

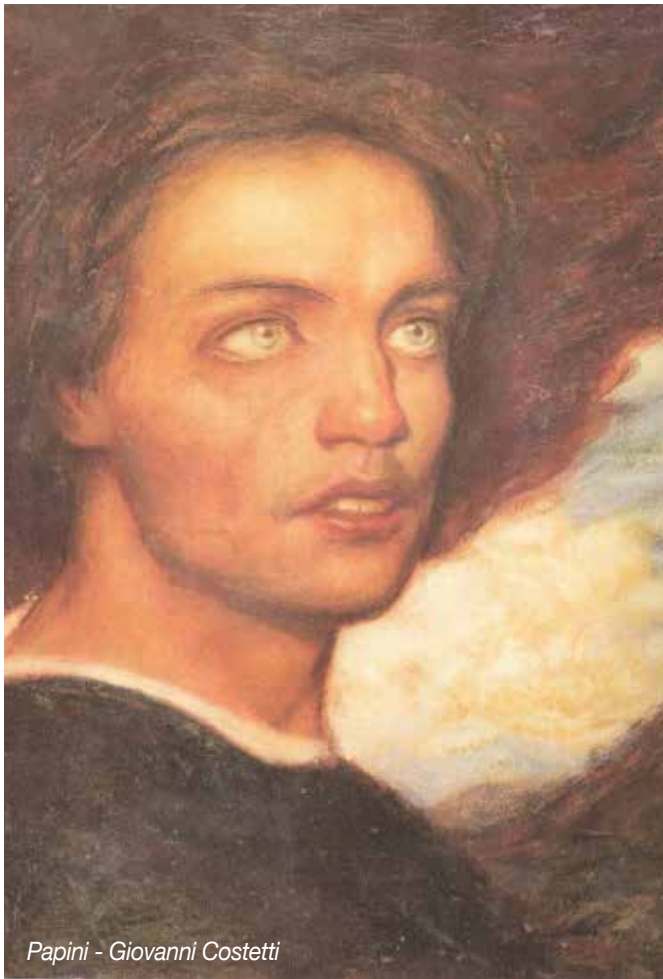
GIOVANNI PAPINI'S INSATIABLE THIRST: A TRANSPERSONAL JOURNEY

Translated by Alberto Gabba

Zsuzsanna Tóth-Izsó

(part two – continued from n. 44)

After having acknowledged the insufficiency of raw knowledge, he is ignited – with elemental force – first by admiration for human intelligence, and then by the mystical power of art, accompanied by a burning desire to possess it. These thus become his new external unifying centres: *«I pretended to start from a precept of logic (pragmatism), but my most secret soul was thirsty and envious of divinity. A similar instinct led me towards art. [...] Poetry is a ladder to divinity and the work of art is already the principle of creation. Poet and prophet for today – and God, perhaps, tomorrow! »* and *«faith in the unprejudiced intelligence and divine virtue of poetry and in the perennial miracle of art»* (A Man – Finished).



Papini - Giovanni Costetti

Although he wrote that for him God had never existed, we nevertheless encounter the terms “divine” and “mystical” with increasing frequency, and the ambitious young man longed for divine power; indeed, he even wanted to become the founder of a new religion. But, to seize upon the artistic inspiration that shakes everything, he no longer cares whether it was God or the Demon who inspires him.

Meanwhile, Papini increasingly experienced overwhelming transpersonal experiences: these were unexpected attacks, the irruption of elements and energies from the Higher Unconscious into his Field of Consciousness. It is not difficult to track their traces in his writings, and it would be equally difficult to believe that they are merely the products of literary imagination, since their authenticity and their correspondence with other transpersonal experiences, avowedly personal and actually experienced, is evident.

Let's take a look at an example, a short story entitled “Salvazione (Poesia in prosa)” - Salvation (Poem in Prose): *«Now that I'm dead, I can see for myself the whole combination of the world that has passed and blossomed around my sight. [...] And dead like this, I seem to have ascended to heaven like the prophets [...] I had searched for silence all my life and had never found it: not even in the mountains [...] And now I'm here and I'm not looking for anything – only a constellation to stretch out as long as I am – and I don't lift a finger by an act of will [...] I remember everything at the same time and without effort. Because everything is now welded between me and the recordings. What is there in common between me and this brittle circle of sun? I am with myself. I am dissolved, far away, outside the system. I don't belong in your circle. [...] I throw myself; I recover, I coil myself: I am elastic [...] I am a point full of soul and nothing more. [...] Triumph and definition. The song of every heaven is sung».*

Out of curiosity, let's now read Assagioli's testimony with one of his clients about his personal experience – and perhaps I'm not giving away a big secret by saying that the similarity will be shocking: *«It's what*

*I am! I can see it more clearly now. It's rotating very, very fast... it's something very important to me... it's revolving around a white dot in the centre... absolutely white... I can enter that white dot, and if I enter it, it goes out, and then it's as if I can travel freely through the universe. I can go anywhere, the stars are all inside that white dot, everything is inside that white dot. It's hard for me to keep from entering it. (Therapist: "... okay, go ahead...") I've been there. Here I am, floating in every direction, and I only see space. It's all inside me and outside me too, it's the same... (long pause)... I'm at home [...] there's nothing to say» ("Il superconscio e il sé" – The Superconscious and the Self – *Giornale di psicosintesi*, no. 0 and no. 1, 1990).*

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In 1921, as a result of his conversion, "*Storia di Cristo*" (The Story of Christ) was published, which immediately became a worldwide bestseller, making Papini one of, if not the, most famous contemporary Italian writer in the world. He is attacked from all sides: many turn away from him, and many accuse him of simply inventing yet another mask to draw attention to himself, maintaining that his conversion is actually nothing more than a publicity stunt. Others dismiss him as mad, while some compare him to a toothless circus lion feebly roaring.

Yet, in the meantime, a completely new audience is emerging: people who feel that the new book's portrayal of Christ – raw, innovative, and alive – speaks precisely to them. To those who have grown weary of the Christ, dusty with old conventions, or who have never truly known him, but who now recognize with primordial force the originality of the figure and teachings of Jesus. From this moment on, Papini is a Christian writer, but his relationship with the Church remains ambivalent: at times it seems that not even the Church knows whether to exalt his name as that of the great atheist who became the Lamb of God, or to distance itself from a writer who is sometimes too independent and not averse to criticism – or at least from some of his works.

Papini himself struggled quite a bit to process this enormous change, to the point of asking his daughter Viola to destroy all available copies of the nihilistic

pamphlet "Le memorie d'Iddio" (The Memoirs of God), published in 1911. In that period, he was still unable to accept his past as an atheist: he was ashamed of it. Only later would he be able to consider the different phases of his life as fundamental and indispensable elements of his personal development.

An excellent literary example of this lack of acceptance is the 1906 short story "Due immagini in una vasca" (Two Faces in the Well). In it, the thirty-year-old protagonist returns to the place of his twenties and, looking into the bottom of a well, sees another face next to his own: it is his own face from seven years earlier. Looking up, he sees his "young self" beside him, in the flesh.

An intense conversation ensues, and the two spend happy and cheerful days together, forgetting all of life's troubles. But, as time passes, the young image begins to bore, and then even annoy, the present-day Papini. The situation escalates: Papini begins to feel an unbearable hatred within himself that leads him to kill his own young image.

We are faced with the failure to integrate the $\Psi\sigma$ of the ages, which «consists in keeping alive, conscious, and active within ourselves the best aspects of each age or stage of existence already passed, and in appreciating, knowing, assimilating, and utilizing the superior qualities of the subsequent age, disidentifying from our own biological and psychic ages, experiencing them as parts to be recited, tasks to be undertaken, but remaining internally free» (from: "Comprendere la psicosintesi" (Understanding Psychosynthesis).

At the end of the short story, the protagonist, indirectly Papini, is surprised to have a strange feeling of missing something: «And now I still live in the world, and it seems to me that I am missing something that I have no precise memory of. When joy assails me with its stupid laughter, I think that I am the only man who has killed himself and continues to live».

Papini bore many pseudonyms and nicknames, such as the following: *the beast of Florence, the slammer,*

GianFalco, the sick gentleman, the diabolical writer, the finite man, the infinite man, the restless seeker, the chameleon, the good ogre, the lion, the humble and vain man, etc., but perhaps the most important name from the point of view of his psycho-spiritual journey was *Bonaventura*.

In 1944, as mentioned, he became a Franciscan tertiary together with his wife and took the name *Bonaventura*, and experienced «true, profound joy» (Diary). In the figure of Bonaventura, Bargellini sees Papini's acumen, logic, and unquenchable intelligence reunited with the fire that burns perpetually within him and with the mystical strength of his faith. He writes: «*Giovanni Bonaventura Papini's entire life was spent under the sign of intelligence, of which his very clear mind made a luminous and clear mirror. Not cold, however; not sterile, but, on the contrary, fervent and warm. [...] Papini's intelligence followed the Bonaventurian itinerary, in desire, in groaning, in darkness and in fire*».



Papini con la moglie

Papini, beyond the immature part (“Two Faces in the Well”), at one time also wanted to make the *atheist Papini disappear*, as seen above, but then admitted that without the *blasphemous Papini*, he would never have reached the *believer Papini*. He no longer wanted to kill the *previous little Papinis*, but desired to integrate them into the unity of his soul.

It can be assumed that with the new name, Bonaventura, charged with symbolic meaning, Papini completed – at least partially – the $\Psi\sigma$ of the ages, a process that culminated in his last hours. But first we must know how, under what conditions the writer arrived at the hours of his happy agony.

Papini's physical decline began in 1953. Paralyzed, nearly blind, and helpless, the prison of his body closed definitively: he was left with only the flight of his spirit. Everything unfolded exactly as he had described in “A Man – Finished”, at that time in the guise of physical decay, a sort of psychosomatic projection of his spiritual agony.

Back then, in the remote 1913, his spirit was dying, enclosed in a living body that was gradually aging as a psychosomatic effect; now, we see in him a living, vital soul imprisoned in an old, dying body.

Despite all this, Eugenio Montale said of their 1955 meeting that «*those who have recently visited him in Florence (nearly blind and seriously ill) are astonished by his fortitude and his serene, Christian courage, as if a new man had been born within him today*».

Among the testimonies of friends, acquaintances, and fans, we also find that of Carlo Bo from 1956: «*In that humiliated body lived the Papini of always and, in a revealing way, the new image of a spirit appeased by hope. Papini testified until the end to the importance of life and the primacy of the spirit. No one will therefore be able to forget his long and moving lesson*». But to better understand Papini's attitude towards life in these terrible physical conditions, let us read his words published earlier in the “Corriere della Sera” known as *Schegge* (splinters): «*If I could move, speak, see and write, but had a confused and dull mind, a torpid and sterile intelligence, an incomplete and slow memory, a vague and sluggish imagination, a dry and indifferent heart, my misfortune would be infinitely more terrible. I would be a dead soul inside a uselessly alive body. [...] I have always maintained the superiority of the spirit over matter: I would be a fraud and a coward if now, having*

reached the point of proof, I had changed my opinion under the weight of suffering».

The hour was near and a Franciscan friar came to him: «Unable to receive the holy Viaticum due to his condition, he received Extreme Unction. But when the priest, pronouncing the sacramental formulas, called him Giovanni, the sick man began to get all agitated in the effort to express himself, until his Giacinta (editor's note: Papini's wife) understood and suggested the name he had taken upon entering the Third Order of Saint Francis, that day at La Verna: Bonaventura. And immediately the sick man calmed down» (Roberto Ridolfi, "Vita di Giovanni Papini" – Life of Giovanni Papini).

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At this point Papini identified himself completely with *Bonaventura*, the full manifestation of his mystical subpersonality. On his deathbed he gathered the characters he had paraded on the stage of his life. Papini is now a good father who loves all his children, a Self who loves all his subpersonalities, he welcomes them, even if they are prodigal children, into the paternal home: «So he took his leave of us: as good and luminous like a patriarch. The things that had happened, the places he had seen, the dreams and all the battles, become ghosts around him, like strong children: prodigal creatures that love has called home, in time to the father's embrace» (Luigi Santucci in Radio Italiana, AA.VV.: "Papini Vivo" – Living Papini).

Thinking of his own words from the aforementioned "Two Faces in the Well": «All these despisers and despised had the same name, inhabited the same body, appeared to men as a single living being» we better understand how integral all these *little Papinis* were to the welcoming and integral personality of their master Giovanni Bonaventura Papini.

Papini's example resonates with Assagioli's thought that «the 'Self' must not be destroyed. Personal identity is precious. It is the result of a long evolution, and it cannot be thrown to the wind. What we must eliminate is our attachment to the self, because the personal self must be brought back to its source. And this is achieved through

the coordination and alignment of the personal will with the Transpersonal Will, which leads to the reunification of the personal self with the Transpersonal Self» ("The Superconscious and the Self").

Papini glimpsed and experienced the Superconscious and the Higher Self, but he neither neglected nor denied his personal identity, his multiple personality. His mystical subpersonality, the *inner Bonaventura*, rose towards the Higher Self, and the partial $\Psi\sigma$ centred around it gradually transformed in the direction of a transpersonal $\Psi\sigma$.

The complete and perfect transpersonal $\Psi\sigma$ – of course – could not be achieved, since it is the privilege of the greatest, but nevertheless the psycho-spiritual life of Giovanni Papini can give us the strength to continue our battles, so that we can say together with him, with peace in our hearts:

«To be on an equal footing with nature and with men. To be in harmony with God. To love those who love, to love more those who do not love (the more unhappy), to obey the law, to pray in the morning upon awakening, to pray in the evening, with tired eyes, to do one's share of the work to the last, to be reconciled with the world. Every day of our life should be a new peace treaty between the creature that passes away and the creation that endures» ("Ritrovata bellezza" – Beauty Found Again).

