

Nationalism as a stylistics issue in interwar Romania*

ANGELO MITCHIEVICI

RANGING FROM A. C. Cuza's volume *Naționalitatea în artă* [Nationality in Art] (1908) to Lucian Blaga's *Trilogia culturii* [The Trilogy of Culture] (*Orizont și stil* [Horizon and Style] (1935), *Spațiul mioritic* [The Mioritical Space], (1936), *Geneza metaforei și sensul culturii* [The Genesis of Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture] (1937) and Nichifor Crainic's *Puncte cardinale în haos* [Cardinal Points in Chaos] to Alexandru Dima's *Conceptul de artă populară* [The Concept of Popular Art] (1939) and then moving on to Dan Botta's *Unduire și moarte* [Waft and Death] and Emil Cioran's *Schimbarea la față a României* [The Transfiguration of Romania] (1936) we are confronted with unflinching documentary proof on the constant effort to forge an accommodating theoretical framework which would legitimate the production of a set of identity constructs bearing an aesthetical imprint. Distinguished personalities of the Romanian interwar cultural life like Lucian Blaga, Mircea Vulcănescu, Vasile Băncilă, Nichifor Crainic, Dan Botta, Emil Cioran or Mircea Eliade are committed to the idea of shaping a complex identity construct. Both on the level of discourse, ascribable to a stylistics of identity, and on the level of its inbred imaginary, the analysis of such identity constructs unfolds not only the trajectory of every preoccupation aiming to address identity projects and ideas in an aesthetical key, but also accounts for their ideological treatment throughout the radicalization process of the right-wing trends of the Romanian interwar politics. Our approach endeavours to deconstruct such interpretative acts in their emerging context by highlighting the relationship between ideological motivations and aesthetic mechanisms, and their blast at the level of stylistics of identity. In the case of A.C. Cuza, Nichifor Crainic or Emil Cioran the conceptual approach coincides with an ideological engagement. Theories are not confined to the allotted disciplines, and they become important players inside an intensely politicized market of ideas. Throughout the radicalization of the interwar right-wing camp of the polit-

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ical space, the stylistics of Romanian identity takes a turn away from the aesthetic sphere and becomes ethically and politically orchestrated. Undoubtedly, some of these theories require an ampler discussion regarding their alliance to matters of style. In what follows, we have chosen to draw four venues for analysis which all share a stylistics of identity likely to endorse what has by now become a consensus in the history of ideas, namely the fact that they drift towards a specific dynamics approaching new types of representation compatible with political capitalization. Consequently, we would suggest that such matters should not be addressed in virtue of a mechanical chain of causalities, but rather in an analogical way, as part of a wider phenomenon of resonance. Primarily, we addressed Lucian Blaga's reflections on the phenomenon of cultural morphology, Dan Botta's similar theoretical stands and also Al. Dima's considerations regarding popular art as a defining element for the configuration of an identity complex. All these theories remain attached to the reflection space that generated them and none of them implies any sort of action or programme. Secondly, we identified another set of theories, which are to a very large extent indebted to the ethnic factor and tend to reduce identity stylistics to this particular factor, pertaining to a clearly delineated programme with regards to a "strong" identity, purified from all residual elements. Moreover, in a separate episode, we will also briefly tackle the case of the two emblematic ballads *Miorița* [The Little Ewe Lamb] and *Meșterul Manole (Mănăstirea Argeșului)* [Master Manole or The Argeș Monastery], by underscoring their identity trademarks and the manner in which they both respond to the aesthetic sublimation of an in-built content violence. Our fourth venue of analysis is not so much directly concerned with theory but with an autobiographic initiatory sequence. In his Memoirs, the historian Nagy-Talavera recounts the spectacular apparition of Corneliu Zelea-Codreanu at a solemn peasant life event. This particular episode manages to epitomize all the attributes of a stylistics of identity as elicited by the aforementioned theoreticians. Consequently, our aim is to elude any mechanical connections and, in exchange, to bring forth a set of ideological and symbolic equivalences, to draw the picture of a mirroring space of ideas which eventually entail a specific type of stylistics conducted by political leaders, which would mark the interwar period renown for fanaticism and intolerance. The leader of the Legionary movement perpetrated a dangerous legacy, he deliberately and efficiently built a posture, projecting himself as an exemplary point of reference. We claim that the trajectory of ideas can be interpreted by looking at the way in which before turning into political actions with severe consequences, most ideas went through the intermediary level of identity stylistics, which cautioned the political stand as an aesthetic matter.

I.

IN THE lineage of a Romantic tradition, during the 20th century folklore played a fundamental part in defining elements of style and contributed significantly to the configuration of a Romanian mind-set devoted to establish identity coordinates. In this respect Lucian Blaga's opus *Trilogia Culturii* [*The Trilogy of Culture*] aims at redefining

space from the perspective of cultural morphology, in direct line to the works of Leo Frobenius and Oswald Spengler, by identifying a *stylistic matrix* that incorporates a set of individualizing characteristics. Lucian Blaga oscillates between a philosophy of space as a matter of style and a theory of the metaphor as a philosophy of style. Furthermore, similar issues are of concern to Mircea Vulcănescu in *Dimensiunea românească a existenței* [The Romanian dimension of Existence] (1943) and Mircea Eliade in *Comentarii la Legenda Meșterului Manole* [Comments on the Legend of Master Manole] (1943) or even Emil Cioran in *Schimbarea la față a României* [The Transfiguration of Romania] (1936), suggest theories or modalities of cultural reflection for popular culture and identity marks. Lucian Blaga brings to discussion a more extended notion of style, considering it as “a dominant unity of forms, accents and attitudes, revealed in a rich, complex and diverse formal and content variety.”³¹ The novelty of such an approach resides in introducing, in addition to consecrated concepts, of a set of notional derivatives such as “horizons, accents and attitudes” which transfer the notion of style from the field of “forms” to a broader sphere, that of a “a way of life.” Also, the philosopher forges a new discipline, *noologie abisală* [abyssal noology], which concerns the structure of the unconscious spirit (*noos, nous*) different from that of an unconscious “soul.” The process in by which this unconscious spirit interacts with the “undisguised,” yet “diminished” space belonging to the conscience is called *personanță* [personance]. Blaga is mostly concerned with a specific space and its stylistic corollary, and relying on the identity relevance of the Miorița ballad, he suggests the concept of “mioritic space,” “plaiul” as a harmonic alternation, “a high, rhythmic and undefined horizon formed by hill and valley” which he also recuperated from music, the “art of succession,” in this particular case from a Romanian folk form, the *doina*. From the viewpoint of attitudes, the essay on *dor* gives nuance to the notion of stylistic matrix and implicitly to that of way of life, a particular form of sensibility. In the third volume of his *Trilogy, The Genesis of the Metaphor and the Meaning of Culture* (1937), the philosopher extends the notion of style and introduces a paramount distinction between plastic (“plasticizante”) metaphors, which are decorative, and revelatory (“revelatorii”) metaphors, incorporated in a stylistic matrix. Blaga remains faithful to the plot of his own theoretical outlines and, in other words, he pleads allegiance to the field of philosophy, that of the reflection on forms and collateral contents. His philosophy does not imply the idea of taking action, it is committed to contemplation, it does not destabilize the realm of order, but identifies it at a superior level, that of the stylistics of identity.

In his work *Conceptul de artă populară* [The Concept of Popular Art] (1939), Al. Dima consecrates the space of an entire chapter to the relationship between popular art and style, formulating his own definition of style by making reference to *Estetica*³ [Aesthetics], a volume written by Tudor Vianu, a widely renown Romanian aesthetician. According to Tudor Vianu the notion of style captures the “unity of the artistic structure of a group of works, related to their agent, whether an individual artist, the nation itself, the époque of the cultural milieu.” A very broad definition, indeed, indicating that stylistics of identity is not exclusively tributary to the idea of the nation. Al. Dima uses K. Freyer’s concept of “die Stilverschleppung,” which signals how an old stylistic form

finds itself dragged, long after its disappearance, in the scholarly strata. This is one of the most moderate theories concerning the style of popular art. Yet, as anthropological analysis astutely asserts, the concept of beauty in the peasant world is considerably different from its scholarly usage for identity constructs. This characteristic was also debated in the works of the Romanian eminent sociologist Dimitrie Gusti, founder of the Romanian School of Sociology during the interwar period. Along with Ernest Bernea,⁴ Gusti suggests that inside the peasant societal context beauty was attached to more heterogeneous ideas like social prestige, the pursuit of differentiation or a series of moral standards. Concerning the psychology of the Romanian peasant, one interesting theory belongs to Constantin Rădulescu-Motru who disseminates the concept of “energetic personalism.” In his view, the psychology of the peasant, accounted for as a psychology of the “primitive,” would be “the tendency to become one with nature,” “the vagueness of belonging,” “the character of the mystic soul.” Consequently, the Romanian idea of beauty, pertaining to national stylistics, namely to stylistics of identity, derives from the proximity of folklore and its subsequent mythology. Debate over the existence of a national style in art had already become an issue at the end of the century and it was largely concerned with resorting to popular art in a modern spirit. The architect Ion Mincu sets the basis of a neo-Romanian style in architecture. At the turn of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, art critics like Leo Bachelin, Apcar Baltazar, Ștefan Popescu discuss about the way in which Art Nouveau could incorporate patterns of popular art, further consider the necessity of adding a stylistic dimension to such patterns, or review the possibility of using them in a different frame of reference than the original, popular⁵ context. However, we should bear in mind the fact that the new meanings attributed to style surpass the aesthetic dimension and no longer exclusively refer to popular art, operating at the intersection of a “stylistic taxonomy” with a “way of life.”⁶ It is, therefore, only at the level of the metaphor that identity legitimation regains its cohesion. Participant in a canonical text, the history of the Romanian literature, and a canon builder in itself, style is regarded as an integrative mode reuniting the imperfections of strong, racial categories. It melts impurities into prototypes, turns them into a fictional identity platform anchored in the archaic strata, the culture and civilization of the peasant immemorial society. “The ethnic factor is the guarantee of our fundamental originality.” By equating specificity to the ethnic factor, its stylistic expression is immediately integrated to popular culture, which is meant to represent the expression of an ethnic fund and the articulation of an identity complex. There is an obvious methodological advantage to this perspective mostly due to the relative homogeneity of such a culture, contrasting to the complexity of the modern culture widely affected by different foreign influences, more or less assimilated and integrated to an autochthonous dimension. Although the phenomenon of acculturation is also traceable at the level of popular culture, it is less visible, implying long-term sedimentations, which are metabolized at a lower rate. Similar postulates to the ones issued by A.C. Cuza in his volume *Nationality in Art*, are to be found in the works of a historian of literature like G. Călinescu, though slightly diluted in aesthetical preoccupations. According to Călinescu stylistics of identity is majorly influenced by “national specificity” recognizable in the space of pure

ethnicity, the task of the literary historian being to reveal this particular “style.”⁷⁷ “By being a structural element specificity does not arise by subordination to a canonical posture. The only condition for specificity is being an ethnic Romanian. The work of the historian should rely on nothing more than tracing a posteriori the intimate fibres of the autochthonous soul.”⁷⁸ The case of G. Călinescu is pivotal, considering that he embodies an example of argumentative “impurity” disclosing its own stylistics, and the fact that he became the literary historian with the most powerful influence in shaping the literary canon. Such a merger between identity stylistics and a set of legitimization strategies in relation to the fiction of identity becomes strikingly emblematic in itself. In conclusion, G. Călinescu uses the Balkan, Thraco-Getic melting pot to extract fictions of identity revealing a particular type of stylistics. The literary historian prefers modeling the space identity vulgate to specialised studies per se, introducing a series of mythological and stylistic rectifications wherever an identity frame based on race criteria turns out to be in some ways imprecise. However, we should not infer that a reputed literary historian and aesthetician like G. Călinescu sets the stage for a character like Zelea Codreanu. The latter is the outcome of a space of cultural convergence, which, if we were to borrow Blaga’s terms, displays an ideological matrix encrusted on a stylistic one.

II.

DURING THE interwar years there was a shift of interest regarding the Romanian concept of beauty, manifested through the agency of a new polemic rapprochement between nation and race. Romania was not a singular case, as the interwar time-frame shows a wide range of theories, from linguistics to philosophy, striving to phase style and identity building on ethnic grounds. The set of motivations no longer pertain to philology, history or philosophy alone, their practical overall value being supplied by political action concerted with the ideology of the extreme right. More often than not, the purpose of such a joint action implies the configuration of normatively empowered stylistics of identity, performed in a segregationist manner. Whether they be a legacy of Romanticism or a by-product of cultural morphology instrumented by a philosopher like L. Blaga or a philologist like Dan Botta, or even ideologically forged units in the hands of someone like A. C. Cuza, the prevailing key terms give an account of the intellectual tensions of the époque and reveal the overt preoccupation for ethnic stylization and for the configuration of an aesthetics of Romanian identity. Consequently, we are concerned to what extent and by what means identity related issues could be captured through the lens of the aesthetic. Despite the fact that its ideological laboratory is prior to the period we have in mind, the prefiguring signs of a shift in interest could be traced in the work of Alexandru C. Cuza, *Nationality in Art*,⁹ dating from 1908, and subject to numerous revised editions. Another eloquent example in this respect is the study of Antonio Patraș, *Ibrăileanu. Către o teorie a personalității*¹⁰ [Ibrăileanu. For a Theory of Personality], constructed around the emblematic evolution of Garabet Ibrăileanu, a writer and a philologist from Iași, stemming from the same cultural pool as A. C.

Cuza. His trajectory, switching from the revolutionary left, before the War, to a well-tempered conservatism during the interwar years, confirms that there were also tempered alternative ways to bypass ideological fervour and perilous activism, similar to the one suggested by Julien Benda in *The Treason of Intellectuals*. A. C. Cuza formulates clear postulates concerning the configuration of a national concept of beauty. “Nationality is the creative power of human culture—and culture, the creative power of nationality.” For A. C. Cuza “art” is the product of ethnic individualities. Art is the custodian of “the being of the people.” At this point, Herder’s views are not afar, nor is the concept of *Volksgeist*. A. C. Cuza considers art as reproduction of spiritual and sensibility traits, of the mentality reflexes belonging a pure ethnic typology.

In the case of Emil Cioran, his own reflections concerning the stylistics of identity are indebted to Lucian Blaga’s writings on the morphology of culture, mainly to *Filosofia stilului* [The Philosophy of Style] of 1924 and to the three volumes included in *The Trilogy of Culture*, the first one of the three, *Horizon and Style*, being published in 1935, one year before Cioran’s work, *The Transfiguration of Romania* was released. Although the young philosopher does not make any direct reference to Lucian Blaga’s theoretical universe, a direct filiation is unequivocal. Cioran constantly touches upon “psychological and spiritual elements, which distinguish the specificity of a nation’s physiognomy”¹¹ in an attempt to configure a stylistics of the Romanian identity. This is how we should read his definition of style as a harmonious setting of forms and mind-sets and also as an action-prone unity. Cioran strongly believed that style, imagined as a way of life, could be acted upon, that its course could be changed to crediting nationalist fervours and messianic tendencies that power ideals of emancipation through violent action. “It [style] is the expression of life’s tendency to acquire a temporal shape, to manifest in a determined yet limited structure, to dominate all inner dynamics and to uplift the irrationality of life’s inmost substance to a more intelligible level. Out of all its multiple tendencies, lifestyle is a way of organising new contents, it determines specificities and establishes prevalence. . . . The meaning of style is to overcome heterogeneity and imprint forms of specificity, to trace barriers in the dynamics of being and to ensure a sharp individualization. Style, form and harmony are interrelated.”¹² Cioran’s understanding of messianism supposes “the exasperate and dramatic endurance of the metamorphosis of the whole of a way of life.”¹³

Nevertheless Cioran takes a radical turn away from popular culture and the values of peasant society, believing that the “Byzantine tradition and the life of Byzantine spirituality” tantamount to a way of life to which he associates the aesthetic correlative of Byzantine art, represented a negative influence both on the evolution of Russia, addressed in emulation, and on the evolution of Romania. The way in which Cioran abandons such an apparently inexhaustible source of prestigious identity might seem paradoxical considering the historical context and his own theoretical framework. By doing so, he embraces a utopian project of “historical transfiguration” of the Romanian identity, bearer of the dynamics of “Romanian prophecy,” at the confines of revolutionary fervour, ideological engagement and political militancy. “Every people should aspire to the achievement of a “historical” and not of a popular culture.”¹⁴ In the case of Cioran, the stylistics of

the national becoming is placed under the sign of pathos and the sublime, both engaged in acclaiming a violent action. Cioran advocates for messianic violence as a form of transfiguration, and underscores its absence inside the conservative civilization of peasant society whose mentality reflex is embedded in the most profoundly identity-oriented text of the whole Romanian popular culture, the ballad of *Miorița*. “The passive abandon to fate and death, the unfaith in the efficiency of individuality and strength; the minor distance from all the world’s aspects created the national poetic curse called *Miorița* . . .”¹⁵ However, Cioran’s suggestion is not a barbarious alternative, but an “aggression in style,” with its own aesthetic correlative, capable to impose a style in culture, and open of the “political instinct cultivated as art”: “Only the *aggression in style* has gained historical momentum.”¹⁶

Another extremely influent tendency of the époque was Orthodoxy, promoted by Nichifor Crainic in the pages of *Gândirea* [The Thought] magazine. Not only were the majority of its collaborators represented by theoreticians of aestheticized nationalism, but it also displayed a particular type of stylistics ranking theories from the field of cultural morphology and lebensphilosophie and voicing philosophers like Lucian Blaga, Vasile Băncilă or Dan Botta. A significant amount of the narratives and representations offered on display were programmatic instruments of a new ideological and cultural trend, *gândirismul*, articulated around a nationalist doctrine, yet not always serving exclusively cultural purposes. In his work *Sensul tradiției* [The Meaning of Tradition], Nichifor Crainic identifies a chain of relations between youth as a cultural patrimony, Petre Ispirescu’s story *Tinerețe fără bătrânețe și viață fără de moarte* [Youth Everlasting and Life without End], tradition and a myth of the blood, which suggest the mythological and imagological portance of the theoretical discourse and also the way in which legitimation strategies of identity constructs are aesthetically circumscribed to matters of style. “Unanimous consensus on youth is a primordial in the creation particular culture. One of our oldest folk stories speaks about ‘youth everlasting’ which is a mythological expression of the vitality of the people. Youth everlasting is the myth of the blood, a mysterious blood composed by the energy of all the peoples who overrode this country for centuries, it feeds on the grains and wines of the earth, lashed by the sun and whipped by the gusts of wind—whose reddish vigour pulsates beyond time, up to the present day. . . . The physiognomy of the Romanian culture comes from this mysterious blood. Old age takes hold of a people when its powers to create and to build a civilization are dry. Manole is destined to die, by throwing himself off the roof, soon after he had set the golden cross—the last ornament—on top of the church tower built by his own genius. It is a fatality of history that peoples are sentenced to death by their own creation in order to outlast it, just like Master Manole and his church.”¹⁷ These ideas are reinacted more synoptically in another work by Nichifor Crainic, *Ortodoxie și etnocrăție* [Orthodoxy and Ethnocracy]. The theoretician defends a direct relationship between physiognomy of culture and identity, existential, stylistics governed by the organic perspective of ethnicity. His reference to the ballad of *Meșterul Manole* highlights a locus of identity building translated into the formula of an aesthetically sublimated sacrifice.

III.

THE MAJORITY of writers, essayists and philosophers striving to draw a stylistic profile of the Romanian identity overtly recur to a series of legitimising narratives, especially to the two popular ballads *Miorița* and *Meșterul Manole* (*Mănăstirea Argeșului*). Consequently the two ballads act as performers in a new stylistic equation. In neither one of the two cases do we become acquainted to a peaceful pastoral or professional existence, as violence and death dominate the picture. In the case of *Miorița*, a shepherd is on the verge of being killed by his two comrades and despite all warning he sets up his funeral arrangements staged as a cosmic wedding. In the other example, the ballad *Meșterul Manole*, a builder sacrifices his own family to erect a Church and becomes in turn the victim of a sacrifice ordered by the reigning authority who wanted to preserve the uniqueness of such an artistic achievement.

The two ballads become the landmark of an existential, moral stylistics of identity seen as aesthetical sublimation of violence. Firstly, in the case of the murdered shepherd, death is embraced under the form of a grandiose, cosmic-like wedding, synonymous to an ecstatic vision of the aesthetic compensation for a premature death. Secondly, in the case of master Manole who endures the loss of his family, the sacrifice presides over a pure aesthetic gesture – erecting a Church of exceptional beauty – which in turn is taken over by an also sublimated political desideratum. The result of the sublimation of violence inflicted on one's own family (a wife and child) is represented by the body of the Church, while the result of the sublimation of violence inflicted on the master himself is signalled by the metamorphosis of his body into a crystal clear spring. Hence, the stylistics of sacrifice gradually shifts from the anecdotic, yet personal level, to a national one acquiring an identity value. These two representative, 19th century ballads, which also made an impression over the Romantic historian Jules Michelet, become symbolic agents in the economy of representations of identity. In its turn, the ideology of the extreme right incorporated the stylistics of the sublime of sacrificial gesture to its own doctrine. The Romanian concept of beauty derives from the pattern of the heroic gesture. What changes is the meaning of the aesthetic sublimation. As we could see, in both cases violence was absorbed in an amortised plot of submissiveness, recalling what Philippe Ariès viewed as “tamed death” (*la mort apprivoisée*),¹⁸ death seen as a ritual. In the case of the legionary movement, death is set free, it becomes pure and escapes from the aesthetic realm to take the form of political action. Yet, such an action is still aesthetically cautioned and stylistically particularized. The doctrine of *vivere pericolosamente* or hooliganism in Mîrcea Eliade's terms, as depicted in his novel *Hooliganii* [The Hooligans] (1935), would become the driving force for an entire generation of thinkers who overtly manifested their ideological engagement. In an essay entitled “Mioara năzdrăvană,” included in the volume *De La Zalmoxis la Genghis-Han*¹⁹ [From Zalmoxis to Genghis-Han], Mîrcea Eliade pushes the terms of his analysis away from the spectre of violent activism and nationalist fervour of the 30's, and closer to the perspective of a “cosmic Christianity,” and the hypothesis of an aesthetically sublimated cultural answer, which the generic Romanian uses to cope with “the terror of history” in absence of a

more “practical,” i.e. political, solution. In other words, failure in the sphere of reality is aesthetically transfigured in a posthumous victory, equivalent to a cultural gesture. By doing so, Eliade was not only drawing the outline of an existential attitude, but he was also forwarding a stylistics of identity, a way of life warranted by a singular answer to any historical adversity: the refuge in culture and the resistance through culture.

By lining up the concept of ethnic beauty along with the idea of moral substance and the cultural traditions of peasant society, we may ascribe the behaviour of charismatic leaders to a type of stylistics adapted both to peasant sensibility and also to scholarly representations of the notion of national beauty. National beauty emblematically incorporates the moral traits of a culture and, in this respect, Vasile Băncilă’s affirmation has a normative value: “customs are indeed the living body of culture.”²⁰ Some of the legionary publications owe their name to Romanian folk story characters: *Sfarmă-Piatră* [The Rock Crusher] and *Făt-Frumos* [The Prince Charming]. Having this type of ethnic and aesthetic sensibility as a backdrop allows us to symbolically resuscitate the charismatic figure of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the leader of the Romanian Legionary Movement.

In 1933, the year when Hitler became Germany’s chancellor, Codreanu founded the party called *Totul pentru Țară* [Everything for the Country] managed by the Legionary Movement. Profoundly anti-Semitic and anti-Western, the legionary programmatic platform resonated with the Italian Fascism, which eventually led to its exclusion from political elections. The Liberal Prime-Minister I.G. Duca, who initiated this political measure with the support of King Carol II, was found dead three weeks later, murdered by a group of three legionaries at the order of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu. A trial followed and Nichifor Crainic, one of the theoreticians of the ethnic beauty and the editor in chief of the magazine *Gândirea*, was among the ones who were accused of murderous conspiracy. Aside from the three assassins, all the accused were exonerated from any type of responsibility. We should definitely not ignore the criminal character of the legionary society, the Mafia-like conduct of its leaders who most often than not resorted to murder in order to eliminate their political adversaries. One of the most horrible among the series of assassinations was committed against a fervent nationalist and critic of the legionary organisation, the scholar Nicolae Iorga. Zelea Codreanu was A.C. Cuza’s student and disciple, at the University of Iași, assimilating a great deal of the master’s ideas during his formative years, in the same way in which the young members of the group Criterion, all disciples of Nae Ionescu, acquired their experience and became the founders of the Generation’27.²¹ Undoubtedly, remarkable philosophers and professors permanently left their print on the intellectual destinies of students who came to embrace ideological and sometimes risky engagements.

The Jewish historian Nagy-Talavera provides one of the most emblematic portraits of the legionary leader. His book, *The Green Shirts and the Others: A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania*,²² is a comparative study of Romanian and Hungarian Fascism, bringing forth the role played by charismatic leaders of both societies. In our opinion, the eloquent quotation from Nagy-Talavera would somehow be incomplete without the set of images representing Zelea-Codreanu while taking part in weddings and legionary meetings, close to his disciples and friends. This is one of those cases when the spirit of the text is best rendered in the company of the images that consecrated it.

“There was suddenly a hush in the crowd. A tall, darkly handsome man dressed in the white costume of a Romanian peasant rode into the yard on a white horse. He halted close to me, and I could see nothing monstrous or evil in him. On the contrary. His child-like, sincere smile radiated over the miserable crowd, and he seemed to be with it yet mysteriously apart from it. Charisma is an inadequate word to define the strange force that emanated from this man. He was more aptly simply part of the forests, of the mountains, of the storms on the snow-covered peaks of the Carpathians, and of the lakes and rivers. And so he stood amid the crowd, silently. He had no need to speak. His silence was eloquent; it seemed to be stronger than we, stronger than the order of the prefect who denied him speech. An old, white haired peasant woman made the sign of the cross on her breast and whispered to us, ‘The emissary of the Archangel Michael!’ Then the sad little church bell began to toll, and the service, which invariably preceded Legionary meetings, began. In more than a quarter of century I have never forgotten my meeting with Corneliu Zelea Codreanu.”²³

Inside the frame of national stylistics, ethnicity appears to be inscribed in the symbolic economy of charisma. Undeniably, the stylistics of charisma has its own aesthetic identifications. Roland Barthes distinguished between two types of charisma, on the one hand a militant one, of Roman filiation, represented by the authority of a leader, and on the other hand, an Oriental one, represented by a guru, a sort of exemplary model, encountered in the anchorite communities or Athonite monasteries. In these circumstances, the bearer of charisma “s’impose dans sa place comme modèle projectif: dépositaire d’un charisme, non d’un pouvoir.”²⁴ Zelea Codreanu’s description, as presented by Nagy-Talavera, would place him in the second category, illustrating the marks of an Oriental charismatic authority. Still, Zelea Codreanu adopted the fist type of charisma, the militant one. Consequently, the Barthesian segregation of the two types of charisma does not function in the case of the legionary leader, as Codreanu knew how to merge the features of the two and create his own style, inside a more general stylistic spectrum. Nevertheless, the sense of ambiguity equally persisted at the level of his appearance, as he wears both the legionary uniform and the traditional peasant type of clothing. There is obviously something emblematic and sacrosanct about his posture, reinforced by the name given to his organisation, The Legion of the Archangel Michael, recalling the image of a fighting saint, a warrior-saint, engaged by all means in a just war, a religious war. Thus, personalities like Victor P. Gârcineanu considered the Legion to be a religious²⁵ movement. Codreanu’s posture epitomises the layout employed by Max Weber to describe the charismatic authority. He enjoys community recognition, which undoubtedly signals a type of confirmation originated in the idea of abandonment under the hold of a revelation (as depicted in the image where the old woman sees him as the messenger of the Archangel Michael) and is explanatory of his overall veneration. Max Weber insists on the irrational and exceptional character of such an investment in the charismatic authority, which eludes all forms of bureaucratic or traditional forms of authority by far: “La domination charismatique, en tant qu’elle est extraordinaire [Außeralltägliche], s’oppose très nettement aussi bien à la domination rationnelle, bureaucratique en particulier, qu’à la domination traditionnelle, en particulier patriarcale et patrimoniale, ou à

celle d'un ordre. Les deux dernières sont des formes quotidiennes spécifiques de domination, la domination charismatique (authentique) en est le contraire."²⁶ Thus the paradox of setting up a party, *Everything for the Country*, which—ever since its dawning days—had no intentions to play by the rules of democracy, relying solely on the inspirational vocation of its leader maximus. There is something that Max Weber calls “an emotional community,” a dominating group, which at a first encounter becomes the main public for its leader, the main addressee of the leader's individual stylistics, meeting the requirements of a way of life similar to monarchic vocation. This symbiosis between an ascetic condition of mystical reflex and a military-regimented one, yet rejoicing the benefits of public expression, is key to the political success of such a deliberately exemplary figure. With the help of his organisation, Codreanu sets the premises for craftsmanship enterprises, he organises work camps invigorated by seminars in an endeavour to offer a pragmatic solution, an alternative to the state, while making sure that every reunion with his groups of sympathisers bore the camouflage of civic or traditional motivations, hiding away any political purposes.

Corneliu Zelea Codreanu was always very exigent with details and managed his attitude, showcasing his public appearances although all his visits to Romanian villages were part of an on-going electoral campaign. Although he had poor oratorical skills, he considered his significant silent manner to be by far more effective than an actual speech, taking advantage of the solemn character that his taciturn mood could enhance. The portrait furnished by Nagy-Talavera evokes the skilfully orchestrated marks of a national stylistics. We could say that Zelea Codreanu succeeded to make use of a national stylistics in a manner similar to the way in which a dandy incorporated aesthetics not only through his choice of particular pieces of clothing, but also in his behaviour and personal attitude. Consequently, Codreanu represented an exemplary model, he incarnated a nationalist aesthetics and the idea of Romanian beauty, illustrating what Richard Shusterman calls “self stylisation.”²⁷ Unlike a dandy, though, whose desiderata do not transgress the sphere of aesthetics, Zelea Codreanu's ambitions were politically connoted and more importantly, they were antidemocratic. Not only did he use terror as an instrument of persuasion, but he also exploited, stylistically or in a spiritualised manner, were we to use a term close to the *Gândirea* circle, the values of the autochthonous imaginary. However, the leader of the Legionary movement is engaged in building up his own individual style up to a certain extent, and this is where Shusterman's distinction between the concept of taxonomic style and the concept individual style proves to be extremely helpful. In the first case, we are confronted with the adoption of a consecrated style, epicurean or stoic, a style of writing, baroque, romantic etc. In the second case, we are no longer dealing with the display of a general style, but with an individualising label, an original stylistic print, based on distinctiveness. “L'autostylisation est originale, spécifique, et exigeante précisément parce que nous devons cesser d'être nos ‘moi’ ordinaires afin de devenir nos moi supérieurs. Cela exige, non pas un retour à la nature donnée préalablement à chacun avant que celle-ci n'ait été étouffée par la culture, mais cela requiert au contraire la culture. Puisqu'on ne trouve pas le moi supérieur déjà présent en soi-même, il faut se trouver un guide qui préside à sa construction. Il faut donc des exemples de moi

supérieurs qui nous inspirent et nous servent de modèles à imiter; il s'agit, bien sûr, d'émulation et non d'imitation servile. C'est dans ce sens, en tant que modèle d'inspiration, que Nietzsche fait l'éloge de 'Schopenhauer l'éducateur', tirant 'profit de l'éducateur dans la seule mesure où il peut être un exemple.'²⁸ In conclusion, the process of self-stylisation successfully accommodates both concepts at work and best describes the strategies of the legionary leader. In addition, it should be noted that such a concept is not functional unless applied to an already consecrated stylistic matrix, taking into account the taxonomic concept of style, the impact of popular culture, which eventually lead to a series of symbolic identifications, as for instance, the ones regarding the fighting saints, the archangels Michael and Gabriel.

In his book, *De la beauté comme violence. L'esthétique du fascisme français 1919-1939*, Michel Lacroix highlights a particular type of aesthetics with regards to the French Fascism, based on the relationship between beauty and violence and the tense rapprochement between the pathos, the sublime, the violence and the death. In so far as Zelea-Codreanu's political models are concerned, he was mostly receptive to the Italian Fascism and some of his courses dealt with the issue of Fascism. In this context, Michel Lacroix's bold thesis is especially revealing. The author states that, in fact, the grounds for Fascism were not primarily ideological but aesthetic, and one of Mussolini's postulates comes to confirm such a hypothesis: "Those who say fascism, say first of all beauty." Hence, to support his thesis Lacroix advances the following arguments: 1. in the case of Fascism, aesthetics is an essential and primordial dimension and 2. Fascism stands for the radicalization of a great part of the European culture during the early 20th century.²⁹ A truly pertinent analysis, the text is the embodiment of what the historian calls *megalographie*, namely a particular category of biographical texts, encomiastic in character and therefore dedicated to exceptional, charismatic historical figures, pontifices maximi. "Ce que ce type de biographie apporte au fascisme, sur le plan esthétique, c'est un regard, un type de personnage et un modèle de beauté. Ce regard en est un d'admiration univoque, de fascination complète de la part de l'énonciateur pour son sujet. . . . Fondamentalement asymétrique, ce regard est porté du bas vers le haut: il magnifie et embellit."³⁰ Therefore, the two sensibilities, the legionary and fascist one, simultaneously contribute to the configuration of a particular type of aesthetics inherently linked to the concept of the sublime. Ranging from pathos and the sublime to violence the constellation defining such an aesthetics could not be more revealing. "De plus, ils constituent une ébauche rudimentaire, parfois, mais assez présente tout de même, d'une esthétique du sublime, au sens kantien de beauté immense qui coupe le souffle."³¹ Another fundamental aspect is suggested by Armin Heinen who draws our attention upon the way in which the cult of youth is intimately linked to the Fascist movement and on how violence plays a pedagogical part in the symbolic economy of the Movement: "Vivere pericolosamente," the expression of the Italian fascism vividly evokes "the dynamic formula of youth." Eventually, the articles written by legionary figures illustrate how violence represented a means of education at the disposal of the intransigent³² individual. Moreover, this stylistics of violence and of the sublime evoke, on the one hand, the figure of the oxymore in their attempt to see in the reconciliation of the contraries the

signs of a new alloy, the exceptional sacrificial vocation. On the other hand, they conjure the figure of the hyperbole in order to illustrate the grandeur of emblematic figures like the leader *maximus* or that of the exemplary disciple.

Michel Lacroix stresses another fundamental aspect of the fascist aesthetics, namely the spectacular dimension manifest during the fascist congresses or public shows and parades. Undoubtedly such public exposure was always intensely ritualized and every gesture was part of a larger stylistic orchestration. It is interesting to notice how this spectacular dimension of the fascist aesthetics is textually rendered through stylistic markers and, in this respect, Nagy-Talavera's text manages to retain the effusive marks of the mesmerized spectator. Here is how Lacroix understands this effect: "Dans les textes, ce principe d'exhibition a deux effets majeurs. D'une part, il conduit sur le plan énonciatif à une surcharge de marques de la présence de l'énonciateur. Le fasciste mis en présence de la beauté, bouleversé par elle, montre et souligne avec force son émotion. D'autre part, ce principe crée dans le fil du récit un moment à part, un îlot de grâce, saturé d'émotion—celle de l'énonciateur—, qui détache et met en relief la beauté fasciste."³³

In conclusion, we would suggest the following: Codreanu's entree wearing a white national costume and riding a white horse simultaneously evokes the image of *Făt-Frumos* and the moral commandments that justify the leader's presence. White is part of the archaic canon of beauty. The expression "white as milk" is one of the most frequently used phrases to express the unlikely glowing skin of the person embodying the beauty canon. In the case of Zelea Codreanu we deal with two corroborated elements: the first echoes monarchic vocation and ascetic behaviour, while the second accounts for the Manichaeism of the folk story, the naive idealism of a spotless hero, a *Făt-Frumos*. Such an alloy is all the more interesting as folk stories are not known to enflame passions, but rather to codify initiatory gestures. By following the red thread of the initiatory gesture, folk stories can undergo a change of function and become inserted in the symbolic economy of the legionary society. The example of Nichifor Crainic is mostly revealing, as in the shadow of the Western culture, he symbolically reinvests the figure of *Parsifal* with the virtues of the legionary belief.³⁴

Expressivity is perfectly able to reveal those particular moral traits that bear an ethnical character and, as suggested in Mircea Vulcănescu's work *Dimensiunea românească a ființei* [The Romanian Dimension of Being], traits like kindness or humanity illustrate the ethnic concept of beauty.

The sanctification and confirmation of charisma come as a response of the people, represented, in this case, by the figure of the old woman. In addition, we would also emphasize the messianic character of such a public appearance, expressly resembling popular hagiographies. Zelea Codreanu is in perfect control of his public appearances, directing every gesture of his recluse, hieratic postures. The exceptional character of the folk story hero is translated to the realm of the charismatic authority, which acts as a response to a superior election concomitant to full recognition on behalf of the community. In this respect, the observations of Vasile Băncilă, a philosopher and a disciple of Lucian Blaga, are extremely eloquent, as he brings forth the issue of the stylistic etymon, identified at the level of the "historical races," and equates it with the exceptionality of charismatic

leaders. “The beauty and glory of the historic races reside in the existence of exceptional individuals, who contemplate the harmony of general existence, of its derivation from a supreme form of intelligibility . . .”³⁵

In conclusion, the particular type of stylistics of identity adopted by Zelea-Codreanu is both a response to the configuration of a “cultural matrix” (Lucian Blaga), to the concept of Romanian beauty, as theorized by Mircea Vulcănescu and Nichifor Crainic, and also a response to a certain type of militancy and fervour, an aesthetics of transfiguration, as it had been advocated by Emil Cioran in his work *Schimbarea la față a României*. The authenticity of stylistics of identity is therefore co-dependent to the theoretical framework at work during the interwar timeframe. The individualising marks are inherently more likely ascribable to stage play and stage management of a show of identity, both generic and exceptional, and to a particular form of exceptionalism reverberating in every national hero. □

Notes

1. Lucian Blaga, *Trilogia culturii, Opere*, vol. 9, ed. Dorli Blaga (Bucharest: Minerva, 1985), 79.
2. *Ibid.*, 191.
3. Tudor Vianu, *Estetica* (Bucharest: Orizonturi, 2011).
4. Ernest Bernea, *Spațiu, timp și cauzalitate la poporul român*, 2nd edition (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005).
5. Also see Angelo Mitchievici, “Art and Nation: Romanian Arts and Crafts,” *Studia UBB Philologia* 2 (2012): 93–105.
6. Richard Shusterman, “Style et style de vie,” *Littérature* 105 (1997): 102–109.
7. For a more extended debate on the issue of stylistics of identity in the case of G. Călinescu, see: Angelo Mitchievici “Identitatea ca fapt de stil,” in *Dilemele identității: Forme de legitimitate a literaturii în discursul cultural european al secolului XX*, eds. R. Ilie, A. Bodiș, A. Lăcătuș (Brașov: Transilvania University of Brașov, 2011).
8. G. Călinescu, “Specificul național,” in Iordan Chimet, *Dreptul la memorie: Dialog despre identitatea românească*, Vol. III (Cluj: Dacia, 1992), 86.
9. A.C. Cuza, *Naționalitatea în artă*, 3rd edition (Bucharest: Minerva, 1915).
10. Antonio Patraș, *Ibrăileanu. Către o teorie a personalității* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 2007).
11. Emil Cioran, *Schimbarea la față a României* (Bucharest: Vreimea, 1936), 13.
12. *Ibid.*, 20.
13. *Ibid.*, 47.
14. *Ibid.*, 62.
15. *Ibid.*, 65, 66.
16. *Ibid.*, 34. Emil Cioran’s own emphasis.
17. Nichifor Crainic, *Puncte cardinale în haos*, eds. Magda Ursache, Petru Ursache (Iași: Timpul, 1996), 127.
18. Philippe Ariès, *L’Homme devant la mort* (Paris: Seuil, 1977).
19. Mircea Eliade, *De la Zalmoxis la Genghis-Han* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995).
20. Vasile Băncilă, “Duhul sârbătorii,” *Gândirea* 4 (1936): 136.
21. For a more detailed analysis on the evolution of this leader in the context of interwar Romania, see Armin Heinen, *Legiunea “Arhanghelului Mihail” mișcare socială și organizație politică. O*

- contribuție la problema fascismului internațional*, 2nd edition, trans. Cornelia and Delia Eșianu, Bucharest: Humanitas, 2006.
22. Nicholas M. Nagy-Talavera, *The Green Shirts and the Others. A History of Fascism in Hungary and Romania*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1970.
 23. *Ibid.*, 247.
 24. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1957), 91, 92.
 25. Heinen, *Legiunea*, 265.
 26. Max Weber, *Économie et société – I, les catégories de la sociologie* (Paris: Plon/Pocket, 1995), 323.
 27. Richard Shusterman, *L'Art à l'état vif* (Paris: Minuit, 1992).
 28. Richard Shusterman, "Style et style de vie," *Littérature* 105 (1997), 107.
 29. Michel Lacroix, *De la beauté comme violence. L'esthétique du fascisme français 1919–1939* (Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2004).
 30. *Ibid.*, 101.
 31. *Ibid.*
 32. Heinen, *Legiunea*, 264.
 33. Lacroix, *De la beauté comme violence*, 330.
 34. See the article "Parsifal" in Crainic, *Puncte cardinale în haos*.
 35. Băncilă, "Duhul sărbătorii."

Abstract

Nationalism as a stylistics issue in interwar Romania

I examine the association of nationalism with a concept of beauty in Romania by means of representations of ethnic stylistics, imagological and iconic frameworks circumscribed to an aesthetic-mythological repertoire both national and European in the context of emerging/coming up with some theories whose purpose is to validate the cultural profile of a certain identity complex. Firstly, I analyze those identity theories which embed the aesthetic imagery of nationalist rhetorics in the context of interpretative and discursive practices. The imagery mobilized by the identity constructs maintains a complicated connection not only with the different epistemes and theories currently on the market/used but also with art history, literary critics and aesthetics, which conveys a series of tropes, stylistics, a mythological property and cultural references. Along with ideological trends evolving to the extreme right in Romanian interwar policy, the stylistics of Romanian identity is validated by means of invoking a new aesthetics in the case of Emil Cioran, Mircea Vulcănescu, I.E. Toroușiu or Nichifor Crainic among the others. Their theories do not remained contained within the literary fields of interest, being recovered by a politicized market of ideas. I analyze the spontaneous or intentional affiliation of Romanian theorists and writers to the models of European ideas concerning the same issues of a national stylistics and the connection between ideology and aesthetics as well.

Keywords

Style, Nationalism, Identity, Ethnicity, Folklore