



On the Heights of Despair

By E. M. Cioran

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Born of a terrible insomnia—"a dizzying lucidity which would turn even paradise into hell"—this book presents the youthful Cioran, a self-described "Nietzsche still complete with his Zarathustra, his poses, his mystical clown's tricks, a whole circus of the heights."

On the Heights of Despair shows Cioran's first grappling with themes he would return to in his mature works: despair and decay, absurdity and alienation, futility and the irrationality of existence. It also presents Cioran as a connoisseur of apocalypse, a theoretician of despair, for whom writing and philosophy both share the "lyrical virtues" that alone lead to a metaphysical revelation.

"No modern writer twists the knife with Cioran's dexterity. . . . His writing . . . is informed with the bitterness of genuine compassion."—Bill Marx, *Boston Phoenix*

"The dark, existential despair of Romanian philosopher Cioran's short meditations is paradoxically bracing and life-affirming. . . . Puts him in the company of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard."—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

"This is self-pity as epigram, the sort of dyspeptic pronouncement that gets most people kicked out of bed but that has kept Mr. Cioran going for the rest of his life."—Judith Shulevitz, *New York Times Book Review*

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Imagine walking across a tightrope suspended high in the summer air above a bay flooded in the mauve glow of sunset, the music of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" surrounding you. Now imagine the tightrope is actually razor-wire, and gusts of wind challenge every tortuous step into sublime infinity. This is the paradox of emotions one feels when reading **On the Heights of Despair**, the paradigmatic cry of the tortured artist whose explosive intensity of passion is equaled only by the profundity of his despair. In this hauntingly lyrical meditation on darkness, stemming from a sustained insomniac hyper-lucidity, E. M. Cioran cries out a devastating nihilism that is in the end betrayed by his own intransigent lust for being. Compels reading and rereading.

From Publishers Weekly

The dark, existential despair of Romanian philosopher Cioran's short meditations is paradoxically bracing and life-affirming. Written in 1934, when he was 22 and desperately insomniac, this feverishly lyrical, at times slyly humorous confessional outpouring reveals Cioran as an angry young man in morally decaying Europe--a far cry from the elegant, curt stylist of his later books. Here Cioran rails at life's irrationality and absurdities; embraces solitude, melancholy and the awareness of death; and breathes organic vitality into the great philosophical themes of truth, eternity, beauty, suffering and good and evil. After one separates mature wheat from adolescent chaff, Cioran's early philosophical prose, like his later works, puts him in the company of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. In the enriching introduction, Zarifopol-Johnston, who met the thinker in his modest Paris flat, described this book as "a substitute for suicide and . . . its cure."

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From Library Journal

Born in 1911, the author (who now lives in Paris) belongs to the group of 20th-century Romanian intellectuals that includes Mircea Eliade and Eugene Ionesco. This slim and elegantly translated volume, his first publication, originally appeared in 1934 and won him a national award for young authors. Its dark title should be taken as a whole: Cioran does indeed address death and despair, but from a healthy psychological perspective. While clearly a young man's work, this epigrammatic book is neither callow nor dated. For all Western philosophy collections and readers.

- *Francisca Goldsmith, Berkeley P.L., Cal.*

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