



E.M. Cioran





THE BOOK OF DECEPTIONS

E.M. CIORAN

**THE BOOK
OF DECEPTIONS**

Translated by Salomé Monk

Introduction by Ion Dur



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The Book of Deceptions

© 2025 Salomé Monk.

— E.M. Cioran, *Cartea
amăgirilor*, first published by
Cugetarea, București, 1936.

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THE BOOK OF DECEPTIONS

I.

MUSICAL ECSTASY. I feel how I lose my matter, how my physical resistances fall, and how the harmonies and ascents of certain inner melodies melt me. A diffuse sensation, an ineffable feeling, reduces me to an indeterminate sum of vibrations, intimate resonances, enveloping sonorities.

Everything in myself I believed to be individuated, isolated in a material solitude, fixed in a physical consistency and determined in a rigid structure, seems to have been resolved in a rhythm of seductive fascination and imperceptible fluidity. How could I describe in words how the melodies grow, how the whole body vibrates, integrated into a universality of vibrations, evolving into attractive sinuosities, with the charm of aerial unreality? In the moments of inner musicalization, I lost the attraction to heavy materialities; I lost the mineral substance, that petrification which bound me to a cosmic fatality, in order to soar into space with mirages, without being aware of their illusion, & with dreams, without being wounded by their unreality. And no one will understand the irresistible spell of inner melodies, no one will feel the exaltation and bliss if they do not enjoy this unreality, if they love the dream more than evidence. The musical state is not an illusion, because no illusion can give a certainty of such magnitude, nor any organic sensation — of the

absolute, of incomparable experience, significant in itself and expressive in its essence. In these moments when you echo in space and when space echoes in you, in these moments of sonorous torrent, of integral possession of the world, I can only ask myself why is this whole world not me? No one has ever experienced with intensity, with a crazy and incomparable intensity, the musical feeling of existence, if one did not have the desire for this absolute exclusivity, if one did not have an irremediable metaphysical imperialism, when one would like to shatter every boundary that separates the world from the self. The musical state allies, in the individual, absolute egoism with the highest generosity. You want to be only yourself, but not out of petty pride, but out of a supreme will to unity, to shatter the barriers of individuation, not in the sense of the disappearance of the individual, but of the disappearance of the limiting conditions imposed by the existence of this world. Whoever has not had the sensation of the disappearance of the world as a limiting, objective, and detached reality, whoever has not had the sensation of an absorption of this world in his musical impulses, his trepidation and vibration, will never understand the significance of that experience in which everything is reduced to a continuous, ascending, sonorous universality, with evolutions toward heights, in a pleasant chaos. And what is the musical state but a pleasant chaos, whose dizzinesses are beatitudes and whose undulations are enchantments?

I want to live only for the moments when I feel all existence to be a melody, when all the wounds of my being, all the internal bleeding, all the unshed tears and all the presentiments of happiness that I have had under summer skies, with eternities of azure, have gathered and melted into convergences of sounds, into a melodious surge and a warm, sonorous universal communion.

The musical mystery that lies within me enchants me and kills me with joy, casting its reflections in melodious undulations, breaking me apart and reducing my substance to pure rhythm. I lost substantiality, that irreducible element which gave me prominence and contour, which made me tremble before the world, feeling abandoned and forsaken, in a deadly solitude, and I have arrived at a sweet and rhythmic immateriality, where there is no point in looking for my self anymore, because my melodization, my conversion into melody, into pure rhythm, has freed me from the ordinary relativities of life.

My great will, my persistent, intimate, consuming and exhausting will would be to never return from musical states, to live exalted, enchanted, and maddened by the intoxication of melodies, in an intoxication of divine sonorities, to be myself a music of spheres, an explosion of vibrations, a cosmic song, a spiral ascent of resonances. The songs of sadness cease to be painful in this intoxication and tears burn as in moments of supreme mystical revelations. How can I forget the internal tears of such beatitudes? I should die, never to

return to other states. In my inner ocean drip as many tears as the vibrations that have immaterialized my being. If I were to die now, I would be the happiest man. I have suffered too much not to have some unbearable happinesses. And my happiness is so shaken, so overrun by flames, traversed by whirlpools, by serenities, by transparencies & despairs, that, gathered together in melodic surges, they enchant me into a bliss of bestial intensity and demonic uniqueness. You cannot live to the roots of the musical feeling of existence if you cannot bear this inexpressible tremor, of a strange depth, nervous, tense, and paroxysmal. To tremble to the point where everything becomes ecstasy. And that state is not musical if it is not ecstatic.

Musical ecstasy is a return to identity, to the origin, to the primary roots of existence. In it, only the pure rhythm of existence, the immanent and organic current of life, remains. *I hear* life. From here begin all revelations.

Only in music and in love is there the joy of dying, the flash of voluptuousness, when you feel that you are dying because you can no longer bear the internal vibrations. And you rejoice at the thought of a sudden death, which would spare you from having to survive those moments. The joy of dying, which has nothing to do with the idea and obsessive consciousness of death, is born in the great experiences of uniqueness, when you feel perfectly how that state will never

return. In music and in love there are only unique sensations; with all of your being you realize that they will never return, and you regret with all of your soul the daily life to which you will return afterward. What admirable pleasure is that which arises at the thought that you could die in such moments, *that by this fact you have not lost the moment*. For there is an infinitely greater loss in returning to daily existence after such moments than in definitive extinction. The regret of not dying at the heights of the musical and erotic state teaches us how much we have to lose by *living*. The moment we conceive of the reversibility of the musical and erotic state, when we are organically penetrated by the idea of a possibility of reliving it, when uniqueness seems to us a mere illusion, we can no longer speak of the joy of dying, but we return to the feeling of the immanence of death in life, which makes of it nothing but a path to death. We should cultivate unique states, states that we can no longer conceive and feel as reversible, in order to find a death for ourselves in pleasures.

Music and love cannot defeat death, because in their essence there is a tendency to approach death as they gain in intensity. They can be considered as weapons against death only in minor phases. Quiet music and calm love constitute means of fighting against it. There is no kinship between love and death, just as there is no kinship between music and death, but the relationship between them is established by a *leap*, which may be only an *impression*, but which, inwardly,

has no less the significance of a leap. The erotic leap and the musical leap into death! The first hurls you because of an unbearable plenitude, the second because of total vibrations, which shatter the resistances of individuation. The fact that people have been found who commit suicide because of the impossibility of enduring the madness of love rehabilitates the human species, just as the madresses man undergoes in musical experience rehabilitate it. He is a criminal who does not understand and does not feel music, just as he who does not feel that he could commit a crime in such moments.

No state has any value or expresses any extraordinary depth except insofar as it leads to the regret of not dying. The deepest feeling of life would be reached by the one who, at every moment, would feel how he is dying because of his states. Although for everyone death begins at once with life, not everyone has the feeling that they die at every moment.

To continually make a musical leap and an erotic leap into death! Or to let this leap derive from your solitude, which should be the solitude of being, the ultimate solitude. How can there be *other* solitudes than these and how can there be other sorrows than these? What would my joys be without my sorrows and what would my tears be without my sorrows and my joys? And what would my song be without my abysses and my mission without my despair?

Cursed be the moment when life began to take shape and to individuate itself; for from that moment on began the solitude of being and the pain of being only yourself, of being abandoned. Life wanted to affirm itself through individuation; sometimes it succeeded, and then it reached imperialism, and sometimes it failed, and then it reached solitude, although for a deeper vision imperialism is only a form through which one flees from solitude. You gather, conquer, win, and fight to flee from yourself, to overcome the sadness of existing, in reality, only as yourself. For solitude is a proof of the reality of your being, and not of the reality of life in general. The feeling of loneliness increases the more the feeling of the unreality of life increases. Since life wanted to be more than simple potentiality and actualized itself in individuals, there arose the dread of uniqueness and the fear of being alone; the desire of the individual being to overcome this accursed process expresses nothing but the flight from loneliness, from metaphysical loneliness, in which one feels abandoned not merely in certain aspects, but organically and essentially, in one's very nature. Therefore, loneliness ceases to be an attribute of being only when this being ceases to be.

ON THE HAPPINESS OF NOT BEING A SAINT. Prolonged pain can only make you an imbecile or a saint. For no one, however, is the first term of the alternative a problem, because no one can fear and no one can rejoice in a possible

imbecility, a paralysis of all the senses from excessive pain. You neither fear nor rejoice in such a state, because you know that with lucidities excluded from it, a comparison with previous states is not possible, just as no shudder at your fate is possible. But how many shudders does a man's soul not contain at the thought that he might become a saint, and how many deep fears overwhelm him at the dim presentiment of the holiness into which pain will throw him? No one wants to die in imbecility, just as no one wants to live in holiness. But when you become a saint, involuntarily you make your destiny a mission and a fatality a goal.

The presentiments and the stages of holiness are terrible, not holiness itself. They provoke inexplicable shudders, which are all the greater when they appear in youth. Then it wounds you to think that life will cease within you before you die, that it will cease within you on the heights of supreme lucidities, when you will see everything so clearly that darkness itself will shine to the point of blindness. There is so much renunciation in holiness that a man's youth, however painful, cannot reconcile itself to living without the pleasant surprises of mediocrity. To reach a moment when you can no longer be mediocre in any way, a state in which you no longer have any connection with life, can only leave you with regrets, and you are tormented by the thought that in the state of holiness you will no longer have either the *regret* of the life you have lost or hopes of having despaired.

The fear of becoming a saint...

How can you not fear holiness when you thought that only fire, only barbaric surges and explosions, would give rise to dreams of boundless exaltation, while instead you observe inner stagnations, halts in the course of life, which impress you with their solemn significance. For there is something solemn in these vital silences, these organic cessations, disturbing symptoms of holiness, terrifying states of pre-sanctity.

Have you not felt how, at a certain moment, life stopped within you, and has the *silence* of life never pained you?

Have you not felt how instincts liquefy and withdraw, as in a definitive ebb? And have you not felt in this ebb the loneliness of having been abandoned by your life?

Holiness is that state in which man continues to live after life has withdrawn from him, like water from a sea. And therefore, the soul of a saint resembles a deserted sea, in which anything can fit. Man is condemned to pass from *the joy* of hearing life to the sadness of feeling it stop. He is then faced with the problem of living in existence alongside or beyond life. The tragedy of man is that he cannot live *in* life, but only *on this side* or *beyond* it. Therefore, he can speak only of triumphs and defeats, of gains and losses, and for that same reason he cannot live *in* the world, but struggles in vain between heaven and hell, between ascents and collapses.

There are states that even God cannot surmise, because truly great states can only be born in imperfection. Despair

makes me superior to any divinity. It is a pleasure to think that only from imperfection can one learn something.

I must bind myself with all my might to my imperfection, to my despair and to my death.

What do you say about that man who does not want to have enough wisdom to overcome suffering? But can real sufferings be overcome? Can there still be a value from outside by which suffering can be appraised? In vain it is objected that suffering has no ontological root and that it cannot be understood as belonging to the structure of existence. What value can this objection have, in the face of people whose existence is defined by suffering? And after such torments, to become *only* a saint! Doesn't suffering deserve a greater reward, the reward of dying? However, let us rejoice that in this world at least death is not approximate.

The fear of becoming a saint or the regret of not dying.

ON THE GREATEST REGRET. ... on the regret that *pure* life did not realize itself in me, that it was infected by values, conscience, spirit, and ideas; of having been tormented by regrets, despairs, obsessions, and tortures; of having felt myself dying with every step, with every rhythm, and with every moment; of having been tortured at every instant by the fear of nothingness, by the thought of nothingness, and by the fear of existing.

The regret that life was not pure, that is, the regret that the life in me was not a song, an impulse, and a vibration, that it was not a pure aspiration to the point of illusion and warm to the point of consolation, that it was not a bliss, an ecstasy, a death of light.

I would have liked life to circulate within me with an unbearable plenitude, with its anonymous evolutions from before individuation, with its exclusive desires to be only itself, and with its desire to be parallel to death. I would have liked such a life to throb within me, so that its ascent would have been a radiation, an explosion of rays and a madness of vibrations. Everything to have been integrated into this triumph of being and everything to have been nothing but music, a sonorous orgy, attractive and enchanting to the point of being unbearable. To have been irresponsible for the life that flows through me, and for life to have spoken through me.

There is no more effective means of enduring pain than beating and self-torture. Does pain undermine you, crush you, and bury you? Hit yourself, slap yourself, whip yourself to the point of great and terrible pain. In this way you will not overcome it, but you will endure it and get infinitely more out of it than from some mediocre acceptance. Subject your flesh to blows, burn it until fire comes out of it, tense your nerves and clench your fists as if to destroy everything, as if to embrace the sun and drive away the stars. Let the blood

course through you in hot, fierce, and burning currents, let red visions steal you away and let a halo of rays, born from the trembling of flesh, nerves, and blood, make you dizzy. Let everything burn inside you, so that you do not become gentle and lukewarm because of pain. The time has not yet come when beatings, self-tortures, and self-torments have given everything they can give, because people still do not know the method by which fire can be drawn from suffering.

When you feel how suffering dominates you and insinuates itself into your whole being as if to paralyze you, how it grows within you and stops your life in its tracks, use everything you have to burn everything inside you, to dynamize your organism, to drive it mad with exaltation and to dazzle it with fascinating visions. With your nails in your flesh and the whip upon you; with your face contorted as if about to burst; with your eyes scowling as in a moment of terror; with wandering gazes, red and pallid, try to stop the process of collapse, to avoid moral drowning and organic paralysis. Excite all your organs, intoxicate them with new pains, and overcome the attraction toward darkness in suffering with even greater sufferings. A whip can draw more life from death than I do not know how many pleasures. Strike the flesh until it begins to vibrate. Be certain that afterward you will have fewer regrets and fewer despairs.

Do not forget to strain yourself to the utmost intensity. For only in this way will pain not liquidate you before your time. The tension should be so great that your jaws clench,

your tongue becomes fixed, your brain gathers itself to such a point that you no longer know whether what you are doing is silence or a scream. Pain can only be conquered by new pains, which means that a great pain can never be really and effectively overcome, but can only be integrated or stratified within our being.

To cast out from yourself through beatings: lightning, smoke, and dust, and to let hatreds, despairs, and sorrows rise up from within you like lightning, smoke, and dust.

Some have done this for the Kingdom of Heaven and to avoid hell; others do it solely so that this hell does not swallow them up; and, finally, another group does it only so that their own personal hell does not swallow them.

Such whipping differs essentially from ascetic self-flagellation. The ascetic whips himself to escape the temptations of life, we, to escape the temptations of death. Some do it for renunciation, others, as an act against renunciation. It does not seem to me heroic or dramatic to fight in order to overcome the life within you, to kill the instincts in order to build the spirit upon these ruins. Self-torture as a struggle against life is something criminal, hence the inhuman character of all asceticism. But to torture yourself, to whip yourself, and to bleed yourself in order to overcome an illness and master a pain means to rend yourself to pieces in order to live. And all organic rendings have no value unless through them you have managed to postpone death. Those who suffer have nothing left but the offensive against themselves. All

of you who suffer, no longer wait for consolations, because they won't come, nor will they help you; no longer wait for cures, illusions, or hopes; do not wait even for death, because it always comes too late to people who suffer, but rend yourselves to pieces, torture yourselves, strike your flesh until it bleeds, so that the rot in you may become a flame, and the flesh vibrate like nerves, and everything, as in a hallucination, become a total conflagration of being — burn, brothers, burn until the pains are extinguished in you like sparks!

Suffering cannot be attenuated or overcome through intellectual concentration. How can you concentrate on an impersonal problem when suffering calls you at every moment to your personal actuality, to your concrete & individual existence? There is no salvation through thought. And there is none also because it seems useless to you to think about anything other than your suffering, which thought only deepens, reaching the *essence* of suffering. Those who claim to have freed themselves from torments through objective concerns have not known true pain, but only fleeting spiritual restlessness, which had neither depth nor an organic basis. All the uncertainties related to age, which give the individual a sensation of provisional restlessness, have no value. Everything consists in having the feeling of the irreparable in the essence and throughout the entire sphere of your life. — Thought clarifies other thoughts, but it does not clarify suffering. For there are no explanations for this; or, if there are, they prove nothing and make it no more bearable.

Philosophy is the expression of the restlessness of impersonal people. That is why it offers so little for the understanding of total, dramatic, and ultimate experiences. For those who, unwittingly, surpassed life, philosophy is too little. No thought has suppressed a pain and no idea has banished the fear of death. Therefore, leave thoughts and wage terror against yourself, with anger and desperate exaltation. For ideas have neither saved nor destroyed anyone. From the center of your being, from the zone in which you are irresponsible, because it is too deep, burst forth in a ferocious explosion; extract so much energy from your darkness that nothing but light remains. And in this demonia, let the pride of no longer having ideas be born in you, but only boiling, obsessions, madness. Be so frenetic that your words burn, and make your expressions so clear that they resemble the burning transparency of tears. Cast your terror over your anxiety and make everything tremble in this way in a dramatic, shattering, and internal apocalypse. Bring your entire organism to such a high level and such a high vibration that its intense and accelerated rhythm swallows pain in its tensions, melts it, and integrates it into its evolutions, so that a great madness temporarily frees us from a great pain.

The world has not yet convinced itself that there are only brutal methods of combatting pain, that in this field, a radicalism carried to the point of bestiality is necessary. But is suffering not a bestial fact? Sufferings are inadmissible, and yet they are more closely bound to life than joys. Who-

ever has the regret of a vital purity cannot help but be frightened by these stains which are sufferings and which spread over the sphere of life in order to darken it.

Is there any point in anyone suffering anymore? Can there be anxieties after my anxieties and pains after my pains? There are people born to bear the pains of those who do not suffer. The demonia of life pours into them all the poisons that others do not know, all the sufferings that others have not experienced, and all the despairs that others have not suspected. If they could, by some miracle, distribute their poisons, pains, and despairs, it would be enough to make the existence of other people unbearable. For people know only approximate pains, external pains, which are non-existent beside the pains related to individuation, to the structure of existence, since existence is individual. Only those pains are fertile and lasting that spring from the center of your existence, that radiate into an existence and grow immanently in the essence of this existence. There are pains that should stop history in its tracks, just as there are people after whom history holds absolutely no meaning. And I wonder: does my existence not render the continued existence of this world pointless?

We should not be pained by the transience of earthly things or by the non-existence of heavenly things. That everything is subject to destruction, that everything is vain and

transient, that everything has absolutely no value or consistency, you can have only regrets... But you cannot have only regrets when you think how, in an existence so reduced in time and so limited in space, so many pains can fit, so many tragedies can be consumed, and so many despairs can be born. If individual existence is evanescent to the point of illusion, why then so much sadness, so much renunciation, and so many tears? Faced with this bewilderment, which has grown to the point of despair, you are forced to accept the irrationality of life without being able to think further. And there is no point in thinking further, because there is no explanation. Everything is so inexplicable that the futility of ideas pains me. The nothingness of this world, in which pain asserts itself as reality, transforms negativity into law. The more illusory the existence of the world seems, the more real suffering becomes as a compensation. There is no escape from suffering as long as you live; but death is not a solution, because, while resolving everything, it nevertheless resolves nothing. No explanation or justification can be found for the world. May its transience, nothingness, and futility pain us the least, just as little as the fact that life is given to us to die. But let us be pained by the fact that in such a life we must *know*, at every moment, that we will die. Without consciousness of death, life, if it were not a delight, would in no way be a burden. And every life infected by the fear of death is a burden. Then you realize, and are horrified, that an existence so reduced in time and so limited in space can con-

tain fears so deep and so dangerous. Why was life given to man so that he might fear death, and why is life so impure in man? Why do we live to know that we are dying?

I see in man a *tremor of individuation*: the uncertainty and fear of a life left solitary through individualization — an uncertainty and fear belonging to a life that has so often become solitary by realizing itself in individuals.

How great is the joy of having conquered sadness for a moment, of feeling empty to the point of immateriality, but not through a dizzying and hallucinatory emptiness, rather through an emptiness that elevates me, that propels me upward, and makes me as light as my sorrows had made me heavy.

The methods of a new asceticism must be devised, one that will not wing us toward God, but toward our own heights, from which the depths of our sorrows have removed us. It is absurd to renounce food; but it is just as absurd to eliminate the temporal experience of hunger with its pleasures and immaterialities. As in musical ecstasy, an emotion of the heights seizes you, a joy of no longer being anything but your surge & exaltation. But while in musical ecstasy an internal plenitude grows like an inner current, in hunger an emptiness dilates you through a lack of substance and resistance, it propels you, not with contents, but with spasms, with nervous tensions, into an absurd and indefinable surge.

If sadness draws you toward the earth, toward an obscure and deep material element, the immateriality of hunger throws you into a total arbitrariness, into a fantasy and a fascinating play of planes, delightfully irresponsible. What a pleasure to be so high up that thought becomes impossible; what rare delights to be able to forget everything in a state of drunkenness upon the heights; and what a charm to feel one's sorrows fall away during such ascents. Here begin the joys of sad people: when they are no longer themselves, when they have forgotten their sadness. The entire tremor of individuation seems to have passed, from its anxieties and tortures, into an ecstatic tremor, with shivers and voluptuousnesses, into another madness of individuation, whose joys will do nothing but root the sorrows more deeply.

A tense hunger, with exaltations and visions — this is what a sad person cannot refuse himself as a temporal delight: a hunger through which he can overcome material attraction, a hunger that can produce the pleasures of flight, of air, of light and gliding solitudes, solitudes of flight. Every path must be tried so as not to fall defeated by pain, sadness, or illness. And our struggle against them should be our heroism.

Let us rejoice that in confusion we can be total, that we can actualize in a moment all our spiritual planes and all our divergences. States of admirable internal confusion, which do

not at all imply confusion in ideas, are closer to our subjective center than all the differentiation among the planes in which we normally live. Why should I be sad now, then cheerful, by turns sorrowful, joyful, desperate, or exalted? Why should I live in fragments of time, fragments of lived experience, when through a mad effort I could at every moment be *everything*, to be actual through all my realities and possibilities? This confusion that mixes sadness with joy is voluptuous, and it is all the more voluptuous because it is a confusion of tears. To contort yourself from the pains and pleasures that grow at the same moment and to be petrified by understanding nothing of these things, which you savor in a perverse surge and in a total tremor. And this confusion differs from that kind of total experience in which depth leads you to the essence of a phenomenon, such as penetrating into the essence of universal suffering; it differs through the melting, in an inexplicable convergence, of our diversity and our multipolar structure. This admirable confusion is one of the joys of life, but it is above all a joy of sad people. How could you not feel total in this ecstasy of joy and sadness? Then you feel like throwing pieces of yourself out, hurling away the organs that vibrate, throwing yourself into the general confusion and, proud that within you the universal confusion has been realized to the point of paroxysm, letting nothing stop you in that chaotic surge to vibrate and seethe in a total boiling.

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The Book of Deceptions, originally published in 1936, is one of the earliest and most incandescent works of E.M. Cioran. Written in the aftermath of *On the Heights of Despair*, it extends the young Cioran's assault on the consolations of philosophy, religion, love, and the idea of a stable human self. Here thought does not stand apart from existence and contemplate it: thought burns, suffers, exalts, and destroys itself within it.

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