maintained by the French political parties, which oscillated continuously between left and right. Jacques Doriot founded Le Parti populaire français (The French Popular Party) in 1936, which, after celebrating the Vichy regime, began to support Nazi Germany. Le Rassemblement national populaire (The National People's Rally), established in 1941 by Marcel Déat, also worshiped Nazism and found itself in competition with Doriot's party. On the other hand, François de la Rocque launched Le Parti social français (The French Social Party) in 1936, which has never collaborated with the Nazis. The election of Léon Blum in May 1936 at the head of Front populaire de gauche (The Left Popular Front) attracted the fury of the far right[9] as it found it itself governed by a Jew.

An extremely important role in the maintenance of anti-Semitism and inoculation of love for Fascism was played by the "nice" Otto Abetz, who quickly converted many writers such as Drieu la Rochelle, Robert Brasillach, Jacques Benoist-Méchin, and Louis-Ferdinand Céline. Regarding the spread of communism, it fell under the responsibility of Wili Munzenberg, "founding member of the German Communist Party, Comintern ex-agent in Paris and in various cities from Western Europe after 1933"[10]. When France fell under

[8] Alan Riding, *La vie culturelle à Paris sous l'Occupation. Et la fête continue* [*And the Show Went On: Cultural Life in Nazi-occupied Paris*], translation in French by Gérard Meudal, (Paris : Plon, 2012), p. 28.

[9] In the 1930s, the far right, supported mainly by young people who clearly demonstrated anti-Semitic feelings, was prominent, as in Romania, where the Iron Guard took advantage of the weakness of the youth to gain popularity.

[10] Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, *Journal 1939–1945* [Journal…], (Paris : Gallimard, 1992), p. 37.

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German occupation, the war of ideologies stopped abruptly, but not the war between writers, now divided between writers supportive of the Resistance and collaborationist writers.

The Vichy regime pushed even further into the abyss "the Jewish problem" and took anti-Semitic measures on its own initiative without being encouraged by Germany. The isolation of Jews from cultural, political, and economic life envisaged by the Nazis received the support of the Vichy regime and was tacitly accepted by an indifferent French population. The Germans, through the *Propaganda-Abteilung*, financed some newspapers in charge of denouncing Jews, such as *Gringoire*, *L'Appel*, *Au pilori*, and *Je suis partout*. These newspapers were, however, managed by French writers such as Robert Brassillach at the head of *Je suis partout* and Alphonse de Châteaubriant at the head of *La Gerbe* who openly declared their Nazi sympathy and anti-Semitism.

The Vichy regime took the responsibility of deporting thousands of French Jewish men, women, and children. In March 1941, a service devoted to Jewish affairs was created under the name of Commission générale aux Questions juives (The General Commission for Jewish Affairs). In addition, notes Alan Riding, "Vichy did nothing to alleviate poverty and hunger that led to the deaths of at least three thousand Jews in the French internment camps"[11] although newspapers already informed people at the time about the horrors of Auschwitz.

2.2. The case of Romania

Modern Romania between unification (1918) and the establishment of communism, passed, in a very short period of time, from democracy to royal dictatorship, then to Antonescu's dictatorship and to far right nationalism, before definitely plunging to the far left. There was a real concentration of ideologies and government policies, which made the country unstable internationally. As in France, writers found themselves bewildered by such a concentration of doctrines.

Interwar Romanian liberalism had very strong inflections of dirigisme. In 1923, Partidul Liberal (The Liberal Party) voted for a new constitution, which gave equal rights to all minorities, Jews included, a decision, which had negative consequences on the domestic political scene. The introduction of universal suffrage gave all individuals, regardless of their ethnicity, the right to benefit equally from private property, education, and many economic advantages. At the same time, the line between democracy and totalitarianism became very easy to surpass because of the difficulty of managing the problem of Jewish rights as Jews access to the electoral arena was suddenly facilitated.

What started as authoritarianism turned rapidly into totalitarianism, encouraged by the propitious European context, by the erroneous approach to Germany (stimulated by both King Carol II and Marshal Ion Antonescu), by the extent of unemployment, and also by anti-Semitism. The historical conditions generated by the unification of all Romanian provinces and by the fact that King Carol II courted Germany in order to obtain its help so as to put an end to his self-generated domestic political instability created an environment favourable to the development of anti-Semitic reactions in a people who had never proved racial feelings before. After removing King Carol II from power, Antonescu chose also to sign an alliance with Hitler. Anti-Semitism had been thoughtfully cultivated by the Iron Guard, which invoked the poverty of the young, the increased number of Jewish students in universities, and the important economic positions held by Jews to the detriment of Romanians. According to the sociologist Ștefan Zeletin[12], the resentment against Jews occurred further back in 1830 when

[11] Alan Riding, *La vie culturelle à Paris sous l'Occupation. Et la fête continue*, p. 170.

[12] Stefan Zeletin (1882–1934) was a Romanian philosopher, economist, and sociologist. In his famous book *Neoliberalismul, studii asupra istoriei şi politicii burgheziei române* [*The Bourgeoisie, its Origin*

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Jewish merchants and usurers arrived in Romania with foreign capital and expertise, thus ruining traditional landowner families. Interwar Romania followed the German National Socialist doctrine, was anti-Jewish and anti-communist, aspects embodied by the Iron Guard. As with Hitler, the Iron Guard, in the persons of its leaders Horia Sima and then of Corneliu Codreanu-Zelea, hated parliamentarianism and argued in favour of the force of the masses. Hitlerism expanded because it benefited from the support of intellectuals in all fields: historians, journalists, philosophers, and others. In Romania, the Iron Guard was supported by a very large group of young intellectuals, formed by the professor Nae Ionescu and known as the "young generation", among which the most well-known are Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, Eugen Ionescu, and Constantin Noica. Nae Ionesscu played a very important role in the legionary engagement of Cioran, Eliade, and of more than 30 other outstanding intellectuals of the time. Nae Ionescu began to support the Iron Guard because of his hatred for and desire to have revenge on King Carol II as Cioran reveals in *Entretiens (Interviews).* Nae Ionescu's dispute with the King determined the shift of the "young generation" to legionarism. The Iron Guard received from Nae Ionescu the intellectual justification it needed. The movement presented itself as relying on Christian theology, on the belief in God. As in Hitlerism, the Iron Guard used assassinations[13]. It wanted to establish itself as a movement with a spiritual character, striving for "a spiritual elite". In his book *Pentru legionari* (For the Legionnaires), Corneliu Zelea Codreanu writes:

A movement does not mean a status, a program or a doctrine. These may represent the reasons of the movement, they can define its purpose, its organizational system, its tools etc. But not the movement itself. . . . To create a movement means, firstly, to create, to give birth to a state of mind, which is not to be found in the reason but in the soul of the masses. This is the essence of the legionary movement[14].

3. The Similar Evolution of Céline and Cioran

Even if the style of the two writers is completely different, there are a lot of similarities between Céline and Cioran regarding their evolution and their political ideas, similarities found also between the political landscapes in Romania and France in the 1930s.

The political context of the 1930s in France and Romania frames the political options of Céline and Cioran. Regarding Cioran, he was conquered by Nazi philosophy firstly because he found there some ideas dear to his favourite philosophers such as Heidegger and Nietzsche (even if Nietzsche's philosophical ideas were misinterpreted at the time). Céline, however, did not show as many philosophical inclinations as Cioran; Céline's preference for Nazism was to be found elsewhere.

Another similar feature between Céline and Cioran was their atheism. But, even if both Céline and Cioran were atheists, the source of their atheism was not the same. Despite a

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and its Historical Mission], (Bucharest: Scripta, 1992) he defended the role of the bourgeoisie in pushing Romania into civilization, fighting against traditionalist and agrarian points of view.

13 We can list some figures assassinated by the legionnaires: I. G. Duca in 1933, Armand Călinescu in 1939, General Argeşanu in the massacre from Jilava in November 1940, and N. Iorga, V. Madgearu, and V. Iamandi in November 1940. Once the national legionary state was formed (September 6, 1940) and once the legionaries got to power, the terror was installed among politicians of democratic parties, anti-legionary writers, and journalists. For more details see, René de Weck, *Journal de guerre. Un diplomate suisse à Bucarest (1939–1945)* [War diary. A Swiss diplomat in Bucharest], (Geneva: SHSR et la Liberté, 2001).

14 Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Pentru Legionari* [For the Legionaries], vol. I, (Sibiu, Romania : Totul pentru ţară, 1936), p. 310.

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religious education received at home (the father of Cioran was archbishop at Răşinari, Romania, the birthplace of Cioran), Cioran was led by an innate revolt against God. The intellectual training of Cioran, who graduated from the Faculty of Philosophy in the University of Bucharest, is to be found in his style and ideas. The religious anarchism of Céline, as well as of his writings, was not philosophical. A writer concerned with style rather than with ideas, Céline produced pages filled with the trauma caused to him by the First World War where he participated as a doctor.

During the war of 1914, Céline and Cioran were pacifists. They shared disgust for war and for the political involvement of writers. Both would soon move in opposite directions. The year in which their paths diverged was 1937. Both became controversial and worshiped dictatorial regimes. Powered by strong and almost mad loves for their countries, they showed this attitude in everything they produced. For example, consider the texts *Schimbarea la față a României* [*The Transfiguration of Romania*] and *Țara mea* [My Country] written by Cioran where he shows his hatred for the passivity of his country, Romania, and *Les Beaux draps* [Fine Linen] in which Céline reveals his disappointment provoked by the defeat of 1940. Both writers are angry and virulent even if they do not appeal to the same style. Both love shocking so as to attract the attention of their public.

In 1933, Cioran published an article entitled "Între spiritual și politic" [Between the Spiritual and the Political] in the journal *Calendarul* in which he criticised the involvement in politics of his generation. He declared himself against war and against aggression. Cioran did not participate in the war unlike Céline who returned wounded and scarred for life. Traumatized by his experience, Céline did not stop expressing his disgust in letters, articles, and other writings. His novel *Voyage au bout de la nuit* [*Journey to the End of Night*] was a cry against war, against forced heroism. Fighting for one's country seemed to Céline just a poor excuse to mutilate men.

At the age of 22, Cioran declared himself an expert in the problem of death admitting that nothing can justify life. At exactly at the same age, Céline returned to France after spending a year as a doctor in Cameroon, then a German protectorate occupied by the English and the French. He returned disappointed, showing again his racism, this time against black people. Céline's attachment to the white race aligned with his esteem for Hitler and with his avocation of social stratification.

Céline always insisted that his true vocation was that of a doctor as he had throughout his life a kind of attraction to outcasts to whom he dedicated *Féerie pour une autre fois* [*Fable for Another Time*]: For Animals, for the Sick, for the Prisoners. In all his works, there are references to people who are sick, who are preferred to those who are healthy and considered bad or stupid. We should notice also Cioran's admiration for failures, for beggars, for the sick, for the ostracized. Cioran's books abound in tributes to individuals ignored by society; with which he used to comment on life during his insomniac night walks.

For his debut in 1934 with the volume *Pe culmile disperării* [*On the Heights of Despair*], Cioran picked up the prize for Young Unedited Writers. A literary scandal came two years later, in 1936, with the publication of *Schimbarea la față a României*. A self-censored volume in a second edition appeared in 1990. This discriminatory volume was translated into French in 2009 by Alain Paruit. Regarding Céline, a scandal arose with the publication of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*, which had all the qualities to win the Goncourt Prize. Céline did not win, however, because of a conspiracy led by Joseph-Henri Boex, called Rosny the Elder, senior president of the Goncourt Academy, and by his brother, who finally voted for *Les loups* [*The Wolves*] by Guy Mazeline. The volume did not give Céline a prize, but the scandal surrounding it well assured him fame.

In 1936, Céline visited Russia and returned mortified. He realized that the system was fissured and the dictatorship of the proletariat was actually based on exploding man. He wrote

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to Jean Bonvilliers and Gen Paul on September 4, exasperated: "Shit! If this is the future, we must enjoy our filthy conditions. What a horror! my poor friends! Life at Gonesse takes a sort of charm in comparison"[15]. Communism caused him a shock. From this point, he turned into a writer of combat, warning of the Russian peril. He was convinced that Germany remained the best ally against Bolshevism and that Jews were pushing France into war. Cioran, on the contrary, appreciated all forms of dictatorship, Bolshevism included, so as long as they allowed national resurrection. Cioran's political passion is reflected in all his articles published during the Romanian period and in all his letters sent from Germany and from France to his colleagues of generation. Most of his articles appeared in reviews of the time such as in *Vremea*, *Acţiunea*, *Calendarul*, and *Gândirea*. Some articles are collected in volumes published in Romanian such as *Revelaţiile durerii* [The Revelations of Pain], edited in 1990 by the Publishing House Echinox, and *Singurătate şi destin, 1931–1944* [Solitude and Destiny, 1931–1944], edited in 1991 by the Humanitas Publishing House. To all his articles, can be added his incendiary volume *The Transfiguration of Romania*.

Regarding Céline, his preference for dictatorship manifested especially as a preference for Hitler's regime. He emphasises more strongly his hatred for Jews because his language is much more virulent than Cioran's. But, compared to Cioran who maintained a fairly continuous relationship with historical issues, Céline's relationship with historical issues is to be found primarily in his three pamphlets (*Bagatelles pour un massacre*, *L'École des cadavres*, *Les Beaux Draps*[16]) and in letters sent to collaborationist newspapers like *Au pilori*, *La Gerbe, L'Appel*, *L'Emancipation nationale*, *Cahiers de l'émancipation nationale*, *Je suis partout*, *La révolution nationale*, *Le cri du peuple*, *Lecture*, *Germinal*, *Le pays libre*, *L'Union française*, and *Le Réveil du people*[17]. These works are tirades against Jews, the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet regime, and educational systems in general.

At the end of the Second World War, a defeated and poor Céline apologized without making reference to the extermination of Jews, which he had encouraged. Several reporters questioned him. In 1957, Céline confessed to the reporter Andre Parinaud: "I was on the wrong side in 1940, nothing more. But, it's still stupid. I wanted to be malignant. I could go to London. I master English as well as French. Today, I would be beside the pawn Mauriac at the Academy"[18]. An elderly Cioran also tried to distract the attention of his readers from his former political commitments. Once having moved to France in 1947, the Romanian philosopher began to retract what he had written during his Romanian period. In an interview by François Bondy, we find nothing of his former sympathy for the Iron Guard: "the Iron Guard was a complex movement and rather more of a delusional sect than a party"[19]. Cioran denied that he was interested in the national revival stimulated by the Guard and in its inoculation of revolutionary feeling. Rather, he maintained that it was the metaphysics of the

[15] Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Lettres* [Letters], collection Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, (Paris : Gallimard, 2009), p. 378. The translation in English belongs to the author of this article as well as that of all the other quotations originally in French. We have chosen to present only Céline's quotations in French because of his slang, difficult to be translated. Here is the French version: "Merde ! Si c'est ça l'avenir, il faut bien jouir de notre crasseuse condition. Quelle horreur ! mes pauvres amis ! La vie à Gonesse prend une espèce de charme en comparaison".

[16] In English, *Trifles for a Massacre*, *The School of Corpses*, *Fine Linen*

[17] For the exact numbers of the newspapers cited, see Jacqueline Morand-Deviller, *Les idées politiques de Louis-Ferdinand Céline* [Political Ideas of Louis-Ferdinand Céline], (Paris : Ecriture, 2010), p. 187.

[18] Alméras Philippe, *Céline entre haine et passion* [Céline between hatred and passion], (Paris : Dualpha, 2002), p. 123.

[19] Emil Cioran, *Mon Pays* [My Country], (Bucarest : Humanitas, 2001), p. 148. Translation in English done by the author of this article.

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cult of death, which stimulated him. Regarding his generation, he corrected himself: "We were a band of desperates at the heart of the Balkans"[20], with a sort of Port Royal mission.

4. The Love for Hitler and the Anti-Semitism of Céline and Cioran

4.1 Céline and Cioran demonstrate their anti-Semitism

Céline is today noted for being an anti-Semitic writer and not for being the great author of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. This is not the case with Cioran, considered rather as a negativistic and pessimistic philosopher in line with Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. This is so even though in the fourth chapter of *The Transfiguration of Romania*, entitled National Collectivism, Cioran denies all humanity to the Jew, excluding him from the human condition. As with *The Transfiguration of Romania*, *Bagatelle pour un massacre* by Céline was a bestseller, which proves that the two writers opted for a sensational literary entry. We can better understand the thoughts of Céline and Cioran if we put them in the historical context that produced them and if we also think of them in contrast to many other French writers who expressed anti-racist sentiments such as Jean Giraudoux, Blaise Cendrars, Charles Maurras, Marcel Jouhandeau, Pierre Drieu la Rochelle, Henri Béraud, and Paul Morand.

If we also add to the context the controversial veins of Céline and Cioran, their rage which threw them into the arms of the radical far right, we are already much closer to a complex reading of the texts of these two writers. Despite this, Céline is still unique in European literature for his irrational, oratory, and violent style and for his abundant use of neologisms. Phrases that show a genuine hatred for Jews, fuelled by personal experiences, an exhausting style of enumeration, countless mistakes in French, a chaotic punctuation style, and a gruelling use of synonyms to express the same ideas, all make Céline a rather special writer. Compared to Céline, French by origin, it took ten years for Cioran to fully master the French language and his phrases are extremely worked with a strong philosophical content. Take as an example in order to exemplify the style of Céline and his virulent way of expressing himself, an article entitled "Céline nous parle des Juifs" [Céline is taking to us about Jews] published on September 4, 1941, in the newspaper *Notre combat pour la nouvelle France socialiste*. Here Céline declares: "Crying is the triumph of the Jews! Succeeds admirably! The world to us in tears! 20 million well-trained martyrs is a force! The persecuted arise, haggard, pale, from the mists of time, from centuries of torture"[21]. Céline does not hesitate when uttering insults against Jews: "The Jews racially are monsters, hybrids, . . . that must disappear. . . . In human breeding, these are, without any charlatanism, bastards gangrenous, pests, infected. The Jew has never been persecuted by the Aryans. He persecuted himself"[22].

In 1941, the year of publication of his third pamphlet, *Les Beaux Draps*, he shows even more his disappointment with Marshal Philippe Pétain, dissatisfied with the repressive measures taken against the Jews by Petain: "A hundred thousand times shouting *Vive Pétain*

[20] Ibid, p. 131.

[21] Louis-Ferdinand Céline, "Céline nous parle des juifs" [Céline is taking to us about Jews] in *Notre combat pour la nouvelle France socialiste*, September 4, 1941, as quoted on the site *Mémoire juive et Éducation*. Quotation in French: "Pleurer, c'est le triomphe des Juifs ! Réussit admirablement ! Le monde à nous par les larmes ! 20 millions de martyrs bien entrainés c'est une force ! Les persécutés surgissent, hâves, blêmis, de la nuit des temps, des siècles de torture".

[22] Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *L'École des cadavres* [The School of Corpses], (Paris : Denoël et Steele, 1938), p. 108. Quotation in French: "Les juifs, racialement, sont des monstres, des hybrides, . . . qui doivent disparaître. . . . Dans l'élevage humain, ce ne sont, tout bluff à part, que bâtards gangréneux, ravageurs, pourrisseurs. Le juif n'a jamais été persécuté par les aryens".

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is not worth a small *Vire les youtres*![23] in practice"[24]. He continues, "To recreate France, it would have to be completely rebuild on racist communitarian bases. We move away every day from this ideal, from this fantastic drawing"[25]. Céline's pamphlets are abundant with insults against Jews. The three examples here are written in a spoken French language style which is "filthy", even detestable, and difficult to read, making the text less attractive for the reader. It is very clear that Céline hated Jews for their important economic positions and for their social success. A morbid list of insults against Jews proves Céline's real resentments accumulated against them, but, compared to Cioran, Céline argued his hatred badly. Céline despised Jews and exhausted the dictionary of argotic adjectives when addressing them.

Cioran wrote two texts about Jews, which took two different positions. The first, in 1936 (*Schimbarea la față a României*), was absolutely incriminatory. He then praised Jews in the text published in 1956, *Un peuple des solitaires* [*Jews – a solitary people*], which was included in a volume edited in French, *La Tentation d'exister* [*The Temptation to exist*]. In 1936, Cioran was convinced that Romanian nationalism was based on anti-Semitism, that Romanians had to revolt against the Jews who occupied Romanian positions and who proved to have a kind of material instinct that the Romanians had always lacked. Furthermore, Romanian nationalism was thought by Cioran to be a messianic one. It had a dual aim, to get rid of Jews and to make history: "Our nationalism must revive based on the wish to revenge our historical sleep, a messianic impulse, the will to make history"[26]. Sometimes, Cioran wrote in a very resigned manner: "The Jewish problem is absolutely undesirable. It remains the curse of history"[27]. The presence of Jews in the world always meant the seed of dispute, but also the engine of a commercial society, a mercantile and capitalist one, thought Cioran. The philosopher felt, as Ștefan Zeletin had before him, that in Romania, capitalism had been brought in by the Jews, who always proved a certain brutality serving them perfectly in doing business. In a very naïve manner, totally deprived of economic knowledge, Cioran asked himself rhetorically why Romanian capitalists were not as good as Jewish capitalists. Cioran insisted on his invectives addressed to the Jews, writing that Jews were mainly responsible for such a weak national and political identity in the Romanian territory: "The Jews were always against any means to consolidate nationally and politically the Romanian territory"[28]. In his view, the Jews had always benefited from the protection of the Romanian capitalist state, because the Romanian state was, and here we find again the reiterated opinion of Zeletin, a kind of capitalist partnership between the Jew and the Romanian, the latter a kind of novice in the free market mechanism: "The Romanian democratic regime has no other mission but to protect the Jews and Jewish Romanian capitalism"[29]. The Jewish problem for Cioran is undesirable and unsolvable. In 1936, Cioran wrote, full of hate, that the Jew is first of all a Jew, meaning mercantile and mercenary. Twenty years later, in 1956, he pitied their destiny: "To be a man is a drama; to be a Jew is another drama. That is why the Jew has the privilege

[23] *youtres* in French is slang for *Jew*
[24] Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Les beaux draps* [Fine Linen], (Paris: Nouvelles Editions Françaises, 1940), p. 35 Quotation in French: "Cent mille fois hurlés *Vive Pétain* ne valent pas un petit *Vire les youtres !* dans la pratique".
[25] Ibid, p. 36. Quotation in French: "Pour recréer la France, il aurait fallu la reconstruire entièrement sur des bases racistes-communautaires. Nous nous éloignons tous les jours de cet idéal, de ce fantastique dessin".
[26] Emil Cioran, *Transfiguration de la Roumanie* [The Transfiguration of Romania], (Paris : L'Herne, 2009), p. 110. Translation in English done by the author of this article.
[27] Ibid, p. 111.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.

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to live twice our condition"[30]. Concerning the "Jewish problem", Romanians did not suffer from the obsession of turning themselves into a pure race by eliminating any foreign body, the Jew included. At the time, there was, rather, a sentiment against the Jewish economic monopoly, a sentiment that correlated with an anti-Semitic European political environment.

Cioran was born in a very unstable political context. The interwar period was one of the most effervescent and politically turbulent, but also flourishing, culturally speaking, periods in the history of modern Romania. The fights between political parties, the ideological varieties, social repercussions, and intensity of cultural productions all combined in an acidic but interactive reality.

4.2 The love for Hitler, rage, and the failure of democratic regimes

Starting from 1930, Céline approached the French far right. His sympathy lasted until 1944, until the defeat of Nazi Germany. Prior to this, he had repeatedly expressed his admiration for Hitler, as for example, in *L'École des cadavres*:

What is the real enemy of capitalism? This is fascism. Communism is a Jewish thing, a way to enslave people even more, absolutely evident to the eye. Who is the true friend of the people? Fascism. Who has done more for the worker? The U. S. S. R. or Hitler? It was Hitler. . . . Who has done the most for the small trader? It is not Thorez. It is Hitler! Who preserves us from war? It is Hitler! The Communists (Jews or those enslaved to Jews) think only to send us to death, to make us die in crusades. Hitler is a good breeder of people. He is on the side of life. He is concerned with people's lives, and even our own. He is an Aryan[31].

When Britain and France tried to avoid conflict with Nazi Germany (which threatened to invade Czechoslovakia) by signing the Munich Agreement with the German leaders, Céline remained very sure of his position:

I feel a good friend of Hitler, a good friend of all Germans. I think they are brothers, that they have every reason to be racist. It would give me a lot of trouble if they ever were beaten. I think our real enemy is the Jew and the Freemasons. This war is the war of Jews and Freemasons. It is not ours. It is a crime to require us to bear arms against people of our race, who ask us nothing. It's just to please the ghetto robbers[32].

Finally, Céline clearly recommended the alliance between France and Germany, thus turning himself into one of the first collaborationists: "I want us to make an alliance with

[30] Teşu Solomovici, *Romania iudaica* [Jewish Romania], vol. II, (Bucharest : Teşu, 2001), p. 337. Translation in English done by the author of this article.

[31] Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *L'Ecole des cadavres* [The School of Corpses], p.108. Quotation in French : "Quel est le véritable ennemi du capitalisme ? C'est le fascisme. Le communisme est un truc de Juif, un moyen d'asservir le peuple plus vachement encore, absolument à l'œil. Quel est le véritable ami du peuple ? Le fascisme. Qui a le plus fait pour l'ouvrier ? L'U.R.S.S. ou Hitler ? C'est Hitler. (...) Qui a fait le plus pour le petit commerçant ? C'est pas Thorez, c'est Hitler ! Qui nous préserve de la Guerre ? C'est Hitler ! Les communistes (juifs ou enjuivés), ne pensent qu'à nous envoyer à la bute, à nous faire crever en croisades. Hitler est un bon éleveur de peuples, il est du côté de la Vie, il est soucieux de la vie des peuples, et même de la nôtre. C'est un aryen".

[32] Ibid, p. 151. Quotation in French: "Je me sens très ami d'Hitler, très ami de tous les Allemands, je trouve que ce sont des frères, qu'ils ont bien raison d'être racistes. Ça me ferait énormément de peine si jamais ils étaient battus. Je trouve que nos vrais ennemis c'est les Juifs et les francs-maçons. Que la guerre c'est la guerre des Juifs et des francs-maçons, que c'est pas du tout la nôtre. Que c'est un crime qu'on nous oblige à porter les armes contre des personnes de notre race, qui nous demandent rien, que c'est juste pour faire plaisir aux détrousseurs du ghetto".

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Germany and immediately. And, not a small alliance, precarious, to laugh, fragile, palliative! . . . A true alliance, solid, massive, extremely hard! For life! For death! That's how I talk! . . . Together we will control Europe. It is worth the trouble of trying"[33]. This alliance should announce, as Céline advocated, the beginning of a great "Aryan" Europe, a kind of "confederation" based on the union between France and the fascist states of Europe. Céline did not feel much affinity with the countries that strived to defend democracy in Europe.

Even if Céline was not the only collaborationist among French writers, he remains quite harshly criticized for his anti-Semitism and pro-Nazism. In 2011, Frédéric Mitterrand, the French Minister of Culture at the time, took the decision to withdraw Céline from all national celebrations for the year. Many researchers opposed to Frédéric Mitterrand because they considered Céline's pamphlets simply grotesque, just producing an excess of "excentricism". In fact, Céline never worked formally with the Nazi regime, nor did he support the Vichy regime (as compared to Cioran who occupied the position of cultural adviser at Vichy between April and June 1941). It is plausible that Céline embarked on writing his pamphlets to regain the attention of the public, lost after the publication of *Voyage au bout de la nuit*. But, the Jewish genocide (which he was probably not aware at the time he wrote his pamphlets) provoked a turning point in history. We also wonder whether Céline's pamphlets would have been noticed by readers if he had not horribly accused the Jews. Because of his anti-Semitism, Céline nowadays occupies a conspicuous place in French literature.

Regarding Cioran, the philosopher supported the Iron Guard because of his despair to live in a very corrupt country with overwhelming nepotism. In this context, the promise of the Iron Guard to make a national revolution that would restructure the anarchical society seemed the best solution, especially because the movement promised Romania's reconciliation with God. It promised a doctrinal renewal that would come from existing religious frameworks. His commitment proved not to last in the end. Cioran's articles where he treats the historical ineffectiveness of Romania cover only the period between November 1933 and January 1941. The philosopher shared with the Iron Guard the idea of revolution, of dictatorship, of nation, of collectivism and of hate towards Jews. *Schimbarea la față a României* [*The Transfiguration of Romania*] is his manifesto against the liberal regime. At the same time, it shows his confidence in the spirituality of the Iron Guard. In 1933, Cioran confessed his sympathy for the Nazi regime, for fascism, and for Bolshevism. In a letter sent in December 27, 1933 to his colleague of generation, Petre Comarnescu, he criticized his country for its compromises and he considered dictatorship to be the only chance for his country to get out of its secular darkness. He reproached Romania for compromising, and he considered that a dictatorial regime was the only chance for his country to step out of its misery: "In Romania only terror, brutality, and endless anxiety could change something"[34]. Also, in December 1933, Cioran felt exalted by Hitler's movement: "There is no politician today who can inspire in me greater sympathy and admiration than Hitler"[35]. He undoubtedly supported Hitler: "Any man with a minimum of historical understanding must recognize that Hitler was a destiny for

[33] Ibid, p. 211. Quotation in French: Moi, je veux qu'on fasse une alliance avec l'Allemagne et tout de suite, et pas une petite alliance, précaire, pour rire, fragile, palliative ! . . . Une vraie alliance, solide, colossale, à chaux et à sable ! A la vie ! A la mort ! Voilà comme je cause ! . . . Ensemble on commandera l'Europe. Ça vaut bien la peine qu'on essaye".

[34] Emil Cioran, letter to Petre Comarnescu, December 27, 1933, in *Manuscriptum*, volume 29 no. 1–2, 1998.

[35] Emil Cioran, "Impresii din Munchen. Hitler în conştiinţa germană" [Impressions from Munich: Hitler in the German Consciousness], in *Vremea*, no. 346, July 15, 1934

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Germany"[36]. He was extremely enthusiastic about the Nazi political order. He supported the involvement of the youth in politics by sending articles to Romanian reviews, where he very clearly manifested his revolutionary feelings. Such articles include "România în fata străinătăţii" [Romania in Front of Strangers], "Impresii din Munchen" [Impressions from Munich], "Hitler în conştiinţa Germana" [Hitler in the German Consciousness], and "Revolta sătuilor" [The Revolt of the Satiated], etc. "What would humanity lose if a few idiots were dead?"[37] he wrote in a letter sent from Germany in August 5, 1934. When he returned back home, Cioran continued to publish articles in the same style. For example, in the article entitled "In preajma dictaturii" [In the Approach of the Dictatorship], Cioran showed that the Iron Guard promoted heroic death, a *desideratum* turned by the philosopher into a notorious goal. Cioran chose the Iron Guard for its irrational character, for the idea of heroism, and for the urge to revolutionize the traditional society, but he realized later on that the Iron Guard was not a completely spiritual movement, as he had thought at the beginning.

Although Cioran supported the Iron Guard in his articles, he refused to enlist and he soon chose the solution of exile: "What shall I do if I stay in Romania? From the moment I cannot get effective integration into the nationalist movement, I have no opportunity in Romania"[38]. After a short episode of exile, he returned to Romania to support the Iron Guard; he thus delivered at Radio Bucharest his famous speech *Profilul interior capitanului al* [The Internal Profile of the Captain], on November 28, 1940, the same day that Nicolae Iorga and Virgil Madgearu[39] were assassinated by the legionaries. Later, he deeply regretted his speech and all totalitarian ideas that he fiercely defended during his youth, things for which he was harshly criticized in the West.

Cioran remains a philosopher who was in love with his contradictory statements but unable to bear the consequences of his assertions. He was an admirer of vivid conjugations of words but nevertheless careful when his own words were turned against him. He always defended himself, writing that his nationalism and militancy came from the desire to do something for an unhappy country, his country of origin that he did not want to see lost. We wonder whether Cioran had a passion for his country or just let himself be attracted to the Legionary Movement because of Nae Ionescu and especially because of the socio-economic context of Romania at the time.

Cioran and Céline hated the democratic regime and encouraged dictatorship so as to put an end to the corruption that affected Europe in the early twentieth century. In Cioran's view:

> By giving all citizens the opportunity to participate actively, in a sense, to public life, democracy and its parliamentary system have increased the political pettiness and megalomania of each person. The result is that democracy has revealed a range of political skills, but across the globe, lead to just two or three political geniuses. A great political genius must be by excellence a dominator[40].

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[36] Emil Cioran, "Aspecte germane" [German Aspects] in *Vremea*, no. 314, November 19, 1933

[37] Emil Cioran, "Revolta sătuilor" [The Revolt of the Satiated], in *Vremea*, no. 349, August 5, 1934, p. 2

[38] Mircea Handoca (ed.) *Mircea Eliade şi corespondenţii săi* [Mircea Eliade and his correspondents], vol. I, (Bucharest: Minerva, 1993), p. 193.

[39] Nicolae Iorga, known as the greatest Romanian historian. Virgil Madgearu, known as one of the most important Romanian economists, leftist, member of the Romanian Peasant Party, and a notorious anti-fascist.

[40] E. Cioran, *Transfiguration de la Roumanie* [The Transfiguration of Romania], p. 281.

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He also writes, "the politician who, in a democracy, deifies money and takes his country for a trampoline, is not a dominator and has no mystical halo. Democracy is too rational and not mystical enough"[41]. Cioran demanded the replacement of the poor destiny of his country with an important international destiny; nevertheless, this replacement could be done only through a mystical revolt, proof of his legionary influence.

Cioran sent to Codreanu a copy of his book *The Transfiguration of Romania*, hoping the captain would love it. Céline also acquiesced to the desire that his publisher Denoël translate it into German (actually it was more a kind of interpretation that a translation). The text participated, with the consent of both the author and the translator, to anti-Semitic propaganda in Germany, but it was not highly acclaimed by the fascist authorities. Codreanu did not find either in Cioran's book the revolutionary accents he needed in order to promote his policy.

We are inclined to think that the decisions of both Céline and Cioran were rather literary gestures. Eager to get noticed, the two agreed to be part of national revolts without knowing where this would exactly lead them to the end.

Judged by history, both regretted their revolutionary impulses. Cioran's invectives were always motivated by the distorted European political context. This was not the case with Céline who hated the Jews, the Americans, the English, and the bourgeois and never got tired of repeating this. Céline's texts present no excuses to those who accuse him. His texts are exhausting because of numerous enumerations and their lack of punctuation. Cioran's texts are harmonious. If we read *The Transfiguration of Romania* or Cioran's political articles, we discover coherent parts of Romanian history, ideas and sources of Cioran's philosophical readings. Céline's pamphlets do not present a unified image of the history of France, just glimpses of it. Above all, they present Céline's rage. In either case, the two writers believed that their respective countries were the most decadent in Europe.

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[41] Ibid, p. 295.

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