

Translated from the French by Richard Howard

Introduction by Susan Sontag

E. M. Cioran

# The Temptation to Exist



# THE TEMPTATION TO EXIST

SOME men make their way from affirmation to affirmation, their life a series of acceptances . . . Forever applauding reality or what passes for it in their eyes, they accept the universe and are not ashamed to say so. There is no contradiction they cannot resolve or relegate to the category of "the way things turn out." The more they let themselves be contaminated by philosophy, the more they pride themselves, faced with the entertainments of life and death, on being a *good audience*.

For others, habitual nay-sayers, affirmation demands not only deliberate self-deception but self-sacrifice as well: how much effort the merest nod to existence can cost! What repudiations must be renounced! They know there is never just one "yes": each assent implies another, perhaps a whole parade—who can afford to take such risks lightly? Yet the security of negation aggravates the nay-sayers, too, and hence they conceive the necessity and the interest of affirming something—anything.

It is true that negation is the mind's first freedom, yet a negative habit is fruitful only so long as we exert ourselves to overcome it, adapt it to our needs; once *acquired* it can imprison us—a chain like any other. And slavery for slavery, the servitude of existence is the preferable choice, even at the price of a certain self-splintering: it is a matter of avoiding the contagion of nothingness, the comforts of the abyss . . .

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For centuries theologians have told us that hope is the daughter of patience. And of modesty as well, one might add; the man of pride has no *time* for hope . . . Unwilling and unable to wait for their culmination, he violates events as much as he violates his own nature; bitter, tainted, when he exhausts his rebellion he abdicates his existence—for him there is no intermediate formula. His lucidity is undeniable, but let us remember that lucidity is a condition peculiar to those who by their incapacity to love are as isolated from others as from themselves.

The assent to death is the greatest one of all. It can be expressed in several ways . . .

There are among us daylight ghosts, devoured by their absence, for whom life is one long aside. They walk our streets with muffled steps, and look at no one. No anxiety can be discovered in their eyes, no haste in their gestures. For them an outside world has ceased to exist, and they submit to every solitude. Careful to keep their distance, solicitous of their detachment, they inhabit an undeclared universe situated somewhere between the memory of the unimaginable and the imminence of certainty. Their smile suggests a thousand vanquished fears, the grace that triumphs over all things terrible: such beings can pass through matter itself. Have they overtaken their own origins? Discovered in themselves the very sources of light? No defeat, no victory dis-



turbs them. Independent of the sun, they are self-sufficient: illuminated by Death.

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We are not in a position to identify the moment when the operations of erosion occur within us at the expense of our human substance. We know only that the result of such operations is a void, into which the idea of our own destruction gradually settles. A vague, faintly outlined idea: as if the void were aware of itself. Then from the furthest reaches of the self, in sonorous transfiguration, may be heard a noise, a sound, a *tonality* which by its very insistence must either paralyze us forever or preserve our life anew. We may find ourselves captives of fear or of nostalgia; lower than death or on its own level. Captives of fear, if this tonality merely perpetuates the void in which it occurs; and of nostalgia, if it converts the void to plenitude. According to our structure, we shall discern in death either a deficit or a surplus of being.

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Before affecting our perception of duration—acquired relatively late—the fear of death attacks our sense of dimension, of immediacy—our illusion of what is *solid*: space shrinks, shoots from our grasp, turns into thin air, becomes entirely transparent. Our fear replaces space, welling up until it obscures the very reality that provoked it—until it substitutes itself for death. All experience is suddenly reduced to an exchange between the self and this fear, which, as an autonomous reality, isolates us in such unmotivated terrors, such gratuitous shudders that we run the risk of forgetting we are going to . . . die. Yet fear can supplant our real problems only to the extent that we—unwilling either to assimilate or to exhaust it—perpetuate it within ourselves like a temptation and enthrone it at the very heart of our solitude. One step further and we shall become debauchees not of death

but of the fear of death. Such is the history of all the fears we have not been able to overcome: no longer subservient to motivation, they grow into independent, tyrannical idols. "We live in fear, and therefore we do not live." Buddha's words may be taken to mean that instead of keeping ourselves at the stage of being where fear opens out onto the world, we make it an end in itself, a closed universe, a substitute for *space*. If fear controls us, it must distort our image of the world. The man who can neither master nor exploit his fear ultimately ceases to be himself, loses his identity, for fear is valuable only if one defends oneself against it; the man who surrenders to it can never recover, but must proceed, in all transactions with himself, from treason to treason until he smothers death itself beneath his fear of it.

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The attraction of certain problems derives from their lack of rigor, and hence from the contradictory solutions they provoke: so many more difficulties to entice the amateur of the Insoluble.

In order to "document" myself on the subject of death, a biological treatise is of no more use than the catechism: as far as *I* am concerned, it is a matter of indifference whether I am going to die because of original sin or the dehydration of my cells. Entirely independent of our intellectual system, death, like every individual experience, can be confronted only by knowledge without *information*. Hence many uneducated men have spoken more pertinently of it than this or that metaphysician; once experience has detected the agent of their destruction, such men devote all their thoughts to it, so that death becomes no mere impersonal "problem" but a reality all their own, *their death*.

Yet among all those who, uneducated or not, think continually of death, most do so only because they are terrified by the prospect of their final agony, not realizing that even

if they were to live centuries, millennia, the *reasons* for their fear would remain entirely unchanged, agony being merely an accident in the process of our annihilation, a process that is, after all, co-extensive with our duration. Life, far from being what Bichat once called an ensemble of functions for resisting death, is rather an ensemble of functions for bearing us toward it. Our substance diminishes with every step, yet it is of this very diminution that all our efforts should tend to make a stimulant, a principle of efficacy. Those who cannot benefit from their possibilities of nonexistence are strangers to themselves: puppets, objects “furnished” with a self, numbed by a neutral time that is neither duration nor eternity. To exist is to profit by our share of unreality, to be quickened by each contact with the void that is within. To this void the puppet remains insensible, abandons it, permits it to decay, to die out . . .

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A kind of germinative regression, a return to our roots, death destroys our identity only to permit us a surer access to it—a reconstitution; for death has no meaning unless we accord it all the attributes of life.

Although at our first, our primary perceptions of its quality, death presents itself as a dislocation, a loss, it subsequently produces, by revealing the nullity of time and the infinite worth of each separate moment, certain tonic effects: if it offers us only the image of our own inanity, by the same token it converts that inanity into an absolute, inviting us to commit ourselves to it. And by thus rehabilitating our “mortal” aspect, death institutes itself as a day-by-day dimension of our life, a triumphal agony.

What is the good of fastening our thoughts upon some tomb or other, staking anything upon our eventual rot? Spiritually degrading, the macabre confronts us with the exhaustion of our glands, the stinking garbage of our dissolution. We can claim to be alive only to the degree that we



slight or circumvent the idea of our eventual corpse. Nothing of value results from reflections on the material fact of dying. If I permitted the flesh to dictate its philosophy, to impose its conclusions upon me, I might as well do away with myself before knowing them. For everything the flesh has to teach me annihilates me without recourse: does it not refuse all illusion? Does it not, as the interpreter of our ashes, continually contradict our lies, our fantasies, our hopes? Let us therefore proceed beyond its arguments, and force it to join battle against its own evidence.

To rejuvenate ourselves at the contact of death is a matter of investing it with all our energies, of becoming, like Keats, "half in love with easeful death" or, like Novalis, of making of death the principle that "romanticizes" life. If Novalis was to carry his nostalgia for death to the point of sensuality, it was Kleist who was to derive from it a completely inner "felicity." "*Ein Strudel von nie geahnter Seligkeit hat mich ergriffen . . .*" (A whirlpool of undreamed-of felicity has seized me), he writes, before committing suicide. Neither defeat nor abdication, his death was a rage of happiness, an exemplary and concerted madness, one of the rare successes of despair. Schlegel's remark that Novalis was the first man to experience death "as an artist" seems to me to apply more exactly to Kleist, who was better equipped for death than anyone has ever been. Unequaled, perfect, a masterpiece of tact and taste, his suicide makes all others unnecessary.

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A vernal annihilation, culmination rather than chasm, death dizzies us only to raise us all the more readily above our customary selves, with the same privilege as love's, to which it is related in more than one respect: both love and death, applying an explosive pressure upon the framework of our lives, disintegrate us, fortify us, ruin us by the distractions of plenitude. As irreducible as they are inseparable,

their elements constitute a fundamental equivocation. If, to a certain point, love destroys us, with what sensations of expansion and pride it does its work! And if death destroys us altogether, what *frissons* does it not employ! Sensations, shudders by which we transcend the *man* within us, and the accidents of the self.

Since both love and death define us only to the degree that we project our appetites and impulses upon them, that we cooperate wholeheartedly with their equivocal nature, they are necessarily beyond our grasp as long as we regard them as exterior realities, accessible to the operations of the intellect. We plunge into love as into death, we do not reflect upon them. For that matter, every experience that is not converted into a voluptuous one is a failure. If we had to limit ourselves to our sensations as they were, they would appear intolerable for being too distinct, too dissimilar from our essence. Death would not be the Great Human Experiment that Failed if men knew how to assimilate it to their nature or how to transform it into pleasure. But death remains within them as an experience *apart*, different from what they are.

And it is still another indication of the double reality of death—its equivocal character, the paradox inherent in the manner we experience it—that it presents itself to us as a *limit* and at the same time as a *datum*. We rush toward it, and yet we are already there. Thus even as we are incorporating it within our lives, we cannot keep ourselves from positing it in the future. By an inevitable inconsistency, we interpret death as the future which destroys the present, our present. If fear assisted us in defining our sense of space, it is death which reveals the true meaning of our temporal dimension, since without death, being in time would mean nothing to us, or, at the most, the same thing as being in eternity. Hence the traditional image of death, despite all our efforts to elude it, obstinately haunts us, an image for which sick men are chiefly responsible. In such matters we



agree to recognize their qualifications; a prejudice in their favor automatically accords them a kind of “profundity,” although most of them give every evidence of a disconcerting futility. We have all known *operetta incurables*.

More than anyone else the sick man is expected to identify himself with death; yet he does his utmost to detach himself from it, to project death outside himself. Since it is easier for him to run away from it than to confess its presence in himself, he uses every artifice to rid himself of death. He makes a practice, even a doctrine out of his defensive reaction. The ordinary man, in good health, is delighted to imitate him in every detail. And only the ordinary man? The mystics themselves employ subterfuges, practice every form of evasion, flight tactics: for them death is only an obstacle to be surmounted, a barrier which separates them from God, a last step in duration. In this life, they sometimes manage—thanks to ecstasy, that springboard—to leap beyond time: an instantaneous trajectory by which they achieve only “fits” of beatitude. They must disappear for good if they would attain the object of their desires; hence they love death because it permits them to realize these desires, and they hate death because it delays so long in coming. The soul, according to Theresa of Avila, aspires only to its creator, but “it sees at the same time that it is impossible to possess its creator if it does not die; and since it is impossible for the soul to put itself to death, it dies of the desire to die, until it is actually in danger of death.” Always this need to make death into an accident or a means, to reduce it to a disappearance instead of regarding it as a presence—always this need to dispossess death. And if religions have made of it only a pretext or a scarecrow—a weapon of propaganda—it is the duty of the unbelievers to see that justice is done, to re-establish death and to restore all its rights.

Each being is his sentiment of death. It follows that the experiences of sick men and mystics cannot be discarded as

false, although we may question their interpretations of these experiences. We are on ground where no criterion functions, where certitudes swarm, where everything is a certitude, because our truths here coincide with our sensations, our problems with our attitudes. Furthermore, what "truth" can we claim, when at every moment we are engaged in another experience of death? Our "destiny" itself is only the development, the phases of this primordial and yet changing experience, the translation into apparent time of that *secret time* in which the diversity of our ways of dying is elaborated. To explain a destiny, biographers should abandon their usual procedure, should give up examining this apparent time, this readiness of their subject to deteriorate his own essence. The same thing is true for a whole epoch: to know its institutions and its dates is less important than to divine its intimate experience of which these are the signs. Battles, ideologies, heroism, sanctity, barbarism—all so many simulacra of an interior world which alone should solicit our attention. Every culture dies out in its own way, every culture perfects several rules of extinction and imposes them upon its members: even the best among them could not change or evade such rules. A Pascal, a Baudelaire circumscribe death: one reduces it to our search for salvation, the other to our physiological terrors. If death overwhelms man, crushes him, it remains no less, for them both, *within* man. Quite the contrary, the Elizabethans or the German Romantics made of death a cosmic phenomenon, an orgiastic metamorphosis, a vivifying nothingness—ultimately a *force* in which man was to steep himself and with which it was important to maintain direct relations. For the Frenchman, what counts is not death in itself—an evidence of Matter's absentmindedness or merely an impropriety—but our behavior in the eyes of our fellow-men, the strategy of *adieux*, the countenance which the calculations of our vanity impose upon us—in short, *attitude*; not our quarrel with ourselves, but with others: a spectacle in which it is essen-

tial to observe the details and the motives. The whole of French art consists of knowing how to die *in public*. Saint-Simon describes not the agony of Louis XIV, of Monsieur, or of the Regent, but the *scenes* of their agony. The customs of the Court, an awareness of its ceremony, its ostentation, have been inherited by a whole people enamored of display and anxious to associate a certain brilliance with the last breath. In this regard Catholicism has been useful to the French: does it not maintain that the way we die is essential to our salvation, that our sins can be redeemed by a “good death”? A questionable notion, but one entirely adapted to a nation’s histrionic instinct, and which, in the past more than today, is related to conceptions of honor and dignity, to the style of the *honnête homme*. It was then a question, setting God aside, of saving face in front of an audience, in front of the elegant strollers and gapers and the worldly confessors; not of perishing, but of *officiating*, preserving one’s reputation before witnesses and asking extreme unction of them alone . . . Even the worst libertines died decorously, so much did their respect for opinion prevail over the irreparable, so much did they conform to the usages of an epoch in which to die signified, for man, to renounce solitude and privacy alike, to go on parade one last time, and in which the French were the greatest of all specialists in agony.

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It is nevertheless doubtful that by relying on the “historical” aspect of the experience of death we shall manage to penetrate further into its original character, for history is merely an inessential mode of being, the most effective form of our infidelity to ourselves, a metaphysical refusal, a mass of events with which we confront the only event that matters. Everything that aims at affecting man—religions included—is tainted with a crude sentiment of death. And it is to seek a true, purer sentiment of this kind that the



hermits took refuge in the desert, that negation of history which they rightly compared to the angels, since—they maintained—both were unaware of sin and the Fall into the realm of time. The desert, in fact, provides the image of duration translated into coexistence: a motionless flow, a metamorphosis bewitched by space. The solitary retires there less to expand his solitude and enrich his absence than to produce within himself the tonality of death.

In order to hear this tonality we must institute a desert within ourselves . . . If we succeed, certain harmonies flow through our blood, our veins dilate, our secrets and our resources appear upon the surface of ourselves where desire and disgust, horror and rapture mingle in obscure and luminous festivity. The dawn of death breaks within us: cosmic trance, the bursting of the spheres, a thousand voices! We are death, and everything is death—death seduces us, sweeps us away, carries us aloft, casts us to earth, or hurls us beyond the bounds of space itself. Death, forever intact, unworn by all the ages of our history, makes us accomplices in its apotheosis: we feel its immemorial freshness, and its time unlike any other . . . death's time, which ceaselessly creates and decomposes us. To such a degree does death hold us, immortalize us in agony, that we shall never be able to indulge ourselves in the luxury of dying; and although we possess the very science of destiny, although we are a veritable encyclopedia of fatalities, we nevertheless know nothing, for it is death that knows everything within us.

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I often remember how, at the end of my adolescence, enmeshed in mortuary considerations, enslaved by a single obsession, I apprenticed myself to every force that invalidated my existence. My other thoughts no longer interested me: I knew too well *where* they led me, upon what they

converged. From the moment I had only one problem, what was the use of concerning myself with *problems*? Ceasing to live in terms of a self, I gave death enough rope for my own enslavement; in other words, I no longer belonged to myself. My terrors, even my name were borne by death, and by substituting itself for my own eyes, death revealed to me in all things the marks of its sovereignty. In each man I passed I discerned a cadaver, in each odor a rot, in each joy a last grimace. Everywhere I stumbled against future victims of the noose, against their imminent shadows: other men's lives wore no mystery for The One who scrutinized them through my eyes. Was I bewitched? I preferred to think so. From now on what was I to do? The Void was my eucharist: everything within me, everything exterior to me was transubstantiated into a ghost. Irresponsible, at the antipodes of consciousness, I ended up by delivering myself to the anonymity of the elements, to the drunkenness of indivisibility, determined not to reintegrate my being nor to become again a colonist of chaos.

Unable to see in death the positive expression of the void, the agent that awakens the creature from itself, the summons resounding in the ubiquity of drowsiness, I knew nothingness by heart, and I accepted my knowledge. Even now, how could I mistake the auto-suggestion that produced the universe? Yet I protest against my own lucidity. I must have Reality at any price. I have feelings only out of cowardice; very well, I wish to be a coward, to impose a "soul" upon myself, to let myself be devoured by a thirst for immediacy, to destroy all my evidence and find myself a world whatever the cost. And if I could not find a world, I would content myself with a shard of being, with the illusion that something exists, whether before my eyes or somewhere else. I would be the conquistador of a continent of lies. To be duped or die: there was no other choice. Like those who have discovered life by the detours of death, I would hurl

myself upon the first deception, upon anything that might restore my lost reality.

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After the banality of the abyss, what miracles in being! Existence is the unheard of, *what cannot happen*, a state of exception. And nothing can engage it save our desire to accede to it, to force an entrance, to take it by assault.

*To exist* is a habit I do not despair of acquiring. I shall imitate the others, the cunning ones who have managed it, the turncoats of lucidity; I shall rifle their secrets, even their hopes, quite happy to snatch with them at the indignities that lead to life. Denial is beyond my strength, or my patience; assent tempts me. Having exhausted my reserves of negation, and perhaps negation itself, why should I not run out into the street shouting at the top of my lungs that I am on the verge of discovering a truth, the only one that is worth anything? But I do not know yet what that truth is; I know only the joy which precedes it, the joy and the madness and the fear.

It is this ignorance—and not fear of ridicule—that robs me of the courage to rouse the world with my news, to observe the world's terror at the spectacle of my happiness, of my definitive assent, my fatal *yes*.

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Since we derive our vitality from our store of madness, we have only the certitudes and therapeutics of delirium with which to oppose our dread and our doubt. By dint of unreason, let us become a source, an origin, a starting point—let us multiply by all possible means our *cosmogonic moments*. We actually exist only when we radiate time itself, when suns rise within us and we dispense their light, illuminating the hours . . . It is then that we share in the volubility of things which are so astonished to have come into being and so impatient to broadcast their surprise in



the metaphors of light. Everything swells and dilates to acquire the habit of the unexpected. A generation of miracles: everything converges upon us, for everything radiates from us. But can this really be us—ourselves? Of our own will? Can the mind conceive so much of day, time suddenly made eternal? And what brings to birth within us this quivering space, these roaring equators?

To think we could free ourselves of our penchant for agony, of our oldest evidence, would be to deceive ourselves about our capacity for aberration. In fact, after the favor of a few bits of being, we relapse into panic and disgust, into the temptations of melancholia and the cadaver, into the deficit of being that results from the negative sentiment of death. However serious our fall, it may nevertheless be useful to us if we turn it into a discipline that can induce us to reconquer the privileges of delirium. The hermits of the first centuries of Christianity will serve us again as an example. They will teach us how, in order to raise our psychic level, we must join a permanent combat with ourselves. It is with singular appropriateness that one Father of the Church has called them “athletes of the desert.” They were warriors whose state of tension, whose relentless struggles against themselves we can scarcely imagine. There were some who recited up to seven hundred prayers a day; they kept track by dropping a pebble after each one . . . A mad arithmetic which made me admire them all the more for their matchless pride. They were not weaklings, these obsessed saints at grips with the dearest of all their possessions: *their temptations*. Living only in their behalf, they exacerbated these temptations to have still more to struggle against. Their descriptions of “desire” display such violence of tone that they scrape our senses raw and give us shudders no libertine author succeeds in inspiring. They were ingenious at glorifying “the flesh” in reverse. If it fascinated them to such a degree, what merit in having fought against its attractions! They were titans, more frenzied, more

perverse than those of mythology; for the latter would never have been able, in their simplicity of mind, to conceive, for the accumulation of energy, all the advantages of self-loathing.

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Our unprovoked natural sufferings being far too incomplete, it is up to us to augment, to intensify them, to create others for ourselves—artificial ones. Left to itself, the flesh encloses us within a narrow horizon. Only if we put it to the torture will it sharpen our perceptions and enlarge our perspectives: the mind is the result of the torments the flesh undergoes or inflicts upon itself. The anchorites knew how to remedy the insufficiency of their ills . . . After having joined battle with the world, they had to declare war against themselves. What tranquility for their neighbors! Does our ferocity not derive from the fact that our instincts are all too interested in other people? If we attended more to ourselves and became the center, the object of our own murderous inclinations, the sum of our intolerances would diminish. We shall never be able to estimate the number of horrors which those primitive monkish colonies spared humanity. Had all those hermits remained in the secular world, how many excesses would they not have committed! For the greatest good of their time, they had the inspiration to exercise their cruelty upon themselves. If we would moderate our manners, we must learn to turn our talons inward, to develop the technique of the desert . . .

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Why, you ask, exalt this leprosy, these repulsive exceptions with which ascetic literature has gratified us? We must cling to whatever we have. At the same time that I execrate the monks and their convictions, I cannot help but admire their extravagances, their willful character, their asperity. There must be a secret in so much energy: the secret of

religions themselves. And although they are perhaps not worth troubling about, the fact remains that everything that lives, every rudiment of existence, participates in a religious essence. Let us speak plainly: everything which keeps us from self-dissolution, every lie which protects us against our unbreatheable certitudes is religious. When I grant myself a share in eternity, when I conceive of a permanence which includes me, I trample underfoot the evidence of my friable, worthless being, I lie to the others as to myself. Were I to do otherwise, I should disappear within an hour. We last only as long as our fictions. When we see through them, our capital of lies, our religious holdings collapse. To exist is equivalent to an act of faith, a protest against the truth, an interminable prayer . . . As soon as they consent to live, the unbeliever and the man of faith are fundamentally the same, since both have made the only decision that defines a *being*. Ideas, doctrines—mere façades, decorative fantasies, accidents. If you have not resolved to kill yourself, there is no difference between you and the others, you belong to the faction of the living, all—no matter what their convictions—great believers. Do you deign to breathe? You are approaching sainthood, you deserve canonization . . .

Moreover, if you are dissatisfied with yourself, if you want to change your nature, you engage yourself twice over in an act of faith: you desire two lives within one. Which is precisely what our ascetics are attempting when, by making of death a means of not dying, they take pleasure in their vigils, their cries, their nocturnal athleticism. By imitating their excesses, even outstripping them, the day will come, perhaps, when we shall have mistreated our reason as much as they did. “I am guided by whoever is madder than myself”—thus speaks our thirst. Only our flaws, the opacities of our clairvoyance, can save us: were that transparency perfect, it would strip us of the senseless creature which inhabits us, the self to whom we owe the best of our illusions and our conflicts.



Since every form of life betrays and corrupts Life, the man who is genuinely alive assumes a maximum of incompatibilities, works relentlessly at pleasure and pain alike, espousing the nuances of the one as of the other, refusing all *distinct* sensations and every unmingled state. Our inmost aridity results from our allegiance to the rule of the *definite*, from our plea in bar of imprecision, that innate chaos which by renewing our deliriums keeps us from sterility. And it is against this beneficent factor, against this chaos, that every school of thought, every philosophy reacts. And if we do not succor it with all our solicitude, we shall waste our last reserves: those which sustain and stimulate our death within us, preventing it from growing old.

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After having made of death an affirmation of life, having converted its abyss into a salutary fiction, having exhausted our arguments against the evidence, we are ambushed by stagnation, depression: it is the revenge of our accumulated bile, of our nature, of this demon of common sense which, allayed for a time, awakens to denounce the ineptitude and the absurdity of our will to blindness. A whole past of merciless vision, of complicity with our ruin, of accustoming ourselves to the venom of truth, and so many years of contemplating our remains in order to extract from them the principle of our knowledge! Yet we must learn to think against our doubts and against our certitudes, against our omniscient humors, we must above all, by creating for ourselves *another* death, one that will be incompatible with our carrion carcasses, consent to the undemonstrable, to the idea that something exists . . .

Nothingness may well have been more convenient. How difficult it is to *dissolve* oneself in Being!

## A NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

E. M. Cioran writes: "I was born on the 8th April 1911 in Rasinari, a village in the Carpathians, where my teacher was a Greek Orthodox priest. From 1920 to 1928 I attended the Sibiu grammar school. From 1929 to 1931 I studied at the Faculty of Arts at Bucharest University. Post-graduate studies in philosophy until 1936. In 1937 I came to Paris with a scholarship from the French Institute in Bucharest and have been living here ever since. I have no nationality—the best possible status for an intellectual. On the other hand, I have not disowned my Rumanian origins; had I to choose a country, I would still choose my own. Before the war I published various essays in Rumanian of a more or less philosophical nature. I only began writing in French in about 1947. It was the hardest experience I have ever undergone. This precise, highly disciplined, and exacting language seemed as restrictive to me as a straitjacket. Even now I must confess that I do not feel completely at ease with it. It is this feeling of uneasiness which has led me to ponder the problem of style and the very *anomaly* of writing. All my books are more or less autobiographical—a rather abstract form of autobiography, I admit." Since 1949 M. Cioran has written *Précis de Décomposition*, *Syllogismes de l'Amer-tume*, *La Tentation d'Exister*, *Joseph de Maistre*, *Histoire et Utopie*, and *La Chute dans le Temps*.