

DISINTEGRATION OF THE FIRST-PERSON SINGULAR  
IN E.M. CIORAN'S AVEUX ET ANATHÈMES (1987).

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**Abstract**

Cioran's modest 146 page volume of *Aveux et anathèmes* (1977) is replete with first person pronouns, numerous first person possessive adjectives, and even the hateful construction, «moi aussi, je me...». The title introduces us to a world of intimate confessions (aveux), linguistic and stylistic frustrations, and numerous autobiographical anecdotes, narrated in the first person.

"Anathèmes," on the other hand, suggests the presence of a speaker who judges, even condemns our century, his contemporaries, and himself. The purpose of the paper is to reflect on the individualistic, novel, imaginative ways in which Cioran explores the use of the first person "I."

A modest proposal, but hopefully of interest to Cioran scholars, and Romanian and French admirers of Cioran.

**Keywords:** Cioran, Aveux et anathèmes, Romania, France, first person.

**Resumen**

El modesto volumen de 146 páginas de Cioran de *Aveux et anathèmes* (1977) está repleto de pronombres en primera persona, numerosos adjetivos posesivos en primera persona e incluso la odiosa construcción «moi aussi, je me...». El título nos introduce en un mundo de confesiones

íntimas (aveux), frustraciones lingüísticas y estilísticas y numerosas anécdotas autobiográficas, narradas en primera persona.

"Anathèmes", en cambio, sugiere la presencia de un hablante que juzga, incluso condena nuestro siglo, sus contemporáneos y él mismo. El propósito del artículo es reflexionar sobre las formas individualistas, novedosas e imaginativas en las que Cioran explora el uso de la primera persona «yo».

Una propuesta modesta, pero con suerte de interés para los estudiosos de Cioran y los admiradores rumanos y franceses de Cioran.

**Palabras clave:** Cioran, Aveux et anathèmes, Rumania, Francia, primera persona.

On May 15, 1871, the sixteen-year old Jean Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891) wrote the now famous "Lettre du voyant" in which he announced to his friend, Demy, that "Je est un autre" (Rimbaud 345). What appears at first sight to be a grammatical error (je est vs. je suis) is in fact a new dramatic way of representing the first person "I." In the "Bateau Ivre" or Drunken Boat by Rimbaud, the "I" not only describes an unusual poetic experience, it also becomes the protagonist of the poem. The "I" is the drunken boat that lives, feels and narrates its adventures.

Closer to us, E.M. Cioran proposes something even more enigmatic. He begins by saying: "Je suis distinct de toutes mes sensations," I am distinct from all my sensations; he then adds, "Je n'arrive pas à comprendre comment. Je n'arrive même pas à comprendre qui les éprouve," I can't understand how. I can't even understand who feels them, and he concludes, with a startling question, "Et d'ailleurs qui est ce je au début des trois propositions?" And besides, who is this "I" at the beginning of the three statements." (*Aveux et Anathèmes* 12. All translations are mine).

At first sight, the statement suggests a total alienation of the "I." But a closer reading shows the passage to be a lucid reflection on the part of the speaker. He differentiates between the "I" who speaks and the "I" who has just spoken, the "I" who feels and the "I" who writes. This separation of the speaker from his feelings and actions results in fragmentation, which, in turn, agrees with what Cioran has been saying in his works. He speaks of disaggregation (fragmentation) of time, of history and literature, as in

a novel for instance. The fragmentation which surrounds us, and Cioran's sensitive awareness of it, is one reason which helps explain his preference for the short genre and the aphorism.

The above question, "Et d'ailleurs qui est ce "je" au début des trois propositions?" points to a serious crisis of identity. If Cioran has problems in identifying who the "I" is, then his reader faces an even greater challenge. The difficulty increases when Cioran resorts to a more abstract style, one that creates a false impression of detachment. For instance, he multiplies infinitives and avoids subject pronouns, as a way to conceal his presence, his "I". It remains to be seen whether he actually succeeds.

In his essay on "Montesquieu et le pronom je," Charles Beyer studies the first-person pronoun and its possessives "me, ma, mes." Beyer found only four cases of the "I" and its possessives in *L'Esprit des lois* (1748), and in those rare cases Montesquieu "takes full responsibility for all his affirmations"<sup>1</sup>. By contrast, Cioran's very modest one hundred forty-page volume of *Aveux et anathèmes* (1987) is replete with first person pronouns, its matching possessive adjectives, and he even uses the extreme form of the hateful construction, "moi, aussi, je me..."

In the short passage quoted above, the "I" appears four times and this explains why Cioran's work seems personal, while Montesquieu's work, for instance, has a greater universal appeal. The title of *Aveux et anathèmes*, introduces us to a world of intimate confessions, linguistic and stylistic frustrations, and numerous autobiographical anecdotes. And yet, Cioran's writings, like those of Montesquieu, attain a universal dimension. The frustrations he describes are often those that many readers experience.

In *Aveux et anathèmes*, "plus d'aveux que d'anathèmes," says Bruno de Cessole, the first person "I" literally "permeates" the work, even when Cioran uses style to camouflage his presence, or to make it more conspicuous. He borrows Keat's identity, or uses collective personal pronouns (we, they), and even infinitives include the first person. The same is true for the familiar "tu" (the double) which serves as a mask. The third person impersonal pronouns, "on" or "il," produce similar effects. Such disguises point to a discrete game of hide and seek with the

1 Beyer, Charles. «Montesquieu et le pronom Je dans *L'Esprit des lois*. *Cahiers de l'Association Internationale des Etudes Françaises* 35 (Mai 1983). p. 221.

reader. By the same token, they endow Cioran's ideas with a deceptively impersonal tone, when for instance the writer adopts the "I" of a well-known literary personality and appropriates it: "Je suis un lâche, je ne puis supporter la souffrance d'être heureux"<sup>2</sup>. I am a coward. I can't bear the pain of being happy. The words appear to be spoken by Cioran, and yet it is Keats who is speaking. Cioran borrows the quote to test someone whom he would like to know better. "Pour pénétrer quelqu'un, pour le connaître vraiment, il me suffit de voir comment il réagit à cet aveu de Keats. S'il ne comprend pas tout de suite, inutile de continuer"<sup>3</sup>. In order to penetrate someone, and truly know him, all I need is to see his reaction to this confession by Keats. If he doesn't understand, useless to continue. Only a subtle interlocutor who instantly grasps what Keats meant to say will merit Cioran's continued interest. As for the reader, who also acts as an interlocutor and engages in a conversation with the author whenever he opens one of Cioran's books, he can freely ponder Keat's words at length without worrying about Cioran's inquisitorial stare or fear his expression of indifference should the meaning of Keat's words escape or puzzle him.

*Aveux et anathèmes* is a collection of very personal thoughts. "Aveu" means revelation, confession, or admission of a weakness or failure. "Anathèmes," on the other hand, suggest the presence of a speaker who judges and condemns our century, his contemporaries, and even himself.

The anathemas often appear as a compact and concise chapter heading such as "Cette néfaste clairvoyance," this ill-fated clairvoyance<sup>4</sup>. The speaker seems to be absent, and yet the word "néfaste" adds an eminently personal touch to the notion of clairvoyance, which is perceived here in a negative light. Elsewhere, Cioran takes pride in making clairvoyance his trade mark. Uttered almost in exasperation, clairvoyance betrays Cioran's fascination with certain words and his love/hate relationship with them.

In a passage, dated with meticulous precision December 11, 1963, the second-person pronoun "tu" introduces a certain ambiguity: "Tu n'as

2 Cioran, E.M. *Aveux et anathèmes*. Gallimard, Arcades, 1987. p. 13.

3 *Ibid.* p. 13.

4 *Ibid.* p. 123.

pas besoin de finir sur la croix, car tu es né crucifié”<sup>5</sup>, you don’t have to finish on the Cross, for you were born crucified. Cioran is conversing with himself, but by using the familiar “tu” (you) instead of the “I,” he opens the dialogue to include other speakers and readers. The date, December 11, 1963, refers to a crisis which once seemed so painful that it let erupt an “aveu.” Yet, when Cioran looks at the date from a distance, he sees the former despair as presumptuous or overbearing, “outrecuidant.” To add irony to the situation, Cioran feels humiliated when he fails to recall what had provoked the terrible crisis in the first place. He utters a futile wish: “Que ne donnerais-je pas pour me rappeler ce qui avait pu provoquer un désespoir si outreuidant”<sup>6</sup>; what wouldn’t I give to remember what had provoked such a presumptuous despair. The passage of time, and an unfortunate loss of memory, have stripped a once critical moment of its urgency. There is frustration, sadness and even humor when life’s most crucial moments lose their intensity and uniqueness and fade into oblivion. When this type of memory loss occurs, it exasperates us and makes us feel helpless and embarrassed, and at best, it provokes laughter and a release of tension. Forgetfulness may also be part of growing old. Many readers will recall similar lapses of memory and will understand Cioran’s exasperation and indignation.

At other times, Cioran takes front stage by surrounding his “I” with the ultra-hateful formula, “moi (...), je me...” as he says in his final and concluding reflexion, “Après tout, je n’ai pas perdu mon temps, moi aussi je me suis trémoussé, comme ‘tout un chacun,’ dans cet ‘univers aberrant’”<sup>7</sup>; after all, I haven’t wasted my time, like anyone or everyone, I too have fidgeted restlessly in this incomprehensible universe.

The surprises and contradictions in this statement include the first person “je,” repeated twice; it is surrounded with various possessives

5 *Ibid.* p. 121.

6 *Ibid.* p. 121.

7 *Ibid.* p. 146.

“me,” “moi,” “mon,” strategically positioned near the most impersonal expression “tout un chacun” (anyone), for greater contrast. The verb “se trémousser,” to wriggle nervously, to move about restlessly or uselessly, suggests that all human effort, including Cioran’s fidgeting, is wasted, useless, perhaps even incomprehensible like the aberrant universe in which we live. By comparing his own accomplishments to those of an ordinary obscure person, “tout un chacun,” the speaker implies that his achievement has no exceptional merit, when the time comes to face the void, “le Néant.” And yet, Cioran’s modest volumes, so eagerly translated into many languages, take the form of a lasting testimony of enduring accomplishments, which no doubt will project him into posterity rather than oblivion.

*Aveux et anathèmes* offers many autobiographical incidents, all narrated in the first person. They make Cioran’s presence more deeply felt. One such incident refers to cigarette addiction. For over thirty years, Cioran saw the cigarette as his idol. When he shed the vice successfully, it became “à tel point étranger,” so estranged, so remote, that he now perceives addicted smokers as “détraqués,” unhinged, cracked, and as “minuses”:

Trente ans d’extase devant la cigarette. Maintenant, quand je vois les autres sacrifier à mon ancienne idole, je ne les comprends pas, je les tiens pour des détraqués ou des minuses. Si un ‘vice’ que nous avons vaincu nous devient à tel point étranger, comment ne pas rester interdit devant celui que nous n’avons pas pratiqué?<sup>8</sup>

Thirty years of ecstasy facing the cigarette. Now, when I see others sacrifice to my former idol, I do not understand them. I see them as unhinged, as minuses. If a vice that we have overcome becomes so alien, how not to remain speechless before a vice that we have not experienced as yet.

Several “protagonists” or speakers appear in this passage: Cioran the smoker confronts his alter ego, the non-smoker, and both are different from the lucid writer and philosopher who comments on cigarette addiction, in

8 *Ibid.* p. 136.

fact on any addiction. Victory means overcoming an undesirable habit, but success creates a distance between the person who has recovered and those who remain weak and addicted. In this personal reflection on cigarettes, Cioran quickly switches gears by replacing the “I” with the plural pronoun nous (we). According to him, we, Cioran included, become startled when we confront vices, that remain unknown to us. The (auto)biographical episode acquires a universal tone that can be applied to a wider social circle: Cioran, other smokers, and by extension, society at large.

In another autobiographical incident, Cioran recalls a high school event. According to him, fifteen is a time when every discovery becomes an unexpected source of surprise, “une source d’imprévu.” Ironically, the wisdom that Cioran has gained at fifteen taught him that life is a mistake, “la vie est une erreur”<sup>9</sup>. His discovery acquires universal overtones when he applies this idea to fifteen-year old teenagers worldwide. The utmost simplicity, succinctness and clarity of language used to describe the startling discovery that life is a mistake imply an unusual intensity of feeling on the part of Cioran, that he had experienced early in life as a teenager.

Elsewhere, he recalls a visit in 1937 to a mental institution in Sibiu, in Transylvania. He was twenty-six when an inmate gave him a very sound advice. Why not commit yourself to an asylum, the inmate suggested, for the sake of safety and freedom from being drafted into the army, freedom from war and bombs<sup>10</sup>. The inmate in the asylum seemed so sound of mind that Cioran made inquiries to that effect. He was reassured that the patient was indeed, mentally disturbed but that even the mentally disturbed can think logically at times. The lesson to be learned from this anecdote, if any, is that lucidity and clairvoyance are not infallible. Even, someone as clairvoyant as Cioran, remains vulnerable and impressionable. Lucidity alone does not protect us from reaching false conclusions. Paradoxically, it demonstrates how strangely sound of mind the mentally disturbed sometimes are, they whose judgment we usually mistrust.

When in Romania he was between ten and fourteen, Cioran recalls

9 *Ibid.* p. 108.

10 *Ibid.* p. 108.

noticing in a bookstore window the title of a Zola work, *La Bête humaine*, The Human Beast<sup>11</sup>. The work had remained on display in the window longer than other books. The title caught his eye and became imbedded in his memory associating humanity with animal instincts, stupidity, and uncontrolled passions. The episode proves how persistent certain nightmares and obsessions remain. This one had developed early in life and continued to haunt Cioran in his adulthood.

In a romantic cliché reminiscent of the poet Verlaine, Cioran endows with poetic overtones an apparently impersonal statement: “Les dernières feuilles tombent en dansant”<sup>12</sup>. An unidentified onlooker sees the last leaves fall to the ground and compares their graceful movements to a dance performance. The scene leads him to conclude that “Il faut une grande dose d’insensibilité pour faire face à l’automne”<sup>13</sup>, one needs a great dose of insensibility in order to confront autumn. The impersonal expression “Il faut” suggests a tone of detachment, when on the contrary, the observer betrays a rare “sensibility” by contrast with the (in)sensibility of the leaves towards death as they lightheartedly announce it by performing a graceful dance macabre.

When infinitives replace the conjugated verb and subject pronouns, they create an impression of detachment. And yet, the statements often culminate in exclamation points, suggesting that a strongly aroused speaker is present: “Aux prises avec le papier blanc, quel Waterloo en perspective!”<sup>14</sup>; To struggle with a white paper, what a Waterloo in perspective!”

A comment that provokes an exclamation betrays the agony of the speaker, Cioran, as he stares at a blanc sheet of paper. In Mallarmé’s poem, “Brise marine,” a poet confronts a white page as if it were an enemy and a battlefield. Unlike Mallarmé, Cioran concentrates less on the precariousness of inspiration or the agony of writing, than on underscoring the inevitable failure of all literary effort, his and ours. Indeed, words are a writer’s tools.

11 *Ibid.* p. 104.

12 *Ibid.* p. 133.

13 *Ibid.* p. 133.

14 *Ibid.* p. 129.

Yet, they are anemic and emaciated, unreliable and inept at expressing ideas. Waterloo itself is an ambiguous symbol. For Napoleon and the French, it meant a humiliating defeat; for the Allies and the English, on the contrary, the word signified victory. Interpreted from an English point of view, the expression acquires an idea of success, quite the opposite of what Cioran meant to say, an exasperating contradiction, enough to irritate any writer or, for that matter, any reader.

For a self-proclaimed skeptic like Cioran, to weaken a solid conviction, one that has an air of permanence, offers an attractive challenge. Like a prophet, he proclaims that "Man will disappear," but he promptly modifies the statement to say that man "must" disappear: "L'homme va disparaître, c'était jusqu'à présent ma ferme conviction. Entre-temps j'ai changé d'avis: il doit disparaître"<sup>15</sup>. The verb "devoir" implies greater urgency but weakens the original statement. These nuances remain absent from the more common French form of «aller», used with an infinitive as in "va disparaître." On the other hand, "devoir" may rightly be translated as "should." In that case, other nuances come into play and weaken a "strong personal conviction," by introducing a greater pessimism on the part of the speaker.

On another occasion, in a sentence replete with infinitives, Cioran confesses that he feels emptiness and shame whenever he agrees to "étaler (...) ses secrets (...) débiter (...) son être même (...) raconter et se raconter"<sup>16</sup>, to display one's secrets (...) to speak of one's soul (...) to tell and retell one's story. He envies novelists and playwrights. They are able to transfer their innermost conflicts to their characters, and can rid themselves of their troubles and, in so doing, they become free. The work of the essayist seems much less liberating. He risks contradiction whenever he allows his personal shortcomings to infect his writings. In spite of several stylistic precautions such as multiplying infinitives, avoiding the first person "I," no essayist can prevent revealing his presence in his writings. And yet, Cioran contradicts himself by implying that the short genre, such as the aphorism, guarantees greater objectivity, detachment, impersonality, and

15 *Ibid.* p. 117.

16 *Ibid.* p. 91.

a safe hiding place: "On est plus libre dans l'aphorisme –triomphe d'un moi désagrégé..." says Cioran<sup>17</sup>. Here the "I" (le moi), explodes into a myriad of fragments and remains more elusive. While the aphorism offers a certain freedom to the essayist, it seems premature to claim victory. As a word, "désagrégé" (to disintegrate or break up) also includes its opposite "agrégé," implying cluster and unity. To a persistent and perspicacious reader, the aphorism ultimately reveals the elusive presence of the writer.

Cioran's reflection, "Avoir passé sa jeunesse à une température de démiurgie"<sup>18</sup>, to have spent one's youth at a demiurgic temperature, may well serve to illustrate the triumph of "le moi désagrégé." This short aphorism barely represents a fragment of a thought. The past infinitive, "avoir passé," makes it abstract in style, if not impersonal in tone. Yet, as the mature writer looks at "his" youth from a distance, he still betrays a passion that was once deeply felt by the young Cioran. This passion appears at the linguistic level as intensity (temperature) and at the autobiographical level as a demiurgic, or hectic and intense lifestyle.

Cioran the essayist is also a reader who now and then borrows ideas from other writers, and betrays in the process secret affinities as well as obsessive preoccupations. In a reference to Demosthènes, who is remembered in the dictionaries and encyclopedias for his forceful, simple and concise style<sup>19</sup>, Cioran underscores the manner in which the Greek orator had achieved his stylistic and oratorical excellence. "Démosthène," Cioran tells us, "copia de sa main huit fois Thucydide," and he concludes with a personal reflection: "C'est comme cela qu'on apprend une langue. Il faudrait avoir le courage de transcrire tous les livres qu'on aime"<sup>20</sup>. Demosthenes, Cioran tells us, copied by hand the works of Thucydides eight times. According to Cioran, this is how one learns a language. One should have the courage to transcribe the books one loves.

Cioran's reflection brings out Demosthenes' admiration for Thucydides, and by the same token, Cioran's admiration for Demosthenes and his deep

17 *Ibid.* p. 115.

18 *Ibid.* p. 83.

19 *Petit Larousse Illustré* 1983. Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1983. p. 1274.

20 *Ibid.* p. 112.

commitment to emulate the language and style of his Greek predecessor. This type of emulation does not come without challenges such as the arduous undertaking of copying a book no fewer than eight times. On the other hand, in choosing to leave to posterity this particular fragment, Cioran seems to express a secret and hidden longing: in our 20<sup>th</sup> century, could a modern Demosthenes appear, whose love of language, style and books might inspire him to copy by hand the works of his favorite writer? For instance, why not those of Cioran, he who has mastered the difficult art of the French language and is today one of the most, if not the most prominent French essayists of 20<sup>th</sup> century France? To attain such mastery, Cioran, like Demosthenes, must have literally “copied” the works of the French Masters. Yet, in the end, he affirms that “on n’imite plus que soi”<sup>21</sup>, we only imitate ourselves, pointing once more to the writer’s eminent presence in his own work.

In a note intended as a warning to himself, Cioran invites us and himself to mistrust thinkers whose mind is stimulated and set in motion only by a quotation: “Se méfier des penseurs dont l’esprit ne fonctionne qu’à partir d’une citation”<sup>22</sup>. Cioran suggests to mistrust such thinkers. Yet, he himself sometimes succumbs to this type of stimulation, for instance when he borrows Hamlet’s metaphysical query, “To be or not to be,” and responds without hesitation: “Ni l’un ni l’autre,” meaning neither<sup>23</sup>. He thus leaves the door open, or closed, to other options.

In reflecting on the fickleness of our mind, Cioran remarks that the mind is subject to many influences, including our unpredictable health and its whims, “lubies”<sup>24</sup>. Were he alive today, Montaigne would agree and would probably generously elaborate and amplify Cioran’s concise observation.

Cioran’s many preoccupations, his obsession with “douleur”, physical pain<sup>25</sup>, his “accès de fureur,” fits of furor (AA 105), his love for words such

21 *Ibid.* p. 139.

22 *Ibid.* p. 111.

23 *Ibid.* p. 110.

24 *Ibid.* p. 107.

25 *Ibid.* p. 106.

as “périr,” to die<sup>26</sup>, add an eminently personal accent to *Aveux et anathèmes*. His obsession with God prompts Cioran to utter ideas which could bring either comfort or anguish to his readers: “On a toujours quelqu’un au dessus de soi: par delà Dieu même s’élève le Néant”<sup>27</sup>, there is always someone above us; beyond God himself Nothingness rules.

In the relationship between Man, God and Nothingness, “le Néant,” only God (and Cioran) confront the immense Void. Man, on the contrary, looks toward God for comfort in order to bypass Nothingness. Cioran, no doubt, would object to such a naïve and easy interpretation of his thought of our human condition, but it offers a consolation, nonetheless, to those of us who are not as lucid or as courageous.

Another anecdote provides an insight into Cioran’s subtle black humor. On one occasion he intended to greatly flatter a friend by comparing him to God and to Don Quichotte<sup>28</sup>. He was surprised when his friend offered no objections, not even a trace of false modesty. His astonishment increased even more when later his friend expressed doubts about any resemblance to Don Quichotte, leaving God as the only other model of comparison. We can only smile at such an extreme vanity, which may be more prevalent than we suspect.

Cioran’s subtle humor resurfaces in unexpected places, for instance, in his admonition to pain: “C’est le propre de la douleur de n’avoir pas de honte de se répéter”<sup>29</sup>; its typical of pain not to be ashamed to repeat itself. The quote brings to mind Baudelaire’s admonition: “Sois sage, ô ma Douleur,” behave yourself my pain<sup>30</sup>, reprimanding pain for its childlike tantrums, its impatience and tyranny. As for Cioran, he scolds “la douleur” (pain) for its repeated offenses, for its bad taste in showing up time and again,” and for its obnoxious resurgence.

On another occasion, Cioran shows his affinity for poetry as he reads

26 *Ibid.* p. 105.

27 *Ibid.* p. 105.

28 *Ibid.* p. 103.

29 *Ibid.* p. 118.

30 Baudelaire, Charles. *Les Fleurs du mal*. Introduction, relevé de variantes et notes, par Antoine Adam. Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1961. p. 189.

Rimbaud's "Le Bateau ivre" to a friend. When the reading is finished, the listener reacts by saying: "C'est du tertiaire"<sup>31</sup>, this goes back to the Tertiary period. Hearing this remark, Cioran utters an ambiguous comment of surprise and admiration: "Pour un aveu s'en est un"<sup>32</sup>; that's quite a confession. The reading of the poem, the friend's reaction and Cioran's appreciation take place in a chapter ironically entitled "Exaspérations," a word suggesting violent irritation or provocation. Cioran seems to have mastered the art of releasing frustrations in the most subtle manner.

In *De l'Inconvénient d'être né* (1973), Cioran states that "Dieu est, même s'il n'est pas," God is even if he is not (221). Fourteen years later, in *Aveux et anathèmes*, he projects a new light on his obsession with God, the Supreme, the All-Powerful, an obsession that remains persistent and permanent: "Il faut avoir de fortes dispositions religieuses pour pouvoir proférer avec conviction le mot être, il faut croire pour dire simplement d'un objet ou de quelqu'un qu'il est"<sup>33</sup>; one needs strong religious inclinations in order to utter with conviction the word "being" or "to be". One only needs to believe to simply say that something or someone is. The statement makes it difficult to decide whether the relationship with God is due to "de fortes dispositions religieuses." What seems more certain is that one needs simply to believe ("croire"). In spite of the impersonal "il faut croire," the tone is forceful.

Whenever Cioran omits a subject pronoun or replaces it with an infinitive, the discourse acquires a falsely impersonal tone. Yet, even this betrays the writer's feelings of relief for instance, as he exclaims: "Quel soulagement que de jeter à la poubelle un manuscrit, témoin d'une fièvre retombée, d'une frénésie consternante!"<sup>34</sup> What a relief to throw into a garbage can a manuscript, witness of a decreased fever, of a bewildering frenzy. A destroyed manuscript is an inferior product that one withholds from publisher and reader. In a worst-case scenario, it deprives posterity of literary, artistic and/or philosophical testimony bearing on our century.

31 *Ibid.* p. 103.

32 *Ibid.* p. 103.

33 *Ibid.* p. 93.

34 *Ibid.* p. 90.

Like Baudelaire's "L'Etranger"<sup>35</sup>, or Jim Harrison's Nordstrom<sup>36</sup>, Cioran is a Cloud-watcher with a penchant for poetry, and philosophy. In a true "poème en prose," reminiscent of Baudelaire, we find traces of masochism:

Les nuages défilaient. Dans le silence de la nuit, on aurait pu entendre le bruit qu'ils faisaient en se hâtant. Pourquoi sommes-nous ici? Quel sens peut bien avoir notre présence infime? Question sans réponse, à la quelle pourtant je répondis spontanément, sans l'ombre d'une réflexion, et sans rougir d'avoir proféré une insigne banalité: C'est pour nous torturer que nous sommes ici, et pour rien d'autre.<sup>37</sup>

The clouds were passing by. In the silence of the night, one could hear the noise they were making rushing by. Why are we here? What possible meaning may have our presence? Questions without a reply, to which, nonetheless I responded spontaneously, without a hint of reflection, and without blushing for having uttered a trivial banality: It is to torment ourselves that we are here, and for nothing else.

The free indirect discourse, "Pourquoi sommes-nous ici?" The question, "why are we here," and the plural pronoun nous (we) introduce several ambiguities. Whose questions are these? Is it the clouds that speak, or is it Cioran in his own name or that of humanity? In a moment of solidarity, he seems to be the passing clouds to which he attributes his own questions. This is a unique chance to respond, and the answer is spontaneous: we are here only to torment ourselves, and one another, and for no other reason. The pronoun nous (we) is present in the questions and in Cioran's reply. It, no doubt, represents the clouds, humanity, and Cioran, who minimizes

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35 Baudelaire, Charles. *Petits poèmes en prose* (Le Spleen de Paris). Introduction, notes, bibliographie et choix de variantes par Henri Lemaître. Paris: Editions Garnier Frères, 1962. p. 11.

36 Harrison, Jim. "The Man Who Gave Up His Name." In *Legends of the Fall*. New York, Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence, c1978, 1979. P. 191.

37 *Ibid.* pp. 83-84.

his own role to that of uttering a “banalité,” (a triviality). Yet, this “banalité” contains an ironic truth, obsessive and persistent. The plural we, “C’est pour nous torturer que nous sommes ici,” conveys to the passage a universal dimension. It includes the clouds, humanity, and Cioran, who identifies himself with mankind, in a moment of solidarity à rebours, in self torment and suffering, which are never impersonal or objective.

Cioran often speaks of his sleepless nights that a martyr would envy, “des veilles dont un martyr serait jaloux”<sup>38</sup>, and of his attraction to other writers who suffer from insomnia and who dwell on their inscrutable nocturnal afflictions, “l’insondable de l’insomnie”<sup>39</sup>. We learn of his fear to go to bed and remain awake, without falling asleep, “ne pouvoir se rendormir”<sup>40</sup>. This inevitably happens whenever he wishes to infuse new vigor into the emaciated words. We share in his nightmare as he cries out, using a past infinitive: “Avoir soulevé toute la nuit des Himalayas –et appeler cela sommeil”<sup>41</sup>, to have lifted Himalayas all night long –and to call this sleep. He tells us that sleep chases our worries away, “le sommeil qui est l’antidote du chagrin”<sup>42</sup>, while insomnia on the contrary keeps an eye on our obsessions and our wounds, our blessures, for fear they might heal or vanish.

In Baudelaire’s statement, “Il y a dans tout homme, à toute heure, deux postulations simultanées, l’une vers Dieu, l’autre vers Satan,” duality in art seems to be a consequence of the duality in man. In *Aveux et Anathèmes* the idea of “duality” takes the form of a “désagrégation du moi.” Cioran’s *aveu* or confession is most often reduced to a few key words, to exclamations and questions: “Par nature véhément, par option vacillant. De quel côté pencher? Pour qui se décider? À quel moi se ranger?”<sup>43</sup>. His persistent questions point to the uncertainty if not downright impossibility of choosing an option. How can someone, vehement by nature and by

38 *Ibid.* p. 89.

39 *Ibid.* p. 87.

40 *Ibid.* p. 118.

41 *Ibid.* p. 88.

42 *Ibid.* p. 81.

43 *Ibid.* p. 126.

choice vacillating, choose between the various moi that struggle within us and tear us apart? “Déchirement” (torn to pieces) is a possible expression to describe Cioran’s state of mind.

In another autobiographical episode, we find Cioran portrayed as an “élagueur invétéré”<sup>44</sup>, a habitual gardener cutting or clipping branches. Cioran recalls visiting friends in the countryside, pruning a sequoia tree in their garden, and struggling with the branches. Eventually, his gardening labor ends in a fall, a chute, and brings to mind the fall from paradise and the fall into time, *La Chute dans le temps*.

Pruning trees and trimming branches results in healthier growth and stronger trees. Cioran’s agricultural activity easily transfers to his intellectual pursuits: as he writes, he trims sentences and cultivates the French language, which he has adopted as a means of written expression. Cioran, the “élagueur invétéré,” cuts words, trims sentences, and reduces paragraphs. The task is so demanding that it creates for the writer a true “cauchemar de la nuance”<sup>45</sup>, a nightmare searching for nuances.

The image of the eternal sentence trimmer is what an American psychologist failed to see when Cioran told him the story of his gardening misadventure. He gave a different interpretation of Cioran’s struggle with trees and branches. He saw it as an expression of Cioran’s hidden jealousy and resentment for the timelessness and endurance of the trees. In his opinion, Cioran took revenge on nature, using mutilation of the trees to compensate for his own advancing age and frailty.

Cioran’s stylistic mastery leads him to make his presence more or less perceptible. In order to track down the fragmented “I” in its disaggregated form, and reconstruct the intellectual (auto)biography, it is recommended to lift the layers of masks and disguises in search of the author. Pursuing the elusive writer has the pleasures and rewards of a detective, even if, in the end, success may turn to be only an illusion.

44 *Ibid.* pp. 102-103.

45 *Ibid.* p. 118.

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