

Viagens da Saudade

Coordenação

Maria Celeste Natário

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Organização

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A melancholic exile: Emil Cioran and the feeling of nostalgia

Abstract: This article aims to investigate the relationship between nostalgia, solitude, and skepticism in Emil Cioran's thought. In the first place, we will examine how the concepts of *Sehnsucht*, *saudade* and *dor* are interpreted by Cioran as similar forms of radical nostalgia. In the second place, we will see how the skeptical attitude of doubting reality relates to the nostalgic impossibility of belonging to reality itself. Finally, we will suppose that the metaphysical feeling of being isolated and separated from the world implies a skeptical criticism of subjectivity itself and a humoristic interpretation of existence.

Keywords: Sehnsucht, solitude, skepticism, Pessoa, humourism.

Um exílio melancólico: Emil Cioran e o sentimento de nostalgia

Resumo: Esse artigo visa investigar a relação entre nostalgia, solidude e ceticismo no pensamento de Emil Cioran. Em primeiro lugar, iremos examinar como os conceitos de *Sehnsucht*, *Saudade* e *Dor* são interpretados por Cioran como formas semelhantes de nostalgia radical. Em segundo lugar, veremos como a atitude cética de duvidar da realidade relaciona-se com a impossibilidade nostálgica de pertencimento à realidade em si. Em conclusão iremos supor que o sentimento metafísico de estar isolado e separado do mundo implique o criticismo cético da subjetividade em si e a interpretação humorística da existência.

Palavras-chave: Sehnsucht, Solitude, Ceticismo, Pessoa, Humor.

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This article aims to examine the relationship between nostalgia, solitude, and skepticism in Emil Cioran's thought. We will see how the concepts of *Sehnsucht*, *saudade* and *dor* are interpreted by Cioran as a similar form of radical nostalgia which characterized the melancholic feeling of having been exiled from both the world and the truth. According to Cioran, the skeptical attitude of doubting reality relates to the nostalgic impossibility of belonging to reality itself. This impossibility characterizes the condition of both nostalgia and solitude. At the same time, the metaphysical certainty of being isolated and separated from the world implies a skeptical criticism of subjectivity itself since the very idea of subjectivity presumes the harmony between subject and reality. The purpose of this paper is to understand how Cioran relates the fragmentation of the subjectivity to the necessity of being skeptical.

Loneliness and nothingness

Apparently, skepticism and nostalgia denote two different things: the lack of certainties, and the irrational certainty of having lost "something". In this sense, the nostalgic subject should regret what he has lost while the skeptic subject should keep searching for what he has not found yet. But could it be possible that the reality regretted by the nostalgic is the same reality questioned by the skeptic? And could the nostalgic's regret generate the skeptical desire of doubting reality? In this case, what should this strange connection between doubt, regret, and desire represent?

In 1936, in a text called *Cartea Amăgirilor (The Book of Delusions)*, Cioran writes that we are looking for «the Everything» since we have lost «something»⁷⁴³. In this passage, Cioran interprets the desire of the Absolute as a reaction to unrequited love, that is, as a reaction to sentimental failure: we wanted to be loved, we failed, and we discovered ourselves absolutely alone. Thus, we faced the revelation of our tragic solitude by looking for a place of universal harmony where nobody is left alone (even though such a place does not exist). It is a strategy of psychological defense through which a person tries to justify an experience of radical failure which provokes the destabilization of individual certainties. We could say that such a failure is a fracture, and that such a fracture creates an existential void: solitude is the fall into this void where the subject can perceive the metaphysical emptiness characterizing the essence of human existence. It is a

⁷⁴³ CIORAN, Emil, *Œuvres*, Gallimard, Coll. Quarto, Paris 1995, p. 139.

revelation depicted by Cioran as a mystical event as the perception of this emptiness paradoxically implies a «moment of plenitude», that is, the possibility to «attain to the “vacuity of the void”»⁷⁴⁴. However, love is not the only experience revealing that the whole universe is the place of a cosmic emptiness and solitude. According to Cioran, any fundamental existential failure proves the objectivity of this void and forces the subject to look at things in a different way. In his first book, *Pe culmile Disperării (On the Heights of Despair, 1932)*, Cioran states:

One can experience loneliness in two ways: by feeling lonely in the world or by feeling the loneliness of the world. Individual loneliness is a personal drama; one can feel lonely even in the midst of great natural beauty. An outcast in the world, indifferent to its being dazzling or dismal, self-consumed with triumphs and failures, engrossed in inner drama—such is the fate of the solitary. The feeling of cosmic loneliness, on the other hand, stems not so much from man's subjective agony as from an awareness of the world's isolation, of objective nothingness.⁷⁴⁵

Cioran observes that solitude is a process of marginalization of the subject, a process of isolation comparable to a metaphysical exile from the world. This exile has two consequences on the existence of the solitary. On the one hand, he can see things that others do not even perceive. On the other hand, and precisely because of this difference, he is not able to communicate his visions to others. The more his visions are unique, the more is solitude absolute⁷⁴⁶. Therefore, the strange privilege of his condition forbids the solitary subject from belonging to any place, that is, from feeling *at home*.

It seems that the solitary subject is everywhere far away from home. Thus, the problem of solitude is a problem of a «distance» which is not possible to overcome. Melancholy and nostalgia are two different ways of living this impossibility as they both reveal the feeling of having been separated from the Everything. Nonetheless, there is a difference. On the one hand, melancholy concerns the distance between the individual and his own Self, thus denouncing the anthropological difficulty

⁷⁴⁴ CIORAN, Emil, *The Temptation to Exist*, transl. by Richard Howard, Arcade Publishing, New York 2011, p. 214-215.

⁷⁴⁵ CIORAN, Emil, *On the Heights of Despair*, transl. by Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago & London 1992, p. 50.

⁷⁴⁶ On this point see: MASULLO, Aldo, «Cioran: l'ultima solitudine», in: DI GENNARO, Antonio – GIUSTINIANI, Pasquale, *Dio e il Nulla. La religiosità atea di Emil Cioran*, Mimesis, Milano 2019, pp. 107-116; DEMARS, Aurélien, «L'être et le néant de la solitude selon Cioran», in: DI GENNARO, Antonio – MOLCSAN, Gabriella, *Cioran in Italia*, Aracne, Roma 2012, pp. 136-141.

of being authentic. On the other hand, nostalgia concerns the distance between the Self and the world, thus showing the ontological quality of the solitude⁷⁴⁷.

By referring to a gnostic metaphor, Cioran says that we are alone because the world we inhabit is a wasted work of a Creator («the Evil Demiurge»⁷⁴⁸) which project his heavenly loneliness onto his earthly creatures. Even though God's loneliness is different from human loneliness (only the first one is supposed to represent a perfection), both God and the solitary subject endure the same impossibility of adhering to a world perceived as tragically distant⁷⁴⁹. Actually, the solitary subject knows that such a distance marks «a deficit of existence» and claims the desire to get back to his natal place and recover the original harmony with the world⁷⁵⁰.

This desire is called «nostalgia», and it is described as the will of healing «the *disease of the distant*»⁷⁵¹. Cioran specifies that nostalgia symbolizes the longing of being reintegrated

[...] in the original sources dating from before the separation and the severance. Nostalgia is precisely to feel eternally distant from *chez soi* and, outside the luminous proportions of *Ennui*, and outside of the contradictory postulation of *Heimat* and Infinity, it takes the form of the return to the finite, to the immediate, to a terrestrial and maternal appeal.⁷⁵²

This quotation is taken from a chapter of *A Short History of Decay* entitled «Apotheosis of the Vague». Nostalgia is the real object of this chapter since it represents the aspiration to return to a place which is unknown, impalpable, and vague. According to the logic, to recover such a place we should first define it (or locate it). But if we try to define it, this place suddenly disappears – and we suddenly fall into nothingness. Therefore, the possibility of a nostalgic desire implies the impossibility of its satisfaction. To explain this contradiction, Cioran refers to the opposite concepts of «*Heimat* and Infinity».

Sehnsucht, vagueness, and skepticism

Heimat is a specific German concept indicating the idea of «home» or «homeland». On the one hand, it connotes either a social environment wherein the individual can experience the safety of

⁷⁴⁷⁷⁴⁷ PÉREZ LÓPEZ, Pablo Javier, «Mélancolie, nostalgie et solitude chez Emil Cioran», in: DEMARS, Aurélien – STĂNIȘOR, Mihaela-Gețiana, *Cioran, archives paradoxales. Nouvelles approches critiques*. Tome IV, Classiques Garnier, Paris 2019, p. 227-235.

⁷⁴⁸ CIORAN, Emil, *Le Mauvais Demiurge*, in: *Œuvres*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Gallimard, Paris 2011, p. 621-631.

⁷⁴⁹ LĂZĂRESCU, Mircea, «La solitude cosmique de Cioran», in: DEAMRS – STĂNIȘOR, op.cit., p. 123-134.

⁷⁵⁰ CIORAN, Emil, *Fall into Time*, transl. by Richard Howard, Quadrangle Books, Chicago 1970, p. 41.

⁷⁵¹ CIORAN, Emil, *A Short History of Decay*, transl. by Richard Howard, Arcade Publishing, New York 2012, p. 74.

⁷⁵² Ivi, p.75.

a second childhood or an «idyllic world» where the psychological desire of identity is satisfied by the harmonization of space, community, and tradition⁷⁵³. On the other hand, it evokes the loss of this natal place and the desire of recovering it. Therefore, *Heimat* involves the idea of an endless search aimed at the conquest of a place which does exist only in our regrets, that is, in our imagination.

Cioran affirms that this unsolvable situation defines the essence of *Sehnsucht*, a fundamental concept of German Romanticism expressing the consuming tension between «the longing to be plunged into the undifferentiation of heart and hearth» and the desire

[...] to keep absorbing space in an unslaked desire. And since extent offers no limits, and since with it grows the penchant for new wanderings, the goal retreats according to the progress made. There is no solution to the tension between *Heimat* and Infinity: for it is to be rooted and uprooted at one and the same time, and to have been unable to find a compromise between the fireside and the far-off.⁷⁵⁴

According to Cioran, *Sehnsucht* connotes a nostalgia without limits implying a ravaging desire of the absolute, i.e., of a «lost paradise» which is both the object of our regrets and a regret impossible to define. In this sense, Cioran states that the French have never experienced the feeling of *Sehnsucht* since their Enlightened tradition has always refused «to cultivate the imperfection of the indefinite», to the extent that «their language itself eliminates any complicity» with the Possible⁷⁵⁵. Having burdened nostalgia «with too much clarity», the French do not know the «disease of the distant» which is the essence of the nostalgic desire. Instead, they know the disease of the immanence called *ennui*, described by Cioran as a spiritual boredom lacking the sense of infinity. In a previous text called *De la France* (1940), he defines *ennui* as «the boredom of clarity. It is the fatigue of things being understood»⁷⁵⁶.

In other words, the *ennui* represents a suffering of reason very different from the metaphysical agony symbolized by *Sehnsucht*. The difference is that only *Sehnsucht* involves the idea that human history is not but a «failure in the eternal»⁷⁵⁷. Such a definition is a cornerstone of Cioran's thought and is interrelated with the notion of history as a «fall into time»⁷⁵⁸. Indeed, Cioran

⁷⁵³ See GREVERUS, Ina-Maria, *Auf der Suche nach Heimat*, Beck, München 1979.

⁷⁵⁴ CIORAN, *A Short History of Decay*, cit., p. 77-78.

⁷⁵⁵ Ivi, p. 75-76.

⁷⁵⁶ CIORAN, Emil, *De la France*, L'Herne, Paris 2009, p. 14-15: «Mais leur ennui [des français] est dépourvu d'infini. C'est l'ennui de la clarté. C'est la fatigue des choses comprises».

⁷⁵⁷ CIORAN, *A Short History of Decay*, cit., p. 74.

⁷⁵⁸ CARLONI, Massimo, «Cioran e la poesia del fallimento», *Antarès*, 7 (2014), pp. 15-19.

compares the dimension of history to a degradation of the dimension of eternity; consequently, he defines nostalgia as the desire to recover the condition before such a degradation.

This last point explains how Cioran has always been interested with those cultural traditions permeated by the sentiment of nostalgia – as the Portuguese and the Romanian ones. In an interview with Sylvie Jaudeau, Cioran observes that the Portuguese concept of *saudade* and the Romanian concept of *dor* are the only nouns capable of evoking those indefinable tearing of time depicted by the notion of *Sehnsucht*⁷⁵⁹. But what is the philosophical meaning of this linguistic coincidence? Do these three words (*saudade*, *dor*, *Sehnsucht*) conceal the same content or do they reveal different shades of nostalgia?

To answer these questions, we now refer to an article entitled «Le “dor” ou la nostalgie», published by Cioran in 1943 in the French journal *Comœdia*, and then republished as a chapter of *Exercices négatifs*⁷⁶⁰.

The article is one of the first French writings signed by Cioran and represents a first version of «Apotheosis of the vague». Both versions scrutinize the metaphysical meaning of nostalgia and the difficulty to express it. However, there is an important difference. In the second text, the paradigm of nostalgia is the German concept of *Sehnsucht*; in the first text, it is the Romanian concept of *dor*. But if we carefully read the texts, we realize that the definition of nostalgia-*Sehnsucht* given in «Apotheosis of the vague» is almost the same definition of *dor* given in the previous article of *Comœdia*⁷⁶¹. Cioran substitutes the first definition for the second one since he judges *dor* and *Sehnsucht* as “almost” synonyms. Indeed, there is a decisive distinction between these two kinds of nostalgias underlined by Cioran: the condition of ontological uprooting evoked by *dor* is an effect of a history of defeats suffered by a minor country, while the ontological uprooting evoked by *Sehnsucht* is an effect of a history of imperialism typical of a great nation⁷⁶².

⁷⁵⁹ CIORAN, Emil, *Entretiens*, Gallimard, Paris 1995, p. 230.

⁷⁶⁰ CIORAN, Emil, *Exercices négatifs. En marge du Précis de décomposition*, Gallimard, Paris 2005, p. 177-185. This chapter has been recently republished as a part of the «Appendices», in: CIORAN, *Œuvres*, Pléiade, cit., p. 1259-1263 (I will quote from this edition).

⁷⁶¹ «Le *dor*, c’est justement se sentir éternellement loin de chez soi. Non pas la postulation contradictoire de l’Infini et de la *Heimat*, mais le retour vers le fini, vers l’immédiat, vers la conquête de ce qu’on avait avant d’être seul, l’appel terrestre et maternel, la désertion du lointain» («Le “dor” ou la nostalgie», cit., p. 1262); «La nostalgie, c’est justement se sentir éternellement loin de chez soi; et, en dehors des proportions lumineuses de l’Ennui, et de la postulation contradictoire de l’Infini et de la *Heimat*, elle prend la forme du retour vers le fini, vers l’immédiat, vers un appel terrestre et maternel» («Apothéose du vague», in: *Œuvres*, Pléiade, cit., p. 32).

⁷⁶² In «Le “dor” ou la nostalgie», Cioran specifies that the word *dor* means nostalgia even though no translation can return its original meaning: «Car il faut penser à son histoire de détresse, à l’amoncellement de malchances, d’échecs et de malheurs pour comprendre la note plaintive que dégage la sonorité condensée et volatile du dor. Toute la poésie

In «Apotheosis of the vague», Cioran conceives as *Sehnsucht* an impossible «compromise between the fireside and the far-off» («un compromise entre le foyer et le lointain»). This sentence does not occur in «Le “dor” ou la nostalgie» where, nonetheless, the idea of a compromise allows to distinguish *dor* from *Sehnsucht*. Cioran writes that *Sehnsucht* is an aspiration towards the far-off while *dor* is a surpassing within the far-off («Tandis que la *Sehnsucht* était plutôt une aspiration vers le lointain, le *dor* est le dépassement dans le lointain»).

In this case, Cioran stresses that *Sehnsucht* is a nostalgia which urges to act while *dor* is a nostalgia which prompts to surrender. He explicitly says that the concept of *dor* enshrines «a possibility of failure» («a virtualité of échec») explaining the tragical history of Romania. In the chapter of *A Short History of Decay*, the Romanian question disappears in favor of a general examination of nostalgia based on the comparison between the French and the German culture. Nonetheless, both texts emphasize that being nostalgic means being uprooted from the world, given that nostalgia «keeps us from resting in existence or in the absolute; it forces us to drift in the indistinct, to lose our foundations, to live *uncovered* in time»⁷⁶³.

In *The Temptation to Exist* (1956), this condition of ontological uprooting is connected with the issue of skepticism. In the sixth chapter of the book («Some Blind Alleys: A Letter»), Cioran asserts the necessity to fight against the «seriousness» of a dogmatic thought by educating ourselves to «the ideal of futility»⁷⁶⁴. Then, he specifies that being futile does not imply a simplification of thought but a radicalization of it recalling both Max Stirner’s «radical thought» and Lev Shestov’s philosophy of «groundlessness»⁷⁶⁵. It is precisely in this context that the concept of uprooting emerges once again:

Each time I catch myself assigning some importance to things, I incriminate my mind, I challenge it and suspect it of some weakness, of some depravity. I try to wrest myself from everything, to raise myself by uprooting myself; in order to become futile, we must sever our roots, must become metaphysically *alien*.⁷⁶⁶

populaire en est imbue. Ce n’est pas une fleur raffinée, ni un prétexte pour des sensibilités désabusées, c’est l’aveu poétique de l’âme à la recherche d’elle-même. Infiniment plus répandu chez les paysans que chez les intellectuels, il surgit de l’obscurité du sang, comme une sorte de tristesse de la terre» (cit., p. 1261-1262).

⁷⁶³ CIORAN, *A Short History of Decay*, cit., p. 78.

⁷⁶⁴ CIORAN, Emil, *The Temptation to Exist*, cit., p. 211.

⁷⁶⁵ POZZI, Mattia Luigi, «Un giro di valzer tra le belve. Storia e rivolta in Stirner e Cioran», in: POZZI, Mattia Luigi – MEROI, Fabrizio – VANINI, Paolo (a cura di), *Cioran e l’Occidente. Utopia, esilio, caduta*, Mimesis, Milano 2016, pp. 109-126; VANINI, Paolo, *Cioran e l’utopia. Prospettive del grottesco*, Mimesis, Milano 2018, pp. 165-167.

⁷⁶⁶ CIORAN, *The Temptation to Exist*, cit., p. 211.

A few pages later, Cioran clarifies that this attempt to sever our existential roots epitomizes the difficulties of a skeptical existence since skepticism can be compared to a nostalgic exile from the homeland of certainties. It is not by chance that he confesses «the advantage of belonging to a minor country» (as Romania) because in such a country «nothing *weighed* upon me»⁷⁶⁷. To the extent that he also claims: «Without any tradition to encumber me, I cultivate a curiosity about that displacement which will soon be the universal fate»⁷⁶⁸.

Such a «displacement» provokes a destabilization of subjectivity which forces the subject himself to face the metaphysical void of existence. It is the same void previously faced by the nostalgic subject and the solitary one, but now the point is that nobody can establish roots in such a void. Thus, the regret of the Absolute fueled by nostalgia is linked to the skeptical awareness that the Absolute is not the place of *radical truths*: it is the place of their *nostalgic suspension*. Then, the Absolute is the place of an ideal futility.

It is worth noting that if nostalgia involves «the possibility of failure», skepticism involves the apology of this possibility. On this point, Cioran has always been clear: truth is not the epilogue of a syllogism or of a systematic demonstration. It is the revelation of the cosmological futility caused by an existential failure. According to this revelation, humankind is as futile as the universe and should learn to accept its real dimension. Indeed, in another passage of *A Short History of Decay*, Cioran states that if «we had the right sense of our position in the world, if *to compare* were inseparable from *to live*, the revelation of our infinitesimal presence would crush us. But to live is to blind ourselves to our own dimensions...»⁷⁶⁹.

From this point of view, skepticism is a lesson of ontological diminution of the subject: a humoristic exercise of the intelligence through which the subject learns not to falsify her real dimensions⁷⁷⁰. (Incidentally, we must underline that this is the difference between nihilism and skepticism: the first one dogmatically denies the existence of truth; the second one ironically confesses that truth does not mean a victory of subject's reason)⁷⁷¹.

⁷⁶⁷ Ivi, p. 212.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁹ CIORAN, «The Anti-Prophet», in: *A Short History of Decay*, cit., p. 23.

⁷⁷⁰ In his *Cahiers. 1957-1972* (Gallimard, Paris 1997, p. 738), Cioran writes: «C'est en me dévorant que j'ai trouvé tout ce que j'ai trouvé. Je me suis *diminué* pour pouvoir entrer dans certaines vérités». For the humourism in Cioran, see also: VANINI, *Cioran e l'utopia*, op. cit., pp. 155-157.

⁷⁷¹ See the interview with Léo Gillet, in: CIORAN, *Entretiens*, op. cit., p. 79.

Being not a nihilist, Cioran philosophically plays with humourism to show the tragic essence of life⁷⁷². His apology of failure must be interpreted as a conceptual core of his own skepticism. In «Some Blind Alleys», Cioran admits that those people commonly called *failures* were the responsible for his education. From them he learned the lesson of futility which he is trying to impart through his pseudo-letter. However, what I want to underscore is that Cioran portrays the *failures* as subjects which are both skeptical and nostalgic. In a central paragraph of the text, he writes that those defeated people taught him the importance of being solitary, futile, and sterile; and he further says:

Among others, they revealed to me the stupidities inherent in the cult of Truth... I shall never forget my comfort when it ceased to be my business. [...] *Nothing more to pursue, except the pursuit of nothing*. The Truth? An adolescent fad or a symptom of senility. *Yet out of some trace of nostalgia* or some craving for slavery, I still seek it, unconsciously, stupidly. A second's inattention is enough for me to relapse into the oldest, the most absurd of prejudices.⁷⁷³

My hypothesis is that Cioran interprets skepticism as the nostalgia of truth, i.e., as the desire to recover a truth we have tragically lost. Failure is the experience of this loss; skepticism is the possibility of facing this experience with humor in order to keep searching for truth though it represents «the most absurd of prejudices».

The trouble with being nostalgic

Heretofore, we have examined how Cioran relates the loneliness suffered by the nostalgic subject to the humoristic revelations of skepticism. Besides, we have seen that the skeptical disclosure of the universal futility would have not been possible without the experience of a radical failure. From this point of view, nostalgia represents both the confession of an existential failure and the desire for an uncorrupted existence.

Now, Cioran believes that such a desire has something to do with the existential experience of exile⁷⁷⁴. The condition of exile exemplifies the nostalgic feeling of having been separated from our homeland. This is the reason why he is interested in the history of the exiled peoples (as the Jews) who lost their homeland and who faced the condition of an existential uprooting. In a letter to his Brazilian-Portuguese translator José Thomaz Brum, Cioran writes that the ideas of nostalgia

⁷⁷² POZZI, Mattia Luigi, «L'Apocalisse esige umorismo: le categorie del religioso in Emil Cioran», in: DI GENNARO– GIUSTINIANI, *Dio e il nulla*, cit., pp. 117-143.

⁷⁷³ CIORAN, *The Temptation to Exist*, op. cit., p. 209. (The italics are mine).

⁷⁷⁴ See the fourth chapter of *The Temptation to Exist*, called «The Advantages of Exile» (ivi, pp. 126-133).

and melancholia mark the tradition of these peoples; and he mentions the history, the music, and the idioms of Russia, Hungary, and Portugal as a proof of his hypothesis. Especially, he focuses his attention to the similarities between the Portuguese and the Romanian idioms as they are «particularly apt to translate all that yields to melancholy and failure» («spécialement aptes à traduire tout ce qui relève de la mélancolie et de l'échec»⁷⁷⁵).

The Portuguese concept of *saudade* and the Romanian concept of *dor* are linguistic examples of this metaphysical similarity since both these words manifest the experience of failure and pain provoked by the violence of compulsory isolation⁷⁷⁶. These concepts are close to the meaning of *Sehnsucht*; however, Cioran observes that *dor* and *saudade* are marked by a poetical vehemence absent from the German feeling of nostalgia⁷⁷⁷. If *Sehnsucht* symbolizes an aspiration towards the Absolute, *dor* and *saudade* depict the failure of this aspiration: “a fall into the Absolute”, if we want to propose an oxymoron.

From this point of view, *saudade* and *dor* do not simply imply the regret of a «natal universe» which we lost or of an «idyllic childhood» which we ruined. More drastically, they involve the desire of an existence which is radically anterior to the existence itself since the very moment of birth is the origin of all our diseases. This desire of coming before the existence can be translated as a desire of having never been born. Indeed, this idea is the core of *The Trouble with Being Born*, an aphoristic book written by Cioran in 1973.

The central theme of this fundamental book is «the scandal of birth»⁷⁷⁸. Cioran reacts to this scandal by imagining «a time when time did not yet exist», that is, a hypothetical condition of pre-temporality represented by the notion of the «non-born»⁷⁷⁹. If birth is the original sin, then the negation of birth will be the recovery of a new paradise. The humoristic accent of the argumentation is undeniable since it exemplifies a comic desacralization of the idea of Creation itself (given that God's Creation can be labelled as the “birth” of the world)⁷⁸⁰. However, it is important to underline that Cioran converts the pessimistic regret of being born into the humoristic

⁷⁷⁵ Letters to José Thomaz Brum, in: VAN ITTERBEEK, Eugène, *Cahiers Emil Cioran. Approches critiques*, vol. IX, Editura Universității Lucian Blaga/Les Sept Dormants, Sibiu/Leuven 2008, p. 250-260.

⁷⁷⁶ PÉREZ LÓPEZ, op. cit., p. 234.

⁷⁷⁷ BORGES, Paulo, «Saudade et nostalgie de l'absolu chez Fernando Pessoa and Emil Cioran», *Anale Seria Drept*, XXVI (2017), pp. 41-58.

⁷⁷⁸ CIORAN, Emil, *The Trouble with Being Born*, transl. by Richard Howard, Seaver Books, New York 2011, p. 21.

⁷⁷⁹ Ivi, p. 17.

⁷⁸⁰ See the interview with Ricardo Gil Soeiro, «Escritas do desastre e outras volúpias: entrevista com Ricardo Gil Soeiro, autor de *Notas Soltas para Cioran* (Labirinto, Lisboa 2019)»: <https://emcioranbr.org/2018/12/27/entrevista-volupia-desastre-rgs/> (view on April 1st 2019).

desire of a paradise of the never-born. He writes that the «rejection of birth is nothing but the nostalgia for this time before time», thus exposing the assonance between his humoristic tone and his nostalgic feelings⁷⁸¹.

Indeed, such an anti-theological desacralization of birth allows Cioran to philosophically refute the necessity of existence. This refusal is a cornerstone of his skepticism and proves once again how skepticism and nostalgia are two issues strictly interconnected in Cioran's thought. The nostalgic regret of «this time before time» is thus the premise of the skeptical confutation of that «fall into time» symbolized by human history.

As Dagmara Kraus points out, Cioran's refusal of birth is linked to his discovery of Pessoa's poetical works⁷⁸². In a passage of the *Cahiers*, Cioran quotes a sentence from Pessoa-Álvaro de Campos' poem «A Passagem das Horas», by remarking what follows: «J'ouvre les *Poésies* d'Alvaro de Campos (Pessoa), et je tombe sur “Seja o que fôr, era melhor não ter nascido”. Quoi qu'il en soit, mieux valait n'être pas né»⁷⁸³.

According to Alvaro Campos, one of Pessoa's heteronyms, it was better not to be born. This conclusion is not a statement of death. It is the confession of a nostalgic poet regretting his birth to the extent that he would have preferred to be someone else. Indeed, Pessoa does not sign this poem with his own name but with a stranger's name. Such a name represents the desire of another existence whose possibility is guaranteed by that «time before time» of imagination. In the dimension of that pre-temporality, the poet can imagine having lived another life and having known other lands. In the English poem called «The Foreself», Pessoa writes:

I had a self and life
Before this life and self.
When the moon makes woods rife
With possible fay or elf,
There comes in me a dreaming
That is like a light gleaming
Somewhere in me away,
On seas that I have known
And placeless lands that own
Another kind of day⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁸¹ CIORAN, *Trouble with being born*, op. cit., p. 17.

⁷⁸² KRAUS, Dagmara, «On Pessoa's involvement with the Birth Theme in Cioran's *De l'inconvénient d'être né*», *Pessoa Plural*, 7 (2015), pp. 23-43.

⁷⁸³ CIORAN, *Cahiers*, op. cit., p. 787.

⁷⁸⁴ PESSOA, Fernando, *Poesia Inglesa*, I, ed. and transl. by Luísa Freire, Assirio & Alvim, Lisboa, 2000, pp. 274-276.

As Paulo Borges observes, in these verses the poet is experiencing the *saudade* of a non-identity which reveals the metaphysical void of the Self⁷⁸⁵. Pessoa claims that the Self is nothing, and that this nothingness is the only possibility to avoid the slavery of a well-defined subjectivity.

Cioran supports this claim when he accuses the Western philosophy of having ignored that the real problems begin «after the last chapter of a huge tome which prints the final period as an abdication before the Unknown»⁷⁸⁶. Indeed, Pessoa's desire of experiencing an existence prior to his own birth represents precisely the will of not abdicating «before the Unknown» defended by Cioran. If we do not abdicate, we will probably be able to keep the «pursuit of nothing» that Cioran regards as the essence of skepticism itself.

Actually, skepticism requires the courage «to sever our roots» and to «become metaphysically *alien*» even though such an act of uprooting implies the possibility of a radical failure. Both Cioran and Pessoa assume this risk since they have previously assumed the risk of losing their own identity.

In a paragraph of *Le crepuscule of pensée*, Cioran summarizes the relationship between identity, nostalgia, and skepticism by stating that «the nostalgia of *something else* [...] is nothing but the desire of *another Self*» («la nostalgie d'*autre chose* [...] n'est que le désir d'un *autre moi*»⁷⁸⁷).

In conclusion, we could say that the desire of another Self, the longing to recover our lost *Heimat*, and the skeptical pursuit of nothing define the conceptual constellation of Cioran's nostalgia. We have seen that such a nostalgia does not imply a nihilist vision of the world, but rather a humoristic interpretation of it. If the whole universe is futile, we should learn to accept the futility as the essence of our existence. Once accepted, we will be able to free ourselves from the dogmas of identity. Of course, without the support of such an identity we risk to fall into nothingness and to become “failures”. However, this is exactly the challenge that Cioran is offering us, given that failure and truth are two sides of the same coin.

«One always perishes by the self one assumes: to bear a name is to claim an exact mode of collapse», claims Cioran in the first chapter of *The Temptation to Exist*. Nostalgia is the refusal of

⁷⁸⁵ BORGES, Paulo, «Saudade et nostalgie de l'absolu chez Fernando Pessoa and Emil Cioran», op. cit. p. 44. See also: BORGES, Paulo, «La saudade de ce qu'il n'y eut jamais», in: *Do Vazio ao Cais Absoluto. Fernando Pessoa entre Oriente e Ocidente*, Âncora Editora, Lisboa 2017, pp. 117-131.

⁷⁸⁶ CIORAN, *A Short History of Decay*, cit., p. 110.

⁷⁸⁷ CIORAN, *Œuvres*, Quarto, p. 363.

the precision of such a collapse. It is the desire to fail somewhere else, with someone else. Because, in the land of the Unknown, loneliness is not the only possibility of existence.

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