

THE DISCOURSES OF THE FLORENTINE AVANT-GARDE AND OF THE ROMANIAN “YOUNG GENERATION”. INTERFERENCES

Abstract: This article aims to analyse the interconnectedness between the Florentine Avant-Garde of the 1900s-1920s and the Romanian “young generation” of the 1920s-1930s. Leaving behind the traditional approaches of the master-disciple relationship between Giovanni Papini and Mircea Eliade, our endeavour is to provide a larger picture of the complex interactions between the Florentine and the Romanian “young generations”, as well as between the two of them and the other “young generations” spread in Europe, in the first half of the last century. The interferences visible after the comparative study of these discourses will also show the common tendency to transgress the boundaries between psychology, literature, sociology, and politics. Thus, one can look further into the complex issue of the responsibility held by some of the European intellectual elite for the crystallization and rise to power of the Fascist discourses. The jargon developed around such terms as “sincerity”, “hardness”, “masculinity”, “hooliganism”, visible in the writings of Giovanni Papini, Giuseppe Prezzolini, Ardengo Soffici, Mircea Eliade, Mircea Vulcănescu and of many others, evasive and entralling as it was, would easily and dangerously trespass the borders between literature and politics.

Keywords: Florentine Avant-Garde, “young generation”, sincerità, durezza, maschilità, teppismo

When dealing with the Italian Avant-Garde, researchers usually gave pre-eminence to the movement crystallized around Marinetti’s manifesto, published in 1909, due to its international impact (after being republished in the same month, February, on the first page of the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, which by that time sold over 80,000 copies). However, while the Milanese Futurism gained an instant and unrivalled European reputation, on the national level, the Florentine Avant-Garde was more pervasive, in terms of influence on the domestic intellectual and political elite, as Walter L. Adamson has shown (Adamson 4). The Florentine reviews *Leonardo*, *La Voce*, and *Lacerba* brought the European debates and polemics of the day to the Italian public. The jargon of the “young generations” spread in France, Spain, or Germany left an unmistakable mark on their style. The Italian version of the discourse on “youth” and “authenticity” is devised here, in the first decades of the 20th century.

The first issue of the philosophical review *Leonardo* appeared in 1903, as a result of the friendship and collaboration between Giuseppe Prezzolini and Giovanni Papini, two young intellectuals looking for public recognition. Papini expressed straightforwardly his desire to become the prophet of a new era and of a new generation (Wohl 160). With an imaginative graphic design and a fashionable program, stating an anti-positivist, anti-materialist, anti-parliamentarist, anti-machinist, and spiritualist credo, *Leonardo* also represented a reaction against the *fin de siècle* aestheticism unabashedly promoted by D’Annunzio’s journal *Il Marzocco*, very popular among the Florentine intellectual milieu, at the turn of the century,

¹ PhD candidate, University of Bucharest
Research assistant CISCER “Tudor Vianu”, University of Bucharest

focused on arts and literature exclusively. In exchange, *Leonardo* promised a broader cultural spectrum, taking guidance from the three *maestri* celebrated in a series of articles, Benedetto Croce, Henri Bergson, and William James (Adamson 68-73). Under the influence of Nietzsche, the columnists eulogized philosophy as a form of autobiography and poetry. Politically, even if the “internal enemy” (*nemico interno*) was not mentioned by its name yet, it could be easily recognized as the Giolittian government of the time, an epitome of democracy and tolerance towards socialism (a doctrine vigorously rejected by the young *leonardini*). Inspired by the elite doctrine elaborated by the sociologist Vilfredo Pareto, Prezzolini now develops his own version of the theory of “two Italies”: the first – rationalist, progressivist, parliamentarist – in decay, the second – vitalist, instinctualist, passionate – in full swing, though still repressed by the authorities; the first, belonging to the profiteering bourgeoisie, the second, supported by the “new aristocracy” of the younger generations (Adamson 83-87). The simplistic antithesis between the two countries, together with its naïve antagonistic potential, will be found in Ortega y Gasset’s writings, ten years later, as well as in Mircea Vulcănescu’s or Mircea Eliade’s essays on “the two Romanias” of the thirties. Mircea Vulcănescu, bringing to fruition his background as a sociologist, draws a distinction between the rural agricultural and the urban industrial Romania. Obviously, his analysis is strongly biased in favour of the former, which he considers the cradle of nationalist reactionism against “the hybrid style of existence of our city mobs”, who borrow the values of the modern European democracies (Vulcănescu [1932] 3). The same drastic discrimination between the “two Romanias” takes on a different guise in Mircea Eliade’s article, four years later. His approach is less sociological and more cultural, distinguishing between two lines of ancestry in the local cultural history: Maiorescu – I. L. Caragiale vs Bălcescu – Heliade Rădulescu – Hasdeu – Eminescu, characterized by rational criticism – scepticism – irony, and irrationalism – mysticism – “mad, frightening will of creation” (Eliade [1990] 167), respectively. Eliade feels that the heyday of the former line of thinkers has passed, while the full bloom of the latter is yet to come. As, in 1936, he is drawing closer and closer to the Far Right movement, he attempts to attach to the second line of ancestry a new, contemporary figure, that of the young leader of the Iron Guard, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu: “It is not by chance that a young right-wing movement sets its goal, through the words of its leader, ‘to reconcile Romania with God’. Thus spoke before only Bălcescu, or Heliade Rădulescu” (170). Though Codreanu’s name is not mentioned, the allusion to one of his most popular catch-phrases, among the young Right-wing intellectuals, is transparent. Though the similarities between Prezzolini’s, Gasset’s, Vulcănescu’s, and Eliade’s “theory of the two countries” are striking, it is difficult to state a clear cause-effect(s) line, to define the undisputed primordial “model” and its “copies”. We are rather in front of a telling illustration of the multicausality and interconnectedness of the concepts that the young intellectuals of all Europe operated with, in the first decades of the 20th century. Many of the ideas and of the catch-phrases spread within the “young generations” of Europe became more or less authorless, travelled freely across borders from one country to another, defining the common *air du temps* and set of beliefs of several communities of thinkers.

Here is another word that was turned into a myth by the European “young generations”: “sincerity”, associated by Papini, in 1906, with the courage to explore and unravel one’s own “interior secrets”, hidden beyond the social surface. It can easily be connected to Charles Péguy’s “révolution de la sincérité”, as Adamson showed (92). However, another source is obviously André Gide, whom the young Florentine writer paid a courtesy call in 1907, in the course of which he proved to be more than generous with his compliments (Gide 84). On the one hand, self-knowledge is, for Papini as well as for Gide, adopting a confrontational ethics, because man is seen as a “battlefield” where conflicting instincts, passions, and moral forces collide (Adamson 89). In fewer words, “sincerity” is the inner quest and struggle for the ‘true’, personal self. The war-related imagery of Papini’s early period would impress the young Mircea Eliade a lot. On the other hand, Papini equates the quest for the self with the discovery of his “Tuscan core” (*toscantità*), leaping from the individual to the regional identity. The idea will be expressed more clearly in a later text: “So, finding myself has meant finding Tuscany, in its nature and tradition” (Papini [1913] 276).

The program of the next common project of Prezolini and Papini, the review *La Voce*, issued in 1908, starts with the same promise of “sincerity”:

We do not promise to be geniuses, to unravel the mysteries of the world, or to find out the precise daily schedule of the activities necessary in order to become great personalities. But we promise to be honest and sincere. [...] We believe that Italy is in more need of character, sincerity, open-mindedness, seriousness, than of intelligence and wit. (Prezolini 1)

Among the cultural figures discredited in the first issue, the first to be singled out is Anatole France, the embodiment of artificiality and philistinism for many advocates of “sincerity” and “authenticity” throughout Europe, from Gide to Camil Petrescu, Anton Holban, or Mircea Eliade. Not before long, on the long list of artists accused by *La Voce* of “insincerity”, one could find the Milanese Futurists as well. In 1909, the *vocianti* ironize Marinetti’s manifesto, describing it, in the crudest Avant-Garde style, as a recipe which mixes up “a kilo of Verhaeren, two hundred grams of Alfred Jarry”, “fifteen automobiles, seven airplanes, four trains, two steamships, two bicycles”, and many other ingredients to be boiled together “in the emptiness of your soul, on a burner of American quackery” (quoted in Gentile 30). The lampoon is signed by Ardengo Soffici, the young painter and critic who will eventually start the famous brawl between the Milanese Futurists and the Florentine Avant-Garde, on the streets of Florence (Adamson 148-149). A few years later, using a more moderate rhetoric, Prezolini would launch new accusations of superficiality and buffoonery, criticizing Marinetti’s group both from an artistic and a moral point of view. His article echoes Croce’s polemics against “the great industry of emptiness” and “the modern disease of histrionics and insincerity” (Gentile 37). The relationship of the Florentine Avant-Garde with the Milanese Futurism would always fluctuate between conflict (used as a strategy to gain a cultural position that was also claimed by the Futurists) and truce (against other cultural or political actors, perceived as common enemies). On the aesthetic level, *La Voce* is far less daring than the Milanese reviews, the graphic experiments abounding only in the next review conducted by Papini and Soffici, *Lacerba*. For the moment, Prezolini and his friends only reassert their anti-aestheticist, anti-rationalist, and anti-academist views, attacking, on the political level, Corradini’s nationalist doctrine embodied in *Associazione Nazionale Italiana*. “Nationalists no, Italians yes!” frantically defines their group Papini in an article from 1909 (quoted in Adamson 119). Among the collaborators, one can notice Benito Mussolini, still a Socialist, but also Benedetto Croce, together with a relatively stable team including Giovanni Amendola, Scipio Slataper, Giovanni Boine, or Gaetano Salvemini, and a sum of foreign well-established celebrities, such as Georges Sorel, contributor of a long article, in an issue dedicated to sexuality. Papini, Boine, and Soffici have an intense correspondence with Miguel de Unamuno (Adamson 292), who helps them discover Kierkegaard and shape their doctrine of *toscanità*. However, the links with the European cultural modernity are not limited to the “Latin” countries, such as France or Spain. One of the most significant roles in the creation of the discourse of the Florentine “young generation” is played by Otto Weininger. His extremely misogynist *Geschlecht und Charakter* (1903) will not be published in Italian until 1912, but, by then, Prezolini, Papini, Slataper and other *vocianti* eulogize him more than once (Adamson 122, 289). Papini’s collection of articles *Maschilità* (1915) is dedicated to Weininger. Starting from the statement of a dualism between the “male” and “female” “characters”, the Italian author launches the whole ‘constellation’ of words that will become his trademark, in the European cultural journalism of the decade:

Don’t think of petticoats and trousers, or of anatomic differences: I’m a Weiningerian. There are not only physical, but spiritual sexes as well. So, when I’m talking about masculinity, I mean force, energy, harshness, pride; when I’m talking about femininity, I mean softness, sweetness, bland voluptuousness, whispered voices, easy tears, witty gossip, elusive and draining musicality. (Papini [1921] 95)

Durezza, sincerità, maschilità have positive aesthetic-ethical connotations, they are the “strong” pole of the binomial whose “weak” counterpart is *mollezza, imitazione, feminità*. The opposition appears again in this comparison between the “Dantesque Dante” and the “Petrarchesque Petrarca”, a true *confession de foi* of the young Papini:

You may say that a couple of lines do not suffice in order to sketch two poetics. I know it myself, but I have picked these two examples at random, out of many others that I could have produced. Between the Dantesque Dante and the Petrarchesque Petrarch, there is a total and innate irreducibility. The massive, compact, direct art of the former is the opposite of the refined, suave, mimetic, decorative art of the latter. The same holds for their artistic descendants and siblings, up to our days. And I, of course, prefer the former. (92)

Soffici equally debates passionately the indiscipline, instinctiveness, elementarity of the feminine soul, and the typically Weiningerian vision contaminates even some of the female contributors to the review (Adamson 123). In what concerns the issue of identity, the difference from “Gidism” (or, to be more precise, from what a European-wide cliché made out of “Gidism”: looseness, amorality etc.) is the rigid connection between *sincerità* and self-control, suggested by an array of military terms: harshness, discipline, self-mastery etc. The idea can be found in other European discourses on “authenticity” as well, but the Florentine pathos and theatricality are unrivalled. The opposition between will (or rationality) and animal instinct reappears at Amendola: “What we call the rationality of the good is precisely this harmony and cohesion of man, controlled by the will, and thus elevated above the chaos of animal life, towards the order and clarity of the ego” (Amendola 25). In the same vein, Slataper gathers together the extremes of anarchy and hierarchy, of exhilarating spontaneity and ascetic renunciation in order to render a dualist image of human nature (Adamson 129, 134). This flamboyant rhetoric is mirrored in the most celebrated autobiography of the Florentine “generation”, *Un uomo finito* (1913), written – as the author pretends – with a “merciless sincerity” („spietata sincerità” – Papini 234).

All these debates around “sincerity” and “masculinity” echoed deeply in the minds of some of the Romanian young intellectuals of the late ‘20s. Among them, Mircea Eliade publishes a frantic article entitled „Apologia virilității” (“The Apology of Virility”) in the traditionalist review *Gândirea*, in 1928. For the 21 year-old writer, a male is not “any individual with a male name”, but a person who took up a certain spiritual quest: “We are reborn in virility as we are reborn in Christianity: through the actual modification of our lives, through self-transcendence, transfiguration” (Eliade [2008] 232). The Weiningerian vision is apparent throughout the article. The male “creates values, while the female only “borrows values” (235). The real male, and not the “pseudo-male”, should take the steep path of the spirit, should attain the inner freedom through renunciation and self-discipline: thus, “the conflict between flesh and spirit” (241) is complete. The tones of the article resound of a poetic theatricality that reminds not only of the pathos of the *vocianti*, but also of Nietzsche, and of Lucian Blaga’s early Expressionism:

The masculine tragic, of a strident dualism, when the soul defends itself not only against the body, but also against the soul born from the body. Christic essence against the sensual paganism of Dionysus and against the nostalgic paganism of Apollo. (242)

The literary critics and journalists of the time (E. Lovinescu, Paul Zarifopol, Șerban Cioculescu, Camil Petrescu, G. Călinescu a.s.o.) gave some attention to Eliade’s article, because it was published next to another essay of some significance. The review *Gândirea* hosted in the same issue Eliade’s „Apologia virilității” and „Manifestul ‘Crinului Alb’” (“The ‘White Lily’ Manifesto”), signed by Sorin Pavel, Ion Nestor, and Petru Marcu-Balș - two texts that would be generally read as the common platform of a new generation of intellectuals. Eliade resented being associated with the “White Lily” group, though a core of

common characteristics is undeniable: irrationalism, mysticism, reactionarism. The misogynistic approach will be visible in another series of articles published by Eliade in the same year (reproduced in Eliade [2008]): „Virilitate și asceză” (“Virility and Asceticism”), „Suflete moarte” (“Dead Souls”), „Feminitate” (Femininity), „Sören Kierkegaard – logodnic, pamfletar și eremit” (“Sören Kierkegaard – Betrothed, Lamponist, and Hermit”). Not only once does the author assign a political connotation to the masculine-feminine discrimination: the aristocracy “of the spirit” is “masculine”, while modern democracy is “feminine” (43-44). Unfortunately, some of these clichés will be used a decade later by the Far-Right journalists grouped around the Iron Guard, and will gain an even more aggressive sound.

Eliade’s early commitment to Papini is so obvious, that it attracts the irony of many Romanian critics of the time. The anxiety of being taken as a second-rate epigone is perceivable throughout Eliade’s correspondence with the Italian master. Papini’s answer to his young disciple must have sounded very reassuring:

I even remember that you once confessed, in a letter, to own an identity with spiritual experiences similar to mine. But I think this is only an exaggeration: *The Failure* (i.e. *Un uomo finito*) was I, and nobody else can say he saw himself in him entirely. My experiences are due to circumstances that cannot be repeated. Don’t be afraid of being blamed for simulation, for ‘Papinism’. Spiritual experiences can’t be repeated exactly, and they can’t be simulated. (Eliade [1997] 20)

Despite Papini’s generous explanation, Eliade’s indebtedness to him and to his group of intellectuals is obvious, and not unique in the Romanian cultural landscape. In a letter addressed to Eliade (while the latter was on his long voyage to India), Mircea Vulcănescu uses approximately the same jargon as Papini, Amendola, or Slataper, in order to sketch a portrait of the “young generation” of his age. This “young generation” is characterized in the same terms of *durezza*, *sincerità*, *maschilità*, and the same Manichean distinction between intelligence-will-lucidity and emotion-sentiment-instinct underpins the whole argument. The hegemony of the former is stated by means of a metaphor of harsh self-discipline:

Intelligence dominates, in an incontrovertible manner, the affectivity of this generation. Will there be a rehabilitation of the sentiment? It very well may be so. But, everybody knows. It will be a heart covered in an iron band. (Vulcănescu [1996] 29)

Still, the similarities between the Florentine Avant-Garde and the Romanian “young generation” go further beyond the ideology expressed by Papini and his friends in the years of *La Voce*, 1908-1913. Exasperated by Prezzolini’s more and more rigid “militant idealism”, Papini and Soffici decide in 1913 to found their own review, *Lacerba*. Its design draws closer to the Futurist graphic experiments (*parole in libertà*, drawings by Picasso and Soffici). These are the years when the rhetoric of the “regenerating violence” contaminates more and more the social-political discourse, during the invasion of Lybia and on the eve of the First World War. Public scandals, after leaving behind *La Voce*’s Croceanism, are around the corner, due to a series of blasphemous, misogynistic, antifeminist articles. A word that is gradually spreading in Italian cultural journalism (and is about to gain a European notoriety, inspiring one of the most famous novels of Mircea Eliade...) is *teppismo* (“hooliganism”). Before being circulated in the writings of Ottone Rosai, Ugo Tommei, and of other members of the Avant-Garde, it was used by Papini in his famous 1913 *Discorso di Roma*:

They called me a charlatan, a hooligan, they called me vulgar. And I received all these insults with unspeakable joy, ’cause they become magnificent compliments, when said by those who uttered them. I am a hooligan, it is so true. I’ve always enjoyed smashing windows, or picking on people, and there are illustrious skulls in Italy that still bear the pale signs of the stones that I’ve thrown. There is not enough intellectual hooliganism, in our dear little country of parvenus. We

lay at the hands of the bourgeois, bureaucrats, Academicians, do-nothings, and know-nothings. Opening the windows is not enough; we must tear down the doors. The reviews are not enough – we must kick them. (Papini 1913)

Instead of simply “shocking the bourgeoisie”, Papini prefers now a more radical imagery, referring plainly to an anarchist behaviour (throwing stones, breaking windows, tearing down doors). Though a declared Crocean, Prezzolini subscribes to the *teppista* revolutionarism too (Adamson 191). When *Lacerba* and *La Voce* rally to the interventionist movement, Croce chides Prezzolini in a letter (“For goodness’ sake, put some water in your wine and stop stirring up the war...” – quoted in Adamson 198), making clear his view that the war lobby is only due to the “foolish” journalists, while the majority of the Italian population feels more inclined to pacifism. However, a large part of the Florentine “young generation” is now influenced by Giovanni Gentile’s doctrine of “actualism” (which theorizes the pro-active involvement of the intellectuals in public affairs), or live to the full the then-fashionable myth of the “spiritual revolution”. Thus, in spite of Croce’s critique, *La Voce* and *Lacerba* contribute significantly to the victory of the interventionist party, as Adamson shows (196). Predictably, the enthusiasm fades away when the young soldiers meet the sheer realities of the front. Prezzolini, Soffici, or Ottone Rosai’s war diaries make use of a rhetoric diametrically opposed to their earlier mystical-triumphant journalism. Papini, whose myopia keeps him away from the front, passes through a period of severe depression and converts to Catholicism. In different moments and in different degrees, Papini, Prezzolini, and Soffici distance themselves from the line of Mussolini, who is himself converting from his earlier allegiance to Socialism, and impetuously making his way to power in the aftermath of the war, while Kurt Erich Suckert (*alias* Curzio Malaparte, after 1925), once collaborator of *Lacerba*, is responsible for carrying the Florentine Avant-Garde into Fascism (Adamson 232-237). The next Futurist generation, born around 1890, some ten years after Soffici, Papini, and Prezzolini, will be directly involved in the establishment of the Roman and Florentine *fasci* (Adamson 224).

The connection between the Florentine Avant-Garde and the political evolution in Italy didn’t escape the young Mircea Eliade, who notes in a 1934 article that “Fascism and Mussolinian mysticism have sprouted from the seeds sown by his [Papini’s] campaigns for virility, Italianism, courage” (Eliade [1934] 8). In Eliade’s view, the Italian scholar has renounced public life in order to leave “all the glory and reward” to the political actors. In this respect, he sees a resemblance between Papini and Nae Ionescu, Eliade’s Philosophy Professor and mentor. The young journalist is well informed not only about Papini (he pretends to have read more than thirty of his books “at least three times each” – Eliade *idem*), but also about *Leonardo*, *La Voce*, *Lacerba*, that he considers the milestones of a well-defined cultural evolution. Papini’s friendship with Prezzolini, his argument with Croce, his literary enmity with D’Annunzio are mentioned in several essays, private letters, or in his 1927 interview with Papini, in Florence, where he leaves a good impression. In the early articles, written when he was still a teenage student, a mechanism of identification can be easily perceived, so that Papini’s portrait becomes Eliade’s naive self-portrait as well (the unbelievable erudition, the hunger for “experiences”, the ugliness, the ascetic tendencies are also traits that the young hero of the autobiographical novel *Romanul adolescentului miop* – “The Novel of the Short-Sighted Adolescent” – boasts with)². But Eliade’s enthusiasm for Papini was no exception, in the Romanian culture of the 1920’s. A researcher even talks about a “Romanian Papinism” existing in the interwar years, and affiliates G. Călinescu (translator of *Un uomo finito* in 1923) or Eugen Ionescu (author of a heart-felt defense of Papini) to this short-lived fad (Bordaș 67). While, for Călinescu and Ionescu,

² Here is a list of Eliade’s early writings on Papini: „Giovanni Papini”, *Foaia tinerimii*, anul IX, no.8, 15 aprilie 1925: 118-120; „Giovanni Papini. Preludii”, *Cuvântul*, no.640, 18 decembrie 1926: 1-2; „De vorbă cu Giovanni Papini”, *Universul literar*, No.19, 17 mai 1927: 291-292; Eliade’s 1927 correspondence with Papini, in Liviu Bordaș, „Mircea Eliade – Lettres à Giovanni Papini. 1927-’54”, *Origins. Journal of Cultural Studies*, no. 1-2, (Zalău: Centre for Traditional Culture, 2003), 70-71.

“Papinism” proved to be in the end just a teenage craze, Eliade’s commitment is more durable, resisting even after he realizes, having grown more mature, that there are significant intellectual and temperamental differences between him and his model:

(I know that certain imbeciles and witty blockheads will shout out my ‘Papinism’ once again.) And I continue to love Papini, the whole Papini, just the way he is. I think there is no greater way to eulogize a writer, than to confess you love the whole of him, in spite of the ideas, bursts of temper and moral or religious criteria that set you apart from him. (Eliade [1934] 8)

In the year when his volume of essays *Oceanografie* is published (1934), when his aesthetic outlooks started to settle, Eliade draws an interesting comparison between two of the writers that influenced him, Gide and Papini. For him, the resemblance between the two intellectuals lies in their common interest to live as many “experiences” as possible; but the difference is the latter’s vitality and spirituality, as compared to the former’s amorality. Eliade’s obvious reservations toward Gide are counterbalanced by his overt appreciation for Papini. Based on this fragment and on some other texts, Liviu Bordaș argued that it is more appropriate to talk about Eliade’s “Papinism”, rather than of his “Gidism” (Bordaș 67):

No man of our century, not even André Gide, has endured so many experiences and has fought on so many fronts. And, while Gide could not get rid of his misunderstood notion of ‘gratuitousness’, Papini could let himself absorbed by any activity he was doing. He would love and hate passionately, head to toe, which shows his exceptional spiritual strength and vitality. (Eliade [1934] 8)

If, in 1934, Eliade still tries to make a distinction between Papini and Gide, as if to clarify his own aesthetic views, in 1938, he seems keener on the relationship between the private and the public lives. His tribute to Gabriele D’Annunzio, the “soldier-poet” of Mussolini, who just died (Eliade [1938] 8), after a brilliant career in the service of the Fascist state, shows his unrelenting interest in the multiple connections between culture and politics, established by the Florentine Avant-Garde.

The relationship between the Florentine Avant-Garde and the Romanian “young generation” is complex enough to deserve a (re)examination. On the one hand, one can notice the direct influence of the former on the latter, especially through the writings of Mircea Eliade, the ultimate Romanian “Papinist” of the 1920s. On the other hand, there are similarities that can’t be explained as mere results of direct influences, but rather as instances of the interconnectedness between the “young generations” spread in Europe in the first half of the last century. Terms like “hardness”, “masculinity”, “sincerity” made up a jargon that was widely used not only in the Romanian and the Italian, but also in the German, French, or Spanish cultural journalism of the time. The frequent transgressions from the personal to the national, the private to the public, the psychological to the political levels is another trait recognizable in all the discourses of these “young generations”.

Thus, today’s cultural criticism should engage in a particularly complex approach, in order to study the troubled intellectual history of the period. A cross-disciplinary approach is needed, in order to bridge the gaps between literature, politics, sociology, philosophy, psychology, as the main terms used by the “young generations” have a free circulation across the borders in-between. The researchers of this entangled history of ideas have to face two equally deceptive exaggerations: When dealing with the European interwar period, today’s researchers have to keep away from two temptations: on the one hand, to caution the artistic elite of any civic responsibility, drawing on the old theory that arts and politics are two completely different spheres; on the other, to absolutize their guilt, i.e. to make them fully responsible for the later political developments of the totalitarian states. After all, it all comes down to the relationship language – reality: “words” cannot be totally isolated from “facts”, but, luckily, “words” are not “facts”. Robert Wohl proved the role played by the European “generation 1914” of intellectuals in the

crystallization of the Fascist ideology. More influenced by the developments of text analysis after the Linguistic Turn, Walter L. Adamson examined carefully the journalism of the first 20th century decades in Italy, in order to prove that many leit-motifs that made up the violent rhetoric of Fascism were first forged in the editorial offices of the Florentine Avant-Garde. Their aggressive and daring, passionate and phantasmatic essays provided the Fascist discourse with many of its founding metaphors. Adamson shortlists some of these loans, adaptations, contaminations: *il nemico interno* (i.e. the Giolittian government) was first mentioned by Papini, in 1914 (Adamson 87); the claim of being apolitical, in spite of repeatedly instigating to taking radical political action, was first raised by the Florentines (254); Papini's famous phrase *Me ne frego* (i.e. "I don't give a damn") was turned into the nickname of a famous squad, led by Amerigo Dùmìni (230). (One more comment, to confirm the conscious / unconscious similarities between the Italian and the Romanian "young generations": in the '30s, Eliade publishes his passionate lampoon „Nu mă interesează...” ("I don't care"), a distant correspondent of Papini's "Me ne frego"). Beside all these obvious loans, "the cultural Renaissance" (placed under the sign of Leonardo, who gave the title of Papini's first review), "the spiritual revolution", "the discipline", "the work and order", "the new aristocracy" (or "trenchocracy") will reappear in the mass festivities of the Mussolinian Italy of the '20s-'30s. But this doesn't mean that the Florentine Avant-Garde represents the proto-history of Fascism. The "roots" of Fascism are multiple, as suggested by Roger Griffin, through a complex vegetal analogy: unlike the structured roots of the dicots, with a tap-root and many thinner radices, they resemble more the fibrous, diffuse, polycentric roots of monocots, which grow in several directions at the same time (Griffin 196). The directions that Griffin invokes are partly modernist, and partly nationalist. In between, delimiting themselves from either the Milanese Futurist modernolatry or the expansionist nationalism of *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana*, the Florentine Avant-Garde searched for a fusion of these orientations, a symbiosis of arts and politics, of cosmopolitanism and localism. Many other "young generations" of Europe took the same route in the first half of the last century, to eventually lose their track in the deceiving political landscape of the '30s-'40s.

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