

Alexandra Popescu

Discovering non-self-translation via E.M. Cioran

Translation is not the only factor altering translation history, as non-translation can expose elements otherwise overlooked. Translation—reproduction—sometimes takes the form of writing—production,—yet this might not be immediately obvious, or explicitly declared. Such is the case of E.M. Cioran, a Romanian writer who decided to suddenly abandon his past after self-exiling to France. Curiously, he abandoned it completely, refusing to ever write or even translate in Romanian. Cioran explained in an interview much later in his life that his Romanian self was no longer useful to him after a certain point because writing in Romanian meant writing for no audience. This study searches to reveal the true nature of this switch as illusionary, since his Romanian identity managed to stay hidden behind the use of French.

Introduction

“The central object [of translation history] should be the human translator, since only humans have the kind of responsibility appropriate to social causation. [...] [T]o understand why translation happened we have to look at the people involved” (Pym ix). However, translation is not the only factor altering translation history, as non-translation can expose elements otherwise overlooked. Translation—reproduction—sometimes takes the form of writing—production,—yet this might not be immediately obvious, or explicitly declared. Such is the case of E.M. Cioran, a Romanian writer who suddenly

decided to abandon his past after self-exiling to France in his mid-twenties. Curiously, he abandoned it completely, refusing to ever write or even translate in Romanian. Cioran explained in an interview much later in his life that his Romanian self was no longer useful to him after a certain point because writing in Romanian meant writing for no audience (Zarifopol-Johnston 2007:24). This study searches to reveal that this switch is misleading, that it masks its true intention, since his Romanian identity managed to stay hidden behind the use of French. To do so, I will first look at the situation in Romania during his formative years, to shed light upon his abandoned identity, by using documents about Romania at that time, but also biographies on Cioran, to expose his reaction to the political, social and cultural dimensions of Romania. Then, I will focus on the short period between leaving Romania and abandoning his past via his biographies but also via articles on the Romanian exiled community in France, more specifically, on two of his closest companions: Mircea Eliade and Eugène Ionesco; comparing the three will allow me to minimize the bias of one critic, giving the study more leverage. The last section will focus on his later life via interviews and biographies. What I want to stress is the result of a non-official “non-self-translation” in Cioran, namely that he searched for other means to self-translate and achieved to do so, ultimately. Anthony Pym’s *Method in Translation History* provided me with a very good framework to do this, ergo I will be using it to trace my steps into discovering non-self-translation in the case of E.M. Cioran, as the importance of this study falls not only on the findings, but also on the multi-step research necessary to access this information.

Self-translation: Definition and Importance

Self-translation, as pseudo-translation, non-translation and adaptation, is located on the peripheries of translation studies as per Pym and others. Rainer Grutman, having to contribute to the section of Self-translation in the 2008 Routledge *Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, describes it as the process and the result of translating one's own work for material reasons—exile or financial gain. I have simplified his assertions to the most basic form as to better contribute to the focus of the present study, which I will also do with Jan Vansina—anthropological historicist specialized in African cultures. Vansina is important to mention due to his useful breakdown into categories of authors in terms of how their linguistic status affects the translation of their work. Accordingly, Vansina draws the first category to be monolingual authors, who write and pass on their complete works to translators; the second—somewhat bilingual authors, who can participate in the translation process, however, not fully; and third—fully bilingual authors who can and who do translate their own work (Vansina 483). Vansina himself subscribes to the third and, in his opinion, is able to produce the best translation of his work possible. Cioran seemingly subscribes to the second, yet, according to his humble translators, he behaved as if he belonged to the third. Due to his contradictory position on this axis, I put forth the category of non-self-translation as a subcategory of self-translation and, in turn, a subcategory of translation. As stated in the introduction, the translator should be “the central object” in building a history of translation, and, in addition, we must also recognize that “[f]rom the very beginning, we need conflict, a disagreement, perhaps a potential dispute, or at least some measure of dissent” (Pym 128). Cioran's rejection of self-translation in spite of

fulfilling all the necessary conditions of a bilingual writer/self-translator is puzzling. “If translators always have the choice of non-translation, of refusing the conditions altogether, they must surely be seen as major determinants in their own right” (Pym 155). Although Pym builds a much larger framework, applicable to translation history in terms of entire centuries and translation corpora, I have quoted the above to show how I have cut down his methodology to fit my humble Cioran. To reiterate using non-self-translation: it is quite telling that Cioran tossed his Romanian-ness over-night to become an acclaimed French writer, whom, however acclaimed, was denied the Romanian audience, an audience that was his birthright.

Why Cioran?

The study I propose is absolutely problematic, since non-self-translation is even more peripheral than the already outcast self-translation. My motivation was emotional at first, since I projected my own experience as a Romanian bilingual onto Cioran. The answer to the question ‘why did he swap identities’, to me, was ‘out of pride,’ since I too did so and for this reason. Although traditionally not accepted to completely subject the object of study to personal involvement, as Pym would expect, it motivated my research. Cioran’s Romanian critics, among which Matei Călinescu, Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, Marta Petreu, and Sanda Stolojan all shared some biographical detail with him, starting with his native tongue, of course. Their personal involvement is what *caused* the research so that, unlike his French devotees, the Romanian crowd searched for the Emil of E.M. Cioran, the private Cioran, one who Jorge Luis Borges would describe as the “I” and who vaguely represents E.M. Cioran, found in his literature. Borges explains in his very short,

however artistically philosophic, “Borges and I,” that he, as an acclaimed writer—a public figure—was split. “Borges”—the writer, presented as the third person “he”, enjoyed much attention throughout his life, yet the “I”—Jorge, was so much more than his public counterpart and his routine did not differ from any other person’s. He slept and brushed his teeth, ate out of the fridge and called his mother to wish her a “happy birthday”—or so I imagine that he did. “I”, unlike “he”, however, is a self that cannot be accessed, says Borges. “I”—Jorge—is someone who cannot be found on paper, no matter how many statements he makes in the first person, because, truthfully, he is always evolving. Perhaps his close friends and relatives know this part of him, or perhaps he is completely inaccessible to the world outside his own mind; Borges only speculates, he does not give the reader a definitive evaluation. Using Borges’ metaphor of a split self, I want to show that my research was directed at Cioran’s personal self. Although, as Borges asserts, I could not have access to that self, I was able to take apart the public one to find a glimpse of the underlying private one—the Cioran who decided to be a French writer before the French writer actually came into existence. His reason, which I had assessed as pride, promised to reveal the importance of non-self-translation. Of course, my initial hypothesis differs from what I concluded in this study, yet, it was what guided the research and, therefore, it was vital in the process. History is built “brick by brick, hypothesis by hypothesis, link by link” (Pym 118). To do this, I had to go back in time and follow Cioran throughout his life, ergo, I started in Romania, just before 1911 (Cioran’s birth); I briefly followed him to school in Germany, then fled to France, where I lost track of him in his philosophical writing. I was able to find him in his Romanian exile community, particularly, in the other two members of his

triad—Mircea Eliade and Eugène Ionesco, who showed me more of the “I”, who was stealthily concealed by the “he”—Emil disguised as E.M. Cioran.

Pre-Cioran Era – Romania going into the 20th century

The territory that nowadays constitutes Romania has a history of foreign ownership that greatly influenced the “unified” Romanian culture and national identity. Prior to 1918, Romania did not include Transylvania—area enclosed by the Carpathian Mountains in northwestern Romania of today, Bessarabia—today’s Republic of Moldavia, and Bukovina—small region in northern Romania, currently split between Ukraine and Romania. Transylvania, which is the area that interests us in relation to Cioran, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until managing to glue itself onto Romania on December 1st 1918. Matei Călinescu, one of Cioran’s recurring critics, revisits Romania in this period of time by looking into the literature of the times to find the reflection of a past that he does not have access to via official documents. He highlights the strong anti-Semitic “national” attitude throughout Romania (Călinescu “Romania’s 1930’s Revisited”). Anne Quinney, explains that this attitude was due to the fact that “Romanians wanted [...] to “romanize” its Jews but deny them the right to hold property” (Quinney 39). Nationalism spoke out via Christianity; only Christians were allowed to become naturalized citizens. While Western Europe was enjoying its Roaring Twenties, Romanian ardent Christian Corneliu Codreanu was devising his Association of Christian Students, which later became The Legion of Archangel Michael, and, ultimately, the Iron Guard—“the Romanian variant of fascism” (Călinescu 1996:197). This organization was based on fanatic Christian principles and it was determined to take over

Romania by assassinating political figures and brainwashing promising young minds.

The young C(H)ioran¹

Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston, Cioran's translator into English, kept close contact with Cioran in writing her *Searching for Cioran*, which was published posthumously in 2009. I used this reference extensively and it has helped put together a continuum that was significantly broken previously. This account is especially useful in literally debunking Cioran's declarations during his later years, since she organized her book in such a way that Cioran's voice is interrupted by others whenever his accounts seem suspicious.

Cioran was born in 1911, in Rășinari, close to the city of Sibiu (Hermannstadt), in Transylvania. Zarifopol-Johnston points out that this area was an area of high Romanian nationalism. As mentioned earlier, Transylvania was still under Austro-Hungarian jurisdiction, while populated largely by Romanians. After losing its autonomy in 1867, Transylvania began seeing changes in terms of language, in that, the educational system was organized by local sponsors (Stanciu 338). This meant that, for the first time, Romanian had the potential to become the language of instruction. However, the situation changed as a one-language policy was imposed a few decades later. The nationalists fought back via religion—or vice versa. The clergy was “instrumental in this struggle for national rights” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:29). Cioran's family came from a long line of priests extending out from both his father's and his mother's sides, therefore it was to be his vocation as well. Although his mother was not particularly religious, as Cioran declared it in an

¹ As pronounced in Romanian, the combination between “c” and “i” produces a “ch”.

interview with Michel Jakob later in life, she supported his father's wishes due to her own lineage of priests. His father was an eager nationalist who besought the emancipation of Romanians as to insure the continuity of Romanian traditions. Zarifopol-Johnston adds that starting with the eighteenth century, the Romanians became "aware of the nation's cultural backwardness, [and] Romanian intellectuals believed that political emancipation would follow the wake of cultural and spiritual renaissance" (2009:29). The Romanian nobility prepped their predecessors thoroughly by sending them off to schools in big cities. Cioran's family was no different, they were "wealthy and cultured" (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:30), however not cultured enough for a young Emil. In his interview with Jakob, Cioran talked about Rășinari as a "lost Paradise" (Jakob 123). He admits that, supposedly, he had never again encountered a place where a medley of cultures "lived together without drama" (123), yet this information must be taken with a grain of salt. There is an obvious discrepancy between what he declares in regards to *ce maudit, ce splendide paradis* (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:27) in this interview and his behaviour as a young man, as presented in biographical accounts, which point to a lifelong devotion to diving farther away from this idyllic place—to Sibiu, to Bucharest, to Berlin and ultimately to Paris. At the age of ten, Cioran was sent off to Sibiu to live with a pair of Saxon sisters to continue his education. Due to the lack of space and trained educators, the rural areas were still struggling to build a solid educational system—which was not even to be expected after grade four (Stanciu 206). Romanian children in Transylvania would continue their studies in larger cities—as Sibiu, and perhaps even cross the border into united Romania for higher education (Stanciu 332). Given the fact that local universities were scarce, a great number of Romanian high school

graduates from Transylvania would obtain degrees elsewhere in Western Europe (Stanciu 209). This allowed intellectuals and artists to import Western ideas of rights and freedoms. In his interview with Jakob, Cioran says that after having lived in Sibiu he could never live in a “city in which only one language is spoken” (123). Although this seems to clash with his reaction to switch to French completely and only be known as a French writer, Zarifopol-Johnston puts it into an equation with identity. “Although we might almost say that Cioran was born with an identity problem, [...] he did not become conscious of it until he reached ethnically and linguistically diverse Sibiu” (2009:52). It would be otherwise rather pointless to surround oneself with languages if one does not intend to use them, yet Cioran, as we shall see, was committed to global citizenship—even though the concept only appeared several years after his death more than half of a century later. Sibiu was a particularly strange example to attribute a hint of harmony to—here, I am drawing from his assertion of Rășinari mentioned above, since it was truly a tormented city. The three major nationalities of Transylvania—Romanian, Magyars and German Saxons—were in perpetual conflict. Zarifopol-Johnston mentions that Hungarian was spoken in his area due a one-language policy imposed by Austro-Hungary, and not by peoples’ choice. Therefore, specifically in Cioran’s case, it is not surprising that he was expected to learn German as a sign of dissidence, which he did during his teenage years. In this period Cioran started to get bored, or, better said, to realize that he was bored.

Boredom or *l’ennui* (Bollon 58) concurrently ruined him and liberated him. At the time, the negative aspects of boredom pushed him to confess to his mother: “I cannot take it any longer” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:51). Acquiring knowledge without having to invest

the time to study came naturally to him, he was not keen on school, yet he was competitive and ambitious and maintained good relationships with his educators. He started reading on his own, routinely, at the age of fourteen, so that by seventeen he was completely in love with philosophy. His passion for knowledge, true knowledge, was amplified by his disapproval of his family, whom he considered almost brutish at the time. He only gained respect for his mother when she declared her love for Bach, said Cioran to Jakob, having aged out of his extreme dislike of his family. The wish to be far away from his family, coincided with his subject choice—philosophy, which he pursued in Bucharest. This was not only possible but likely due to the fact that Romania's unification had taken place ten years before. Romanians in Transylvania, previously searched for higher education in the Austro-Hungarian empire—if not elsewhere in Europe, yet, once unified, Romania was able to further develop its own universities, for example, the university in Bucharest, which had been inaugurated in 1864 (Stanciu 332).

Becoming Cioran

Perhaps, Emil is much easier to understand than Cioran, but it was Cioran who recounted all of the above. Cioran was, in essence, a human being like any other, which is why I insisted in including Borges in my study. By using Borges I want to underline the fact that having access to anything other than the public figure is not guaranteed but there are loopholes and cracks that can be found. As mentioned, when he was seventeen, in 1928, Cioran managed to escape rural life to Bucharest, the country's capital. Shortly before or after this move he developed a chronic insomnia that was to influence him for the rest of his life. Throughout his life, Cioran philosophized his insomnia as love, glory and excruciating pain, yet

always recognized it as a “privileged obsession” (Regier 1004). It was a tragedy for him, since, combined with *l’ennui*, it impaired him to do anything, become anything other than a writer during “the melancholy of insomniac nights” (Regier 994). “[À] cause de cette expérience [il] n’[a] rien pu faire de sérieux dans [sa] vie. [Il a] vécu intensément mais sans pouvoir [s]’intégrer à l’existence” (Bollon 58). Along with this internal storm, Cioran discovered that the high education was not high enough in Bucharest, *le petit Paris*, where French was in vogue and knowing German made him feel “uneducated and barbaric” (Zarifopol-Johnson 2009:65). This is the point in his life when he started glorifying the French language, the language *par excellence*, one that would complete him. Thus, his spirit of competition and ambition led him to learn it. In fact, the entire country was obsessed with anything French, an obsession that had started a century prior to Cioran’s arrival in the then recently unified Romania. One of the most celebrated Romanian writers, Ion Luca Caragiale, extensively criticized the withering Romanian society through his plays. His focus was high society members who tried to seem less poorly educated by adopting everything French—including word endings such as “-ion” with a French accent. Desperate due to boredom and insomnia, trying to escape a reality he hated, Cioran plunged deeper into reading, trying to find himself, his identity. It is during this period that his life intersected the Iron Guard via Nae Ionescu, a famous philosophy teacher. This was a pivotal point because, as numerous sources state, it was his goal for the rest of his days to erase this moment. Matei Călinescu explains that Cioran saw it as the only alternative, since he despised everything else on the market—king Carol, for unknown reasons, and the communists, who were “very weak” (1996:198). Cioran himself explained that “[t]he Iron Guard was considered a sort of a

cure for all ills and for boredom—even for the clap. Given the [generation’s] tendency to extremism, even the communists could have attracted many; but the communists were very weak and there was no real alternative [to the Iron Guard]” (Călinescu 1996:198). This was the perfect combination Cioran had been searching for and, although he was not one to succumb to peer-pressure, many of his classmates were joining this army, including Mircea Eliade, a Romanian historicist and writer and life-long friend of Cioran. Sources claim that both Eliade and Cioran denied their ties to the Iron Guard later in life, trying to make their work impeccable of anything related to it. After finishing his degree in Bucharest, Cioran received a Humboldt scholarship to Berlin, where, at last, he found a wholesome culture. He wrote his first book *Pe culmile disperării*, translated as *On the heights of despair* in the 1980’s by Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston. The book was published in 1934 and it was highly regarded, although it dealt with problems such as suicide, God and the universe—unorthodox, therefore controversial. Later in life, Cioran admitted that he was planning to take his own life after completing the book, but the very act of philosophizing suicide saved his life. He continued to expand on the themes presented in this first book for the rest of his life, arguing that his insomnia would never leave him, thus he would never cease to recognize his “mortality” (Regier 996). He returned to Romania and found a teaching position in Braşov (Kronstadt), in the center of the country, at the foot of the mountains in Transylvania. He declared, in his interview with Jakob, that his experience there was catastrophic, that he planned to leave this city and this country immediately. His insomnia made him “naturally useless during the day” so that he “could not practice any profession” (Jakob 124), which in turn dictated his decision to never hold a job that would require any mental activity. In Braşov he wrote

his second book, *Schimbarea la față a României*, translated as *Romania's Transfiguration*, which was very similar to a fascist manifesto. *Romania's Transfiguration* is the book that haunted him from then on, leading him to declare, very late in his life, that he felt regret for having published it. "Insomnia makes man 'another man, or not even a man'" (Regier 1997). *Romania's Transfiguration* deals with the Romanian identity—or rather lack of identity—and crowns blind extreme nationalism as the only glue between Romanians, a people of "timeless peasants enamored of their own torpor and almost bursting with hebetude" (Călinescu 1996:194). The book represents a knife thrown at the Romanian people, yet one of the chapters in this book, in particular, embarrassed him to the extent that he did not want to have it translated. The chapter in question is an anti-Semitic declaration. Cioran later wrote an essay glorifying the Jewish culture in hopes of washing away some of the shame he felt for having ever written *Romania's Transfiguration*. To defend Cioran, I want to recall that his Romania was tormented: first, in the Magyar Transylvania of his childhood, he was either considered inferior or mistaken for a Magyar; then, in *Petit Paris* Bucharest, he was again considered inferior to the *real* Romanians, the ones who spoke French and not German. Eventually, in Berlin, he found a strong and charming Hitler, leading a people who did not suffer from an inferiority complex. These were the contexts in which his unconscious was formed, which is the reason why he begged for a Romania with a history, a Romania with "the destiny of France and the population of China" (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:12). In 1937, he published his third book, *Lacrimi și sfinți*, translated as *Tears and Saints*. This book caused a scandal, for which Cioran again blamed the years of sleepless nights. His definition of insomnia suffered a change in this book. Whereas, before, he glorified it as his incentive

to write, he now equated it to pain. In this piece he delved deeper into his issues with God, due to the higher pressures to become a priest, which, of course, came from his family. If Cioran had not had identity issues before, this would have prompted them. However, given that he had been philosophizing his identity for quite some time, he suffered an identity crisis in full-throttle, completely documented in *Tears and Saints*. In later interviews, he declared that “faith was impossible to [him],” that “one cannot will oneself to believe,” faith is a “gift” (Jakob 129) that he had not received. Due to the crude reviews, his family was shamed, leading his mother to tell him that the book should have not been published during their lifetime. Cioran called this a “Balkan phenomenon,” meaning that nothing escaped the *gurile rele* (slanderers), that there were no boundaries and no privacy.

E.M. Cioran

E.M. Cioran—“one of the greatest French writers to honor our language since the death of Paul Valéry” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2079:21) was, in fact, Romanian. Only had they heard him speak his flawless French with a foreign accent, had they known this.

Cioran spent his first years in France trying to find himself, the liberalism of France being a new discovery for him. While still writing in Romanian, he was literally stalking Sartre at his regular cafés, to be able to follow his discussions on existentialism closely. Cioran planned to come up with a fuller version of his world of nothingness, as he saw it. *Précis de décomposition*, his first French book, was his response to Sartre. The publication of this book was an immense joy, declared Simone Boué, his lifelong partner. Upon hearing that he was to be published, Cioran cried: “You must understand how important it is for a Romanian intellectual to be

acknowledged in France. [...] I made it! I won!” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:5). The move to France was something of incomparable intensity. He was delighted—a word most probably absent in his philosophy—to be in Paris, where everything was alive. An older Cioran admitted that he was able to conquer insomnia for a while when arriving in France and he managed to put insomnia in the background for the next six books, yet, although in the background, it most certainly can be seen lingering. Having promised himself to have no occupation, he spent his sleepless nights roaming the streets of Paris, all the while receiving funds from the French Institute in Bucharest. Even though he was not working on his dissertation on Immanuel Kant, he managed to renew his fellowship until 1940, when he received a position as a diplomat in Vichy. “One doesn’t live altogether in paradise—pardon me—as a parasite” (Jakob 137). He published and translated, but he made a living mostly via the compassion of his friends and via conversation with anyone willing to pay for his meal. He lived with the bare minimum, always looking for opportunities to find cheaper accommodation. The 1940 *Amurgul gândurilor* was the last book thought to be published in Romanian, however, the manuscript for his following book, *Îdreptar pătimiș*—translated as *Primer of Passions*—was published in 1991. Since he was unable to find the success he yearned for in Romania, Cioran searched for another audience, one that would not associate him with the fascists of the Iron Guard. Zarifopol-Johnston writes that while translating Mallarmé in 1945, Cioran had a sudden revelation about his choice of language—who would care for a Romanian Mallarmé? Romanian had suddenly become meaningless. He had an epiphany—that French was “a language [...] by definition universal, impersonal and dead” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:15). It was a language that did not share the past of his nation, and, as

mentioned, Cioran sought to be a global citizen. Religion and nationalism baffled him, therefore he needed an ahistorical outlet, which to him was the French language. Cioran was either “born with the wrong identity” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:25) or his identity was “double and contradictory” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:39). Zarifopol-Johnston does not choose. However, it is safe to assume that the political and cultural context in Romania did not allow him to explore the themes he was attached to, while France did offer this possibility. The switch was abrupt, sudden, or that was what he planned. He decided that all ties to Romania must be cut immediately, including his group of Romanian friends in France, with whom he planned to speak in French only. It was a difficult task, yet he was completely devoted to tossing his Romanian identity and converting to French. It is also important to note that “[he] had no talent for translation” (Jakob 138)—read he despised the process. Perhaps it is a question of unwillingness to lend oneself to a tedious process in which the translator is always at a disadvantage, yet, surely, his presence in France authorized a complete identity shift. Mara Magda Maftei adds that he had become increasingly paranoid in regards to politics around this time. He feared that his ties to the Iron Guard would resurface, so he spent his daytime visiting exile after exile in the small Romanian community in Paris. He had never been fully fascist, nor fully communist, but he feared both. Maftei describes his attitude as a French *je-m'en-fiche* type that could not subscribe to politics and France allowed him to act apolitical and ahistorical, and to exercise “his immense sense of pride” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:140) albeit not conforming to a system.

The Romanian exiles in Paris

As mentioned at the beginning of this study, in order to get to Cioran's context in France, I searched for critiques of his surroundings, meaning the community of Romanian exiles in Paris. While there were quite a few of them, Cioran is usually associated with Mircea Eliade and Eugène Ionesco—two very different cases, first of all because these two were veritable exiles, unlike Cioran, whose life was most probably only in danger of boredom.

Under different circumstances the three ended up in Paris. Eliade was hiding from the Communists, who knew about his connection to the old fascist Iron Guard movement. As Cioran, Eliade regretted this deeply—he was also a young and aspiring student, easily manipulated by any new age philosophy. His ties to the Iron Guard, says Matei Călinescu, were both serious and delusional, yet surely a result of naiveté. Only after 1938, upon the death of leader Codreanu, did he condemn them forever, finally acknowledging the fact that the Iron Guard was an army of assassins and manipulators. Once out of Romania in 1941, Eliade devoted himself “exclusively to his work as a scholar of religion and myth” (Călinescu 2010:8). Out of the three, he was the only one who kept his Romanian audience. This was out of need rather than want, critics say, as this decision came from a business rather than an ethical perspective. His work had already been translated into various languages (including English and French) and it was, in fact, his dream to promote Romanian literature on the world-wide market. Eliade did not feel the same urge to change his identity as Cioran and Ionesco. His translations into French did not receive the acclaim he searched for, which led him to realize that he was a fiction writer deeply embedded into a Balkan way of thinking. However, considering his past political affiliations, it was only natural that he too wished to discard at least

some of his Romanian past, clearly promoting an ahistorical approach to knowledge in the United States, at the University of Chicago, where he held a position starting with 1957, until his death in 1986. Eliade was the only one who wished to eventually return to Romania, but he died before he could do so, as the communist regime only ended in 1989.

Eugène Ionesco, the acclaimed French absurdist playwright was also born in Romania. He spent his childhood in France with his Jewish mother, whose memory he held very dearly. Having previously abandoned them in France, his father claimed his children—his sister and him—when Ionesco was thirteen, which marked the beginning of his Romanian experience that he identified as an exile. This shift shaped his relationship to the two languages and cultures, clearly favoring the French one. And yet, his Romanian experience was not very different from what a French one would have been, Romania being excessively keen on *everything* French. He wrote in Romanian and even received a bit of attention, while making a living teaching French. Faced with the war, in 1938, he obtained a bursary to go to France, far away from fascist anti-Semitic waves. In 1948 he finished his self-translation of the play *L'anglais sans peine* and decided to write in French from that point on. Strangely, he became a playwright, “one of the founders of the ‘theatre of the absurd’” (Călinescu 2010:15). I say strangely because before France he wrote anything but plays. As in Cioran’s case, French opened up a universal stage, where he could gain success as a writer. For Ionesco, this shift was much more emotional, since he was able to return to his cherished childhood and it liberated him. Despite all this, Ionesco was still troubled by his double identity. Although he wanted to identify with the French more than the Romanian, his political views were deeply influenced by his “exile” in

Romania. This can be seen in his famous *Rhinocéros*, where “[t]he image of human beings transforming into savage beasts begs to be read as a figure for something else: it is impossible not to read it as an allegory” (Quinney 37), if I may add, of the Romania before he left, one where people turned against each other without justification or reason.

Cioran is categorized along with Mircea Eliade and Eugene Ionesco due to the time period and not the situation, although he “enjoyed his clandestine reputation” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:XVI). The triad shared more than just origins, in fact, it was their conviction that exile—self-imposed or otherwise—is a condition that begs one to write. This conviction ultimately led them to success. It is said that Ionesco held onto his anger for quite a while before he could forgive Eliade and Cioran for having been partisans of the Iron Guard, yet Mara Magda Maftei disagrees claiming that the three did not hold any grudges in regards to their past political inclinations upon leaving Romania (Maftei 3). Life in Paris started out harshly for all the Romanian exiles, they did not make a wealthy living and they could not return, as they feared imprisonment and death. Although in different situations, the Romanian exiles shared an inevitable identity crisis—however different—that they cultivated in writing.

Late Cioran

Exile allowed Cioran to continue his *existența de parazit* (parasite existence) (Maftei 7). Insomnia and his Romanian past continued to shape his life and philosophy even after deserting his native Romania. The 1949 *Précis de décomposition*, is a polished French version of his *On the Heights of Despair*. Willis Regier tells us that he revised it four times before being satisfied with the result. It is only

now that we can notice Emil—the perfectionist, a slave to style. Insomnia only spares the animals, he would say; it is insomnia—the brain in overdrive—that makes us human. As mentioned, insomnia slipped into the background upon his arrival in France and we can assess that it had much to do with his conversion. Once adopted, the “impersonal” French allowed Emil to mask his autobiographical remarks, as it was one of Emil’s great desires to appear impartial. His work was entirely autobiographical, notes Zarifopol-Johnston, the French works especially, precisely since they beg to differ. Emil’s identity crisis was translated via Cioran into the human condition so that his work both “conceals and reveals his life” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:13).

Conclusion: Cioran Non-Self-translating

French Cioran was simultaneously famous and marginal. He did not wish to be popular in the sense of maintaining a public persona. Supposedly, his tumultuous past, his relations to a fascist Romania frightened him and the only way to keep this secret was to become a French writer. Yet, as we have seen, Cioran was a devoted *je-m’enfiche* type of citizen, albeit a very passionate individual. It is clear that he cared deeply for people, yet, I believe, his devotion to his lifestyle was above all, his focus. Zarifopol-Johnston observes that Cioran “must be read *against* his historical background” (Zarifopol-Johnston 2009:11), since France did not change him, it just permitted him to be his true self—an anti-Balkan. He imported the philosophy of *trăirism*²—therefore proving that he was never able to

² “un courant de la pensée roumaine d’entre-deux genres et qui, proclamant la primauté des instincts et de l’inconscient sur la raison, soutenait qu’on ne peut parvenir à la connaissance des différents aspects et phénomènes de la vie que par le biais de l’expérience mystique, courant influencé par l’existentialisme” (Dorobanțu 115)

discard his Romanian roots. Cioran was again faced with his past in the 1980s when several translations were requested—in French and English, and again after the fall of the communist regime in 1989, when his works were to be republished in Romanian. This gave Emil the opportunity to surface. Emil was the one who wanted to “unwrite” what he had written in Romania, or anything he ever wrote for that matter. Old age changed his mind, it made him softer, yet it also exaggerated his desire to tweak incessantly, as he was truly a slave of style. Although he did not self-translate, he collaborated with—read dictated to—Sanda Stolojan in French and Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston in English in regards to what changes were to be made in the translations. Emil Cioran was an emotional cutter—he edited himself, literally, since his works are highly autobiographical. He tried to kill the “I”, the “Emil,” whose imminent death Jorge Luis Borges predicted in his “Borges and I”. Emil wanted to control the future of “Cioran”, a future he thought compromised by his early writings. Perhaps Borges could have brought some peace in this battle—the “I”(Emil) cannot be accessed in those fascist writings; it is a young Cioran that is sometimes recognized as the author. E.M. Cioran’s obsession with controlling his future by erasing his past was, of course, due to guilt but to pride just as much, since it is not unlikely in self-translators to edit themselves as to conform to a certain style, in Cioran’s case a thematic one. A similar example constitutes Samuel Beckett’s *English Company*, which changed after self-translation into French *Compagnie* (Fitch 177)—the French informed the English how to seem stranger. Similarly, Nancy Huston’s *Plain-song* and *Cantique des plaines* were created simultaneously such that they would mirror one another—process that Huston undergoes for most of her work (Danby 85). What I would like make clear in this last paragraph is that my goal was to

illustrate non-self-translation using knowledge of self-translation, yet to describe the conditions of self-translation using a non-self-translation case, thus confirming the need to look at both sides of the coin.

Works Cited

- Bollon, Patrice. "Le labyrinthe et le palais." *Magazine Littéraire* 508 (2011): 48-51. Web.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. "Borges and I." *Parabola*. 17 (1992): 41-2. Print.
- Călinescu, Matei. "Romania's 1930's Revisited." *Salmagundi*. 97 (1993): 133-51. Print.
- Călinescu, Matei. "'How can One be what One is?': Reading the Romanian and the French Cioran." *Salmagundi*. 112 (1996): 192-215. Print.
- Călinescu, Matei. "Eliade and Ionesco in the Post-World War II Years: Questions of Identity in Exile." *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions*. New York: Oxford University Press (2010):103-31. Print.
- Danby, Nicola. "The Spaces Between: Self-Translator Nancy Huston's *Limbes/Limbo*." *La linguistique* 40(2004): 83-96. Print.
- Dorobanțu, Marinela Doina. "Exile et interculturalité : le cas de cinq écrivains français d'origine roumaine." *Studii de știință și cultură*. 7.3 (2011) : 111-17. Print
- Fitch, Brian T. *Beckett and Babel: An Investigation into the Status of Bilingual Work*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 1988. Print
- Grutman, Rainier. "Self-translation." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*. [Electronic Resource]. New York: Routledge (2008). Print
- Jakob, Michel, E. M Cioran, and Kate Greenspan. "Wakefulness and Obsession: An Interview with E.M. Cioran." *Salmagundi*. 103 (1994): 122-45. Print.
- Maftai, Mara Magda. "Tânăra generație. Foști naționaliști în fața comunismului românesc și a stângii occidentale". *Communication interculturelle et littérature (Communicationil)* 2:6 (2009): 75-82. Print.

- Mondreanu, Simona. "Disciple des saints." *Magazine Littéraire* 508 (2011): 62-3. Print.
- Piednoir, Vincent. "Fanatique jusqu'au ridicule." *Magazine Littéraire* 508 (2011): 52-3. Print.
- Plesu, Andrei. "Intellectual Life under Dictatorship." *Representations*. 49, Special Issue: Identifying Histories: Eastern Europe Before and After 1989 (1995): 61-71. Print.
- Pym, Anthony. *Method in Translation History*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing. 2010. Print
- Quinney, Anne. "Excess and Identity: The Franco-Romanian Lonesco Combats Rhinoceritis." *South Central Review* 24.3 (2007): 36-52. Print.
- Regier, Willis G. "Cioran's Insomnia." *MLN*. 119.5. Comparative Literature Issue (2004): 994-1012. Print.
- Rovere, Maxime. "Cioran, cent ans de finitude." *Magazine Littéraire* 508 (2011): 46-7. Print.
- Stanciu, Ion Gh. *O istorie a pedagogiei universale și românești până la 1900*. București: Editura didactică și pedagogică. 1977. Print
- Țurcanu, Florin. "'Transfiguration de la Roumanie' contre 'malédiction Balkanique'. Cioran et le sud-est européen dans les années 1930." *Revue des études sud-est européennes*. 48:1-4 (2010): 323-32. Print.
- Vansina, Jan. "A Note on Self-Translation." *History in Africa* 31 (2004): 483-90. Print.
- Zarifopol-Johnston, Ilinca. *Searching for Cioran / Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston ; Edited by Kenneth R. Johnston ; Foreword by Matei Călinescu*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press. 2009. Print.
- Zarifopol-Johnston, Ilinca. "Found in Translation: The Two Lives of E.M. Cioran; Or, How Can One Be A Comparatist?". *Comparative Literature Studies* 44.1/2, Don Quixote and 400 Years of World Literature (2007): 20-37. Print.

Alexandra Popescu is an M.A. student in Translation Studies at the University of Alberta. The topic of her thesis is Self-translation, otherwise known as the art of translating oneself. She is currently translating for *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies* and teaching beginner-level Spanish at the U of A.

popescu2@ualberta.ca