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After the Great Union: Generational Tensions, Intellectuals, Modernism, and Ethnicity in Interwar Romania

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By the mid-1930s Romanian intellectuals, writers, and artists had long been divided into traditionalists, autochthonists, indigenists, or nativists; and modernists, Westernizers, Europeanists, or just “Europeans”. Keith Hitchins has noted this schism in his 1978 article, which focuses on the group around the review *Gândirea* (Thought);¹ as has Katherine Verdery in *National Ideology Under Socialism*, adding a third category, “pro-orientals”, to the two usual ones.² This approach to the Romanian intelligentsia and its production was first used, and continues to be shared, by literary and art historians working in Romania, and seems appropriate given the polarization of intellectual and artistic fields from the turn of the century on into political and aesthetic camps.³ Without disputing these by now classic categories of analysis, I would like to contextualize and complicate our understanding of them just

¹ Keith Hitchins, “‘Gândirea’: Nationalism in a Spiritual Guise”, in *Studies on Romanian National Consciousness* (Rome: Nagard, 1983).

² Katherine Verdery, “Antecedents: National Ideology and Cultural Politics in Presocialist Romania”, in *National Ideology Under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceausescu’s Romania* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991), pp. 46-47.

³ See for instance D. Micu, “*Gândirea*” și *gîndirismul* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1975), and Z. Ornea, *Tradiționalism și modernitate în deceniul al treilea* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1980).

after the end of World War One and the beginning of Greater Romania. Some decades ago Ovid Crohmălniceanu wrote in his history of interwar Romanian literature, that the two terms “modernist” and “traditionalist” lost some of their definitory power, that most of the traditionalists worthy of note created a *new kind* of literature, as much as the others, and that some poets (his example was Tudor Arghezi) defied the categorization altogether.⁴ Looking at what these labels meant in the immediate post-World-War-One period, as well as at the role of generational conflict in shifting meanings, may help in deciphering the different intelligentsia groups’ professional, aesthetic, and political trajectories. Just how and why did the “camps” come to stand apart facing each other across a chasm that grew wider over the span of the roughly two interwar decades, when in fact they began not as completely separate and hostile groupings, but as one young, ambitious, *enragé* generation opposed to their forerunners?

The generational identity was crucial to younger post-war literati, cutting across or at least blurring the modernism/traditionalism divide that was already in existence. The publications of the future (new) traditionalists, most of who were to become fascist militants or fellow-travelers, were at first, after the end of the war, ideologically eclectic and included production stamped by European modernism. *Gândirea*, for example, the review that was in time to become the signature publication of postwar traditionalism, and the young writers, poets, and essayists associated with it, were initially attacked by older traditionalists for their “sick modernism,” even while others reproached the group with anachronism.⁵

⁴ Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, *Literatura română între cele două războaie mondiale*, vol. 2 (Bucharest: Ed. pentru Literatură, 1974), pp. 6-7.

⁵ Ornea, pp. 126-127.

Gândirea began publication on May 1, 1921, at first as the literary supplement to the Cluj newspaper *Voința* (The Will). That city had until very recently been known officially as Kolozsvár, and in 1920 its predominant public language was still Hungarian. The original *Gândirea* group consisted of several writers in their twenties – including Lucian Blaga, Cezar Petrescu, Gib Mihăescu, and Adrian Maniu. The full title of the revue was *Gândirea literară – artistică – socială* [Literary – artistic – social thought], although eventually only the first word of the title remained. George Gană has speculated that

The intention of ... [*Gândirea's*] founders was probably to give Transylvania – annexed finally to the country to which it belonged – a literary publication of stature, one to reflect both Transylvanian culture's traditional spirit, and its necessary renewal, its emergence out of provincialism, its Europeanization.⁶

While some of *Gândirea's* founders, like Lucian Blaga, were from the province, others, like Cezar Petrescu, had come from the Old Kingdom, driven by distaste with corrupt politics back home and “a romantic cultural missionarism”.⁷ The group seemed vaguely interested in stimulating Romanian cultural life in Transylvania, although the publication's move to Bucharest in December 1922 suggests that other goals or pressures prevailed.⁸ The founders seemed to have felt more deeply the need for a periodical dedicated exclusively to their literary and philosophical explorations “unde să fim la noi și numai pentru noi” (where we might be [intimately] among

⁶ George Gană, *Opera literară a lui Lucian Blaga* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1976), p. 35.

⁷ Bălu, p. 279.

⁸ Ornea, *Tradiționalism*, p. 129.

ourselves, [a magazine that would be] . . . ours, written by us [and] for us).⁹ The “us” was a generational one.

The first year *Gândirea* published articles about expressionism and dadaism and struck some as blatantly “filomodernist” leading Nichifor Crainic, its future long-term editor, and the one most responsible for taking *Gândirea* in the direction of Orthodoxy, who was then in Vienna and only a contributor, to dislike thoroughly what he called the review’s “cheap iconoclasm redolent of Italian futurism or of Swiss dadaism”.¹⁰ Among younger writers, Camil Petrescu, a modernist novelist, considered that *Gândirea* brought together

all the intelligent forces of today’s generation and [was meant] to guide them onto a secure path, of superior achievements.¹¹

In its early years, *Gândirea* published poems by Ion Vinea, called by Crohmălniceanu “the uncontested ‘prince’ of our extreme modernism”,¹² and drawings by Marcel Iancu (Janco) the modernist architect, painter, and graphic artist whose international career began with the Cabaret Voltaire at the side of Tristan Tzara, Hugo Ball, and Hans Arp in Zurich in 1916.¹³ To be sure, these incontestably modernist pieces were published along with the graphics of Anastase Demian whose drawings paralleled the gradual transformation of *Gândirea* itself, evolving, according to Crohmălniceanu, from a spiritual, but

⁹ Cezar Petrescu, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁰ Ornea, *Tradiționalism*, p. 126 and Nichifor Crainic, *Zile albe, zile negre* (Bucharest: Gândirea, 1991), pp. 171-172.

¹¹ Camil Petrescu, *Revista vremii*, vol 3, nr. 11-12, July 1923, p. 22, cited in Ornea, *Tradiționalism*, p. 127.

¹² Crohmălniceanu, p. 371.

¹³ *Centenar Marcel Iancu, 1895-1995* (Bucharest: Simetria and Meridiane, 1996), p. 15.

almost pagan, vision of the Romanian village to a church-dominated, Orthodox rural landscape:

Initially, the drawings presented rustic scenes, shepherds playing the wooden flute, young peasant women at leisure, boys and girls harvesting grapes in the vineyard. The motifs appeared soaked in a sensuality marked by paganism. This Romanian, stylized, bucolic was content to suggest subtly a Thracian primitive essence. Behind the horas and the country rituals, the lines tended to recall mythological images, fauns bent over Pan's pipes, nymphs frolicking, bearded satyrs following them with covetous eyes. But, as of about 1925, the motifs and style of the vignettes change. In the background appear church spires. Angels carrying sheaves of wheat or blowing heavenly trumpets intervene. The drawings depict monks in their monastery cells poring over a sacred text, pious boyars watching religious processions The gestures acquire the hieratic rigidity of Byzantine icons. . . . Demian's universe assumes a mysterious mythical air.¹⁴

Still, as late as 1928 a photograph of Constantin Brâncuși's *Coapsă*, (Torso) 1909, appeared in the pages of the review. There is probably no better, or better-known, example of European modernism, in any medium, than the work of Brâncuși. Henry Moore who considered the Romanian-born master his forerunner wrote that,

ever since the Gothic, European sculpture has become overgrown with moss, weeds and all sorts of surface excrescences which have completely concealed shape. It has been Brâncuși's special mission to get rid of this overgrowth and to make us once more shape-conscious.¹⁵

¹⁴ Crohmălniceanu, vol. 1, pp. 89-90.

¹⁵ Cited in Dan Grigorescu, *Brâncuși* (Bucharest: Ed. științifică și enciclopedică, 1977), p. 32.

Brâncuși's inclusion in *Gândirea* is telling of a lack of consistent, or as we might tend to see it in retrospect – preordained, direction during the periodical's first years, perhaps even first decade, i.e. even beyond Nichifor Crainic's official take-over of the publication from Cezar Petrescu in 1926.¹⁶ That is not to say that there were not essays published even before then that attacked modernism, such as Cezar Petrescu's 1924 *Prejudecata modernismului* (The prejudice of modernism), or the articles of Nicolae Iorga, the father of the older *sămănătorist* current, or those of Pamfil Șeicaru, a radical neo-*sămănătorist*.¹⁷ But the review was above all eclectic, undogmatic, and self-consciously "young". In its first issue, Cezar Petrescu and Adrian Maniu refused any programmatic axis.¹⁸ Its editorial board wished to provide a home for new, or perhaps all, true talents, and thought that a direction would emerge spontaneously out of the raw and clashing creativity assembled there. The group's willed eclecticism was tied to the sense that ideological-philosophical doctrines and literary currents were in flux and just jelling in the radically changed atmosphere of Greater Romania which was, at twice the size of the prewar Kingdom, practically a new state requiring new modes of thought. They wrote:

¹⁶ Micu, p. 56.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 17-20. "Sămănătorismul" was a turn of the century literary current responding to a first wave of European modernism and decadent literature, and to foreign influences on Romanian literature. The Romanian word and concept is not easy to translate. It derives from the verb "a semăna" or to sow, or plant (seeds), and suggests that literature should be fundamentally rural and agrarian, concerning itself with the life and customs of the 90 percent of the Romanian population who were indeed peasants or "sowers". See Z. Ornea, *Sămănătorismul* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1971).

¹⁸ Ion Bălu, *Viața lui Ion Blaga* (Bucharest: Libra, 1995), p. 290.

The whole country has the look of a volcanic crust in the process of settling. A dogma, a line laid out in advance, an idol or our regimentation among these or these other schismatics of literature, would have closed down our horizons from the start.¹⁹

Additional evidence of the importance of the generational axis in the literary politics of the period comes also from an examination of older generation critics, among these Eugen Lovinescu and Nicolae Iorga. The two represented the “Western” and “traditionalist” tendencies of an earlier literary cohort, but despite their profound disagreement, they shared a dislike for the mysticism and anti-rationalism of the new generation. Of the traditions this new generation wanted desperately to overcome, Iorga’s *Sămănătorism* was probably the most important. This was a turn-of-the-century literary current that had responded to a first wave of European modernism and decadence, and to foreign influences on Romanian literature. The term derives from the Romanian verb “a semăna,” to sow, and refers to peasant labor, suggesting that literature should be fundamentally rural, in keeping with the life and customs of the ninety per cent of the Romanian population who were “sowers.” But “to sow” also hints at the planting and broad dispersion of ideas among the masses. The *Sămănătorul* review was in fact founded with a subvention from Spiru Haret in 1901 when he was Minister of Cults and Instruction. Haret, who was concerned with improving peasant life above all, wanted a publication that would turn the reading public’s attention toward the misery and needs of the village,

¹⁹ *Gândirea*, vol. 1, nr. 1, p. 19. Cited in Ornea, *Tradiționalism*, p. 124.

and thus serve as a bridge between the intelligentsia and the benighted peasants.²⁰

In 1934, Iorga published a two-volume history of contemporary Romanian literature.²¹ He felt himself and *sămănătorism* to be under attack by modernists of all kinds, and he showed the inadequacy of these borrowed trends to Romania's literary, aesthetic, moral, and national, needs. With regard to Nichifor Crainic, *Gândirea's* long-term editor, on the one hand, Iorga counted on him as on a younger traditionalist following in his own footsteps, and relied on him to carry the flame of the literary tradition he had himself nurtured. Iorga evaluated Crainic's first book of poetry, published in 1916, *Șesurile natale* (Native plains) and his second, *Darurile pământului* (Gifts of the earth) in 1920, very positively. He praised *Șesurile* as rendering perfectly "the very horizon of the Danubian shores" and the "formula of a spirit. . . . God himself is incorporated in this nature"; and he judged *Darurile* as cultivating "the healthiest of traditions", calling Crainic's talent "persistent and lithe", and able to bring "a different energy from the world of the Danubian village than that formed artificially from readings". As editor, Iorga showed his appreciation by convincing Crainic to write for his publications *Neamul românesc* and *Drum drept*.²²

In light of this, Iorga's criticism of Crainic may seem surprising. Crainic himself evolved ideologically, but, early in his literary career, he partook in a modernist sensibility. Crainic translated Rilke into Romanian, for example, and he called for

²⁰ See Z. Ornea, *Sămănătorismul* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1971), p. 53.

²¹ Iorga, *Istoria literaturii românești contemporane*. vol II: *În căutarea fondului*, edited by Rodica Rotaru. Pref. by Ion Rotaru (Bucharest: Minerva, 1985). The first edition was published in 1934.

²² Iorga, vol. 2, pp. 213-14, 277, and Crainic, *Zile Albe*, pp. 122-123.

the spiritualization of the old type of traditionalism represented by Iorga. Crainic's modernist streak can be hard to fathom alongside the political Crainic, but it might make sense to see his later evolution toward integral nationalism and fascism as part of a "political modernism" a revolt against democracy, liberalism, and rationalism along the lines described by Zeev Sternhell for France.²³ Crainic became a harsh ideologue of "ethnocracy", a royalist, and then a fascist politician. He was speech-writer for the Iron Guard leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, a forger of extreme-right-wing coalitions in the mid-1930s, vice-president of the anti-Semitic LANC (the League of National Christian Defense), and Minister of Propaganda in the Gigurtu government – the first to include legionnaires in its cabinet – and in the Antonescu dictatorship.²⁴

Both Crainic's politics and his aesthetics diverged significantly from those of Iorga. The older traditionalist saw and disliked mysticism in Crainic's *Țara de peste veac* (The country from over the century) published in 1932. For this he blamed the influence of Rainer Maria Rilke, the new German

²³ Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Right Nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, trans. by David Maisel (Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1995).

²⁴ Crainic was no stranger to politics from the mid-20s on. He served as secretary general in the Ministry of Education and Culture under Vasile Goldiș in the Averescu government of 1926; he was elected to parliament in his native county of Vlașca in 1927. See, Crainic, *Zile Albe*, passim, and Nichifor Crainic, *Nostalgia paradisului* (Jassy: Moldova, 1994), pp. 305-308. I have written about Crainic's ethnocratic ideology elsewhere. See *Cultural Politics* 303, 305, and "'How Can One Be a Romanian?'" paper presented at the America Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies Conference, in St. Louis, November 1999. See also my review of Keith Hitchins, *Romania, 1866-1947* in *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 2 (1997), pp. 405-408.

poetry, and Vienna where Crainic had spent two years as a non-matriculating student, after receiving his theology degree in Bucharest. Iorga deplored Crainic's closeness to the symbolist movement and his collaboration with the "decadent" review *Facla* (The Flame). In his memoirs, Crainic recalls his friend Lucian Blaga's literary and artistic guidance in Vienna. At his side, Crainic discovered expressionism, the new German poetry, and mysticism. At the Vienna University library, he read general works about mysticism and some critical studies of Rilke that also touched on the topic. While he did not like the "extravagance" of expressionism in art, he felt it nevertheless as metaphysically close to ascetic Christianity. Crainic's curiosity about mysticism was more than literary, it was a theological interest in intimate modes of religious practice and in reaching a "maximum of spiritual intensity". Also in Vienna, Crainic came to know *lieder*, Richard Wagner, Arnold Böcklin, Oscar Kokoshka, Hugo von Hofmannstahl, Franz Werfel, and Endre Ady's "powerful" poetry translated for him into German by the Hungarian refugee, Zoltán Franyó.²⁵ Crainic was broadening his cultural horizons, but he was at the same time always comparing Romanian art, literature, and music to the new, foreign forms he was becoming acquainted with. Far from letting Vienna "assimilate" him, Crainic assimilated "whatever suited" him, writing later that in Vienna

my country was always present in me, and the comparisons that presented themselves...encouraged me if they were favorable, and provoked me to think about how things should be, if they were not favorable. Out of the contrasts . . . of judgment, taste, sensibility, and temperament my own home nature became clearer to me . . . In Vienna I felt more

²⁵ Iorga, vol. 2, pp. 303-304, and Crainic, *Zile Albe*, pp. 158-177. Franyó collaborated with *Arbeiter Zeitung* in Vienna. See Bălu, *Viața*, p. 275.

Romanian through isolation, than I felt at home through community.²⁶

Iorga, who had not approved of Crainic's Austrian sojourn, extended his ambivalence to the "young" periodical *Gândirea*, which had been started in Crainic's absence, but with which he became closely involved upon his return home, eventually taking over as editor. On one hand, Iorga thought the review "a successful effort of gathering of talents, especially Transylvanian ones of the most varied kinds" and a publication with a long and productive career. On the other hand, "its doors were too open", in his view, to just about anybody, and the publication was too "tolerant of invasive modernism".²⁷ Iorga credited Crainic with putting an end to *Gândirea's* openness and eclecticism – qualities to which Iorga gave a purely negative valence – with his Orthodoxist ideology. But Iorga, in line with his disdain for mysticism, was also extremely critical of Orthodoxism.²⁸

It is interesting to compare Iorga's views about Crainic's poetry with those of Eugen Lovinescu, the distinguished doyen of the Bucharest literary salon, and of the eponymous review *Sburătorul* (The Winged One). Lovinescu was also the theorist

²⁶ Crainic, *Zile Albe*, pp. 180. Writing, for example, about the music of Wagner, Bach, Beethoven, Mahler, and Richard Strauss that he had heard performed in Vienna, Crainic lamented, "Our people hasn't produced or hasn't yet produced anything like it, anything that would overflow like a benediction over the soul of humanity." He followed this regretful comment with praise for Romanian actors, singers, composers and conductors who were becoming known in Austria. pp. 165-166.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 285-286.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 286, 373. See the two violently anti-Orthodoxist articles by Iorga: "După Sămănătorul", *Ramuri-Drum drept* 1926, no. 1, and "Critica literară", *Drum drept*, 1922, no. 17.

of literary synchronism. In his own history of contemporary Romanian literature (1926-1929) of almost identical title to Iorga's, he argued that Romanian letters were influenced by synchronic Western currents, and that this fate of synchronicity had the force of a natural law: it was inescapable.²⁹ Somewhat surprisingly, Lovinescu appreciated Crainic's poetry, but from Lovinescu's standpoint, it was precisely the contact with modern Western forms of literature, with symbolism, and with poets such as Rilke and Francis Jammes that rendered Crainic's verse interesting in spite of his typically traditionalist themes. In describing Crainic's style, Lovinescu was careful to differentiate it from simple, "anemic" *sămănătorism*, which, through a confusion between the ethnic and the aesthetic aspects of art had done so much damage to Romanian letters, that he felt it deserved to be called "the cemetery of Romanian poetry".³⁰ While Crainic had a rural sensibility, and seemed to be carrying on the somewhat tired tradition of describing the beloved native realm, its people and its customs, "in reality", Lovinescu wrote, he "is not so much the poet of exterior or interior landscapes, as ... [that] of solidarity with these". Crainic's poetry lay at the intersection of nature and race and his value was in the larger, more abstract, and more conceptual vision that infused his poetry.³¹

Crainic, the object of Iorga's and Lovinescu's criticism, was himself ambivalent about the former and dismissive about the latter. Although in his memoirs Crainic offered superlative comments on Iorga's pre-war and wartime nationalist propaganda work that, he claimed, dominated and inspired the

²⁹ Eugen Lovinescu, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1981) originally published in 6 volumes in 1925-1929.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2. See chapter 5, section 1, entitled "Sămănătorismul, cimitir al poeziei române", pp. 35-36.

³¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 68-69.

younger generation's nationalism, he also wanted to disassociate himself and his cohort from Iorga's ideology. "Sensul tradiției" (The sense of tradition) an essay Crainic published in *Gândirea* in 1929 is mainly devoted to attacking the young Westernizers of Romanian culture, but also to a more subtle attack on Iorga's *sămănătorism* which Crainic saw as having overemphasized the telluric and instinctual qualities of Romanian peasants while ignoring their spiritual, Christian orthodox traditions.³² Along these lines, Crainic also denounced Iorga for representing a merely secular, rather than a Christian, nationalism.³³ In 1924, the historian had been invited to lecture at the Institut de France. Year later, commenting on that occasion, Crainic accused him retroactively of having become "completely Sorbonnized", saying that the French honor had led him to dilute his nationalist convictions with "humanitarian water", and that he "had completely lost the extraordinary influence that he had once had over [Romanian] youth".³⁴ With regard to Iorga's specific views about literature, Crainic felt that *sămănătorism* had once had a proper place, but that it had, like a bloated river, a tendency to overflow beyond its banks over too much other literature. Crainic liked, nevertheless, to emphasize some continuities between Iorga's movement and his own generation's *gândirism*, too much so, according to Lucian Blaga.³⁵

As to Eugen Lovinescu, Crainic disrespected his too "flaccid" judgment, and attacked the "law of imitation"

³² Nichifor Crainic, *Puncte cardinale în haos* (Bucharest: Ed. Cugetarea, n.d.), pp. 95-129. The article first appeared in *Gândirea* 9, no. 1-2 (January-February 1929).

³³ Crainic, *Zile Albe*, pp. 147-148.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

³⁵ Iorga, *Istoria literaturii*, vol 2, p. 298, and D. Vatamaniuc, *Lucian Blaga: Contribuții documentare la biografia sa și a operei* (n.p.: Mihai Dascăl Editor, n.d.), p. 67.

according to which no literature, no art, no culture was safe from foreign influence.³⁶ In a 1926 article, *A doua neatârnaire*, (The second independence) Crainic adopted a cuttingly ironic tone toward the Europeanist critic who had noted the mixture of Western, Latin, linguistic and Eastern, Orthodox, religious components in Romanian culture:

What would have been the integral solution according to Mr. Lovinescu's doctrine? To put an end to this Oriental exile, to leave this Romanian land which does not suit us . . . to get rid of our history – and thus of our ancestors – and to get rid of orthodoxism – thus of our spirit – in order to move [us] somewhere to the classic land of Latinity.³⁷

To Crainic, Iorga and Lovinescu – although the two older men were on opposite sides of literary barricades – represented an older vision sharing despite their differences in an ideology devoid of religiosity and spiritualism. While Iorga had at least traditionalism and nationalism on his side, both could be accused of materialism – admittedly different kinds of it.

The *gândiriști*'s initial openness to a whole range of forms and ideas was in part a result of their shared generational response to the changed political circumstances of the country. While the new, larger, Romania with its long-lost regions reunited and almost all the Romanian speakers brought together “under one national roof” appeared to the older generations of patriots and literati as the straight-forward fulfillment of a political dream, and the achievement of clear national goals

³⁶ Crainic, *Zile Albe*, p. 149. See Micu, pp. 76-82, and 101-102 on the polemics between Crainic and Lovinescu.

³⁷ Nichifor Crainic, “A doua neatârnaire” *Gândirea* 6, no.1 (February 1926), reprinted in *Puncte cardinale în haos* (Bucharest: Ed. Cugetarea, n.d.), pp. 131-132, and 141.

set long ago, the younger generation perceived this same set of conditions through a different, less political lens. To them it seemed that they faced a miraculous but also a terrifying wilderness of the spirit awaiting to be tamed by the young and brilliant, namely themselves. This constituted a challenge to literary and artistic youth, for whom no ready-made answers existed. Crainic noted in his memoirs that,

the great victory of Greater Romania suddenly shattered the idea in whose fire I had steeled myself during my school years. The sky closed over my forehead. I wouldn't want anyone to imagine that I started to bewail ... the achievement of the national ideal. This fact, which crowned in greatness the history of a whole people ... gave to me, as to any Romanian, ecstasies... But once achieved, it was transformed from a blue sky into a pedestal on which my feet danced. The victory absorbed a credo, destroying it, and leaving behind a desert.³⁸

While Crainic himself was not particularly open to experimentation, aside from his own type of spiritualism, Cezar Petrescu, *Gândirea's* first editor, writing in 1924 that he had published essays signed by French, Belgian, Italian, Hungarian, and German writers, and reviews of many works produced abroad, suggested that the founding editors were eager to print on both sides of the tradition/modernism divide because the two currents represented "the sensibility and ideas of a generation in a struggle with itself and in search of itself".³⁹

³⁸ Crainic, *Zile albe*, p. 147.

³⁹ Ion Darie, "Pe marginea unei discuții", *Gândirea*, vol. 3, nr. 15, p. 389. Ion Darie is a pseudonym for Cezar Petrescu. For a longer list of foreign authors published in *Gândirea*, see Emil Pinteș, "Expresia unei generații", in Emil Pinteș, ed., *Gândirea: Antologie literară* (Cluj: Dacia, 1992) pp. 8-9.

The theme of the indeterminate ideology of the new generation and of one of its most prestigious periodicals was sounded by others who had been on the threshold of literary careers in the aftermath of the Great War. In 1940, Blaga reminisced that,

In 1921, *Gândirea* appeared very youthful . . . , like a bouquet of centrifugal tendencies, and almost ostentatiously without a program. The review was a piazza for the rendezvous of young talents An atmosphere primarily of collectivity based on friendship, rather than ideology, dominated its pages from the start.⁴⁰

From these testimonies about *Gândirea's* first years, and from browsing through it, it appears that it hypothetically could have gone from a matrix of youthful eclecticism in various directions, or even have continued as a literary and ideological Greater Romanian melting pot of sorts. Of course, it did not. With Crainic's editorial take-over in 1926, the review steered increasingly toward ethnocratic Orthodoxism, mystical traditionalism. Politically it veered toward fascism. *Gândirea* became more aggressively "combative" in tone as its ideological mission under Crainic's editorship became clearer.⁴¹ This aesthetic and political crystallization, however, took a long time and many magazine pages. Indeed, from 1922 on when the small journals of the Romanian avant-garde – *75 HP*, *Punct* and *Contimporanul* – began, modernism was hotly debated inside the covers of *Gândirea* with Nichifor Crainic and Tudor Vianu on opposite sides, and Cezar Petrescu in a middle position.⁴² These debates suggest that not only modernism but

⁴⁰ Lucian Blaga, "Începuturile și cadrul unei prietenii, *Gândirea*, no. 4 (1940), cited in Gană, *Opera literară*, p. 40.

⁴¹ Micu, pp. 32-35, 56-58.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 70-74 and Crohmălniceanu, vol. 1, pp. 51-52.

avant-gardism too was “on the table” for those that were a few years later to become polarized into a new traditionalism and a completely different set of aesthetic and political sensibilities. It is then worth trying to differentiate between modernism, which in Romania would arguably include *gândirism*, or at least many of its literary fellow-travelers, and the avant-garde, which most certainly did not. According to Matei Calinescu:

In France, Italy, Spain, and other European countries the avant-garde . . . tends to be regarded as the most extreme form of artistic negativism . . . As for modernism . . . it never conveys that sense of universal and hysterical negation so characteristic of the avant-garde. The antitraditionalism of modernism is often subtly traditional.⁴³

Calinescu’s description of the hysterical quality and negativism of the avant-garde, on the one hand, and the subtle – or, in the Romanian case, sometimes not so subtle – traditionalism of modernism, on the other, is helpful. The group that published the avant-garde reviews mentioned above includes Tristan Tzara, at age 20 the founder of Dadaism, Constantin Brâncuși, Ion Vinea, Ilarie Voronca, Max Maxy, Benjamin Fondane, Victor Brauner, and Marcel Janco. With the exception of Brâncuși whose biography parallels that of many traditionalists, these artists and writers were assimilated Jews and none of them evolved later toward the new traditionalism, nationalism, or fascism. These roads were not really open to them. While the professional trajectories of this

⁴³ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*, 2nd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 140.

group often led away from Romania to Zurich, Paris, or Tel Aviv, their political paths tended toward communist internationalism. Some of them in the 1940s abandoned the experimental styles of their youth for the dogma of socialist realism with its own type of formal traditionalism.⁴⁴ Thus each group, which – with some important exceptions – can also be described in terms of ethnicity, overcame the stylistic and political fluidity of the immediate post-war years in the 1920s in a different manner, evolving aesthetically and politically in radically divergent directions.

⁴⁴ For an overview of the Romanian avant-garde in the visual arts, see Michael Ilk, *Brâncuși, Tzara und die Rumänische Avantgarde* (Bochum: Museum Bochum, 1997).