

ALEXEI MARINAT: THE CATHARTIC FUNCTION OF CONFESSION IN THE DIARY "ME AND THE WORLD"

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Abstract

Writing memoirs constituted the most eruptive phenomenon immediately after 1989, the fall of communism being followed, in terms of literature, but also extraliterary, as a documentary and moral dimension. For Alexei Marinat, the reclusion diary "Me and the World" is not only a way to share the common experience of a cursed society, but also to create a favourable space in which faith and pain can be shared. These confessions, full of candour and simplicity, offer not only public access to a private space, but also allow the diarist to create this space as a way to explore the boundaries of lived experience, expressing the desire to be discovered once in sharing the self with others. At the same time, his diary represents a space where the limits of his life are accessible for analysis and self-analysis, because here, Alexei Marinat reveals the surprising powers of liberation through the purifying exercise of autobiographical art.

Keywords: Alexei Marinat, diary, autobiographical literature, confession, memory

Rezumat

Memorialistica a constituit fenomenul cel mai eruptiv îndată după 1989, căderea comunismului fiind urmată, în plan literar, dar și extraliterar ca dimensiune documentară și morală. Pentru Alexei Marinat jurnalul reclusiunii „Eu și lumea” nu constituie doar o modalitate de a împărtăși experiența comună a unei societăți urgisite, dar și de a crea un spațiu favorabil în care credința și durerea pot fi împărtășite. Aceste confesiuni, străbătute de candoare și simplitate, oferă nu doar accesul publicului la un spațiu privat, ci permit diaristului să creeze acest spațiu ca modalitate de explorare a granițelor experienței trăite, constituind expresia dorinței de a fi descoperit cândva în împărtășirea sinelui cu alții. Jurnalul său reprezintă, totodată, și un spațiu în care limitele vieții acestuia sunt accesibile pentru analiză și autoanaliză, pentru că aici, lui Alexei Marinat i se relevă surprinzătoarele puteri de eliberare prin exercițiul purificator al artei autobiografice.

Cuvinte-cheie: Alexei Marinat, jurnal, literatură autobiografică, confesiune, memorie

Immediately after the fall of communism (1989), writers' attention has been focused primarily on testimony, out of an acute need for direct, immediate, and "unprocessed" truth. Diaries, memoirs, confessional notes have represented prolific literature works that continue their depositional career to this day. This is the age in which life itself is infinitely more interesting than fiction. The phenomenon can be traced on both sides of the Prut river, as the evil communist regime has spread rapidly for decades, capturing

writers, priests, artists, politicians, workers, young students, and exerting mass terror, with serious consequences for the human psyche. In truth, the only individuals able to talk about the horrors of the communist regime are those who really suffered during the communist period (former political prisoners, dissidents, persecuted intellectuals).

Numerous literary critics, including Mihai Cimpoi, Ion Ciocanu, Alina Ciobanu-Tofan, Diana Vrabie, Aliona Grati addressed the theme of detention memoirs in the space between the Prut and the Dniester, the literature after 1989 revealing many taboo subjects, taking a direct and impartial approach. The whole subject area is focused on the Soviet totalitarian regime, the concentration camps, the Gulag, the post-war Soviet occupation, topics that had been waiting for several decades to get an authentic, genuine representation.

"While Ion C. Ciobanu's fiction, which portrayed the Stalinist deportations more obliquely, was published in Soviet Moldova over several decades, his colleague Alexei Marinat's account of internment in the Stalin's prisons, *Eu și lumea* (Me and the World) could appear only in 1989", records the literary critic Marcel Cornis-Pope, in the vast study dedicated to the reconceptualization of the national literary histories of the countries of Eastern Central Europe (Cornis-Pope et al., 2010, p. 575). The effervescent movement to commemorate the tragic experience is also reinforced by Cicerone Ionitoiu, former political prisoner, author of the dictionary *Victims of Communist Terror*: "I saw and felt how the body of the country had become a guinea pig of foreign ideologies aimed at disintegration and enmity between us, those animated by the beautification of the same land and the realization of the same ideal: to get ready for a free, abundant life in which the mutual respect of values should dominate, and the spirit of justice should be the daily binder"¹ (Ionitoiu, 2018, p. 2).

The Dictionary contains unique information about the victims of communist terror, among those imprisoned, tortured and arrested we also identify the Bessarabian memorialist Alexei Marinat, sentenced to 10 years in prison for high treason (Ionitoiu, 2019, p. 100).

Among the recurring themes of Alexei Marinat's confession prose (the disease, coldness, time, freedom, death, loneliness, aesthetic creation, religiosity), *hunger* is the ubiquitous leitmotif, both in its direct form, of torture, and in metaphorical form, of hunger for information from the outside world. In these shocking documentary sketches of years spent in Siberian camps

¹Orig. "Am văzut și simțit cum trupul țării devenise cobai al ideologiilor străine ce urmăreau destrămarea sufletească și învrăjbirea între noi, cei animați de înfrumusețarea aceleiași glee și realizarea aceluiași ideal: să ne pregătim pentru o viață liberă, îmbelșugată în care să domine respectul reciproc al valorilor, iar spiritul dreptății să fie liantul de zi cu zi" (Ionitoiu, 2018, p. 2).

(Duta, 1992, p. 9), the memorialist manages to capture aspects of the terrible famine instituted by the Soviet regime: He had starved to death. But why wasn't he distended? We all know what the signs of hunger are! He died, apparently, not wanting to wait for these signs (January 23, 1947)² (Marinat, 2017, p. 7), the first entry in the diary *Me and the World* being recorded on December 30, 1946.

Among the first published excerpts from his documentary prose, we can mention "Crâmpeie din vârtoarea vremurilor" [Crumbles from the Whirlwind of Times] (Marinat, 1989, pp. 44-63), which include the stories "Ziua X" [Day X], "Taina primei nopți" [The Secret of the First Night], "Damen vals" [Damen waltz], in the magazine *Nistru* no. 6 of 1989. Some memoirs are brought to the public in the paper "Amintiri, of, amintiri" [Memories, oh, Memories] from the magazine *Orizonul* [Horizon] no. 3 of 1989 (Marinat, 1989, pp. 68-71). The journals are later published under the title "Din jurnalele intime" [From the Intimate Diaries], in *Selected Writings* (Hyperion Publishing House, 1991), being written after 45 years from the recording of the events. Eight years later, the well-known work *Me and the World: Documentary Prose* (Writers' Union Publishing House, 1999) is out of print – in a recent edition, at Cartier Publishing House, 2017. As we will see, the volume of memoirs *Călătorii în jurul omului* [Traveling Around the Man] (2004) starts with the publication of the same diary, incorporated into the memorialistic discourse. We are witnessing a fusion of the memorialistic discourse with the diaristic one, as, in the last years, we are attesting less "pure" formulas of these species of confession, which are subject to changes in the "topography" of the genre. Eugen Simion, who delivers a detailed presentation of the writings within the confessional genre, observes that their formula is just as complex: a mixture of memories, autobiography, self-portrait, diary, and moral meditation (Simion, 2008, p. 18). On May 27, 1947, the diaries were interrupted, the diarist being arrested by the security forces in Chisinau [...] Searches were carried out in the room [...] and the three notebooks of the "Me and the World" diaries were found, they were immediately counted and itemised: "The Diary no. 1 - contains 158 written pages, Diary no. 2 - 107 pages, Diary no. 3 - 193 pages", fact to be confirmed on the spot with my own signature. From the way the searches were conducted, I realized that the security services knew about my diaries. Then I found out that they were also photographed³ (Marinat, 2017, p. 23).

² *Orig.* "Murise de foame. Dar de ce nu era umflat? Noi doar știm care-s semnele foametei! Acesta a murit, se vede, nevrând să mai aștepte semnele (23 ianuarie 1947)" (Marinat, 2017, p. 7).

³ *Orig.* "arestat de către organele de securitate din Chișinău [...] Au fost făcute percheziții în cameră [...] și au fost găsite cele trei caiete ale jurnalelor intime «Eu și lumea», au fost pe loc numerotate și specificate: «Jurnalul nr. 1 - conține 158 de

The perquisition, followed by the arrest, was, in fact, the antechamber to the inevitable future detention. Obviously, in the situation in which the fictional literature of the obsessive decade conforms to Soviet precepts, any epic, lyrical, or dramatic freedom being severely sanctioned, it is clear that the diary, for example, cannot contain immediate reality without risks to the author (Manolescu, 1996, p. 7). For the one who records his actual, authentic impressions under an oppressive regime, even if he is careful, the risks are inherent. In the same year, 1947, Gala Galaction wrote down in his diary that “poor Moldovans die by the thousands! [...] Life, nearby and faraway, in our country and in vain - as I catch it on the radio - flows fast, diverse, dramatic, full of worries, of needs, of apprehensions”⁴ (Galaction, 2003, pp. 50-51).

It is the period of maximum stalinist oppression, when, in addition to the ordinary citizens, who were to be mentally exterminated, physically abused in investigations, deported or even killed, there were a large number of Bes-sarabian people who formed the intellectual elite of Greater Romania.

A decisive role in the analysis of Alexei Marinat’s diary belongs to the title, the construction of which raises several issues in literature, to a greater extent than any other element of the paratext. The title, in the terminological sense of one of the founders of modern title science (“titrologie”) - Leo Hoek - represents “a construct, an artifact created for reception or commentary” (Genette & Crampé, 1988, p. 693). If we follow the paradigm of interpreting the title of a literary work presented by Leo Hoek and approached by Gérard Genette and Bernard Crampé, then, in the case of the analysed diary, *Me and the World* constitutes the title of the work, while the second part - *Documentary Prose* - is its subtitle. Hence, the title is defined formally and the subtitle - functionally. Indeed, the subtitle *Documentary Prose* refers to the object of a relatively independent paratextual element (“Prose” - artistic literary creation using expressive language), to the generic indication that denotes certainty of evoking documented events. Consequently, the author consciously assigns his diary to the category of documentary literature. As for the structure of the title, presented in the format of “title plus subtitle”, it involves a relationship of subordination, but also of a clear distinction of the last element compared to the first, a fact confirmed by the punctuation mark that separates them. The title *Me and the World* is an entirely evocative one, referring to the author’s impulse to write about himself, about the process of

pagini scrise, jurnalul nr. 2 - 107 pagini, jurnalul nr. 3 - 193 pagini», fapt ce a trebuit confirmat pe loc cu propria semnătură. După felul cum s-au făcut perchezițiile, am înțeles că organele de securitate știau de jurnalele mele. Pe urmă am aflat că au fost și fotografiate” (Marinat, 2017, p. 23).

⁴Orig. “Bieții moldoveni mor cu miile! [...] Viața, aproape și departe, la noi și aiurea - așa cum o surprind la radio - curge năvalnică, diversă, dramatică, încărcată de griji, de nevoi, de aprehensiuni” (Galaction, 2003, pp. 50-51).

discovering and redefining the “self” in relation to the “world”. In this sense, the diary announces itself as a means of self-assessment and exploration of the “authorial self”. In fact, as Ruxandra Cesereanu concludes, it is the discovery and freedom of “self” that makes the detention memoir a daughter of literature (Cesereanu, 1998, p. 10). As regards the functions of the extensive title – *Me and the World: Documentary Prose* – we can underline the following: identification of the work (documentary prose), designation of the content (author’s testimonies about himself), highlighting the importance (the value of the work as a testament, the resurrection of the author’s memory, in relation to the collective memory). From a semantic perspective, Leo Hoek distinguishes between the subjective and objective functions of the title. Thus, the author delimitates two classes of titles: the “subjectal” and the “objectal” ones (Genette & Crampé, 1988, p. 709). Alexei Marinat’s diary combines both functions in a very inspired way: the subjective is manifested in the authorial “self” or the pronoun *Me*, while the objective belongs to the format itself, the designation of the text as an object – *Documentary Prose*. Hence, we can say that the title of the diary can be qualified as a “thematic”, in relation to the “content” of the text, congruent with a generalizing synecdoche, which presents the evolution of the “authorial self” as the central theme of the work. Dissimulated stays only the effect of the connotative message of the title: does the memorialist address to himself, to the whole world, or to both? Therefore, as a product of inner feelings and experience, the diary externalizes the intimate universe of the narrator, the convention of authenticity being identifiable in the sincerity of the diarist, in the authoritative and committed “self” that guarantees the credibility of the text: “I, as a witness to those events [...] do my duty⁵ (Marinat, 2004, p. 335).

More than obtaining the effect of authenticity on the level of the diaristic creation, the literary critic Diana Vrabie also mentions the preference for the “self” as a conceptualization and return to an inner “authorial self”, to a difficult experience of a relationship with oneself (Vrabie, 2008, p. 207) that existed in the past. In fact, “the past can never be evoked except with respect to a present: the «reality» of by-gone days is only such to the consciousness which, today, gathering up their present image, cannot avoid imposing upon them its own form, its style. Every autobiography – even when it limits itself to pure narrative – is a self-interpretation” (Starobinski, 1980, p. 74).

This metamorphosis is revealed in the prose of the Bessarabian diarist, in the personal act of restoring a public, historical, institutional, collective world, in the evocative emphasis on the existence and experience of authorial consciousness: “Escorted life - you don’t really think about much. Tomorrow morning the alarm clock rings again, another day comes with «let’s, let’s go faster», «come on, come on», put on whatever you have, run to the can-

⁵Orig. “Eu, ca martor al acelor evenimente [...] îmi fac datoria” (Marinat, 2004, p. 335).

teen, to devour the slice of bread and to sip from the bowl of cucumber soup or pickled cabbage, and – at work, to cut down the forest, to carry the dirt with the wheelbarrow, to batter it with the pickaxe, to lay the crossbeams, to lay the railway road – the road of suffering”⁶ (Marinat, 2017, p. 82).

The issue of the relationship between autobiography/biography and memory leads us to a contradictory definition, with some critics considering memory a subset of autobiography, while others assume the exact opposite. The relationship between them is complex, and the demarcation line between the genres – extremely unstable. However, the two genres generate different definitions in readers’ perceptions. Readers of autobiography are willing to give up the supremacy of the authenticity of the message, the fictional dimension being perceived as a necessary part of the autobiographical narrative. Applying this formula to memories generates a series of problems. The expectations of readers of reclusion memoirs are different: they are much less willing to accept an aestheticized description of historically identifiable times, relying on the account of true events. Memoirs carry the value of historical truth, due to the principle of their objective fidelity. In Alexei Marinat’s documentary prose, we find a note about the value of confession, but also about revealing the personal history to the public: “I want to make available to the reader excerpts, gleanings, moments, documentary short stories from these diaries, which, in my opinion, would interest him to some extent, as live experiences of a man who was, saw [...] and reflected about the events of the day”⁷ (Marinat, 2017, p. 98).

We can identify, in these fragments, a form of assumption of existential polyphony, of human plurivocity, that is, in the terms of Mikhail Bakhtin, an invitation to “dialogism”. Self-identity is shaped by the social designation of memory, which has a significant impact on life, by making available to readers fragments of history, through this type of dialogic writing. Memory, which is the indicator of identity, becomes here a way of vigorously experiencing the agony of reclusion, and the victory over it. The loss of memory for the narrator, means the loss of identity. Memory is equivalent to the confession of fragments of the past conveyed in Alexei Marinat’s narrative, be-

⁶Orig. “Viață escortată – nu te prea gândești la multe. Măine dimineață iar sună deșteptarea, mai vine o zi cu «hai-hai mai repede», «dawai-dawai» (rus.), tragi pe tine ce ai, fuga la cantină, pentru a înghiți porția de pâine și a sorbi strachina de ciorbă din castraveți sau varză murată, și – la muncă, la tăiat pădure, la cărat pământul cu roaba, la bătut cu târnăcopul, la așternut traversele, la clăditul de cale ferată – cale a suferinței” (Marinat, 2017, p. 82).

⁷Orig. “Vreau să pun la dispoziția cititorului fragmente, spicuri, momente, nuvele documentare din aceste jurnale, care, după părerea mea, l-ar interesa într-o oarecare măsură, ca trăiri pe viu ale unui om care a fost, a văzut [...] și a gândit asupra evenimentelor zilei” (Marinat, 2017, p. 98).

ing decisively encapsulated in the language of alienation. And here, memory does not exist in itself, it does not subsist only in the individual, in silence, as Adrian Crupa points out. The meaning of being of the memory is a relational one. It only exists as long as it is transmitted. In the absence of sharing, exemplarity does not make sense, and experience loses its purposefulness. The manifestation form of memory is the “confession” (Crupa, 2017, p. 27). In the act of confession, i.e., transmission of memory, the connotations of reclusion experience consumed in the Gulag camps become viable as they are shared and perceived by the audience. Similarly, the readers of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn are invited to “enter into the sweetness of the camp life and to taste its joys” (Solzhenitsyn, 2007, p. 53). The memorialist is in a constant process of adaptation, which explains the configuration of his identity over time. It is a confluence that Alexei Marinat explains through the essential constitutive experience in the culture of a country dominated by the totalitarian communist regime, finding out that there is a moment in his life when, under the pressure of terrifying events, he feels the urgent need to record them in his “green diary” (Marinat, 2004, p. 11), a diary which “saves” him.

From the very beginning of the diary, the memorialist Alexei Marinat consciously has taken over the role of narrator and author, speaking directly to the reader through the prism of his intimate diary, which lay at the origin of his memoirs: “My greetings, green diary! It is you that saves me every now and then, since you let me unload my soul: I share all my hardships with you”⁸ (Marinat, 2017, p. 15).

This autobiographical addressing is meant to emphasize that there are facts to be confessed, and their conversion into narrated events will be accomplished without alteration. At the same time, choosing to record in a diary determines the alleviation of prison suffering and the stylization of the discourse, which facilitates the emergence of a second-degree imaginary. Speaking to a diary determines the existence of the tacit agreement or contract between the reader and the autobiographer while reading an autobiographical text, i.e., in Philippe Lejeune’s interpretation – the “autobiographical pact”.

At the same time, Eugen Simion makes a clear distinction between memoirs, where the pact with history prevails and an autobiography that presumes the author’s pact with himself, urging us to take things “relatively” (Simion, 2008, p. 12), from which we can conclude that the memorialist sees himself in front of history, interpreting the historical facts he experiences, while the autobiographer emphasizes the “self” he narrates. Unlike the autobiography, which is written at a certain distance from the events that happened, the diary does not start from the

⁸Orig. “Salutările mele, caiet verde! Tot tu mă salvezi câteodată, pentru că mă lași să-mi descarc sufletul: toate greutățile mele ți le împărtășesc ție” (Marinat, 2017, p. 15).

recollection in time of some life incidents, but from their recording and synthesis at the time of their occurrence. The common note of these species is that they both reflect the common life of the author. In all these confessional species, however, fiction intervenes, triggering itself involuntarily due to the subjectivity of memory. Memory filters also lead to the creation of myths and images that change the factual reality. They become decisive in extreme contexts, in which, for example, the Bessarabian diarist is found. These filters, indispensable for structuring narrative identities, work particularly effectively when the detainee Alexei Marinat is faced with the impossibility of representing the traumatic experience, adjusting the description of reality for security reasons. This is evident, for example, when the memorialist praises the violence of key events, focusing on external details, as he does when recounting the moment of his arrest. The author's attention is focused on the elements of the portrait: the military uniform of the investigator, his physical appearance, avoiding any description of the physical violence committed against him immediately after his arrest: "He smiles again. A smile, like a baby snake. It is waving from the upper lip to the lower lip. Then, he unlocks his lips and a gold tooth starts shining like a line in a tunnel, revealing his connection to the wealthy, perhaps even to the noble, and educated people. Gold has always served as a sign of wealth. But gold misled me, and I always confused wealth with education and intelligence. This noble metal, which shines on an individual's tooth, makes me believe that man is intelligent. Naivety comes from the lack of life practice"⁹ (Marinat, 2017, p. 26).

This subjective selection of facts in autobiographical writing confirms Eugen Simion's view that autobiography can be treated as fiction, as a narrative in which the author carefully selects and constructs characters, events, and aspects of his past and present, his "self" or identity, while memory conveys a reality into fiction, conferring aesthetic values to literature. Even if the intention of the diarist Alexei Marinat is to free himself through writing while keeping an intimate diary, this act of confession and recording of his private life implies a dialogue with the public. The public, real or imaginary, contributes to the modeling of the "authorial self" in writing, of the intimate nature of the artistic "self", the diarist signing a pact with himself and a pact with history (Simion, 2008, p. 18). The possibility of creating a dialogue or a collaboration between the authorial self and the public is also reflected in the

⁹Orig. "Iar zâmbeste. Un zâmbet, ca un pui de șarpe. I se unduiește ba pe la buza de sus, ba pe la cea de jos. Apoi își desface buzele și un dinte de aur străluminează ca un fir într-un tunel. Dându-i în vileag apartenența la oameni avuți, poate chiar și nobili, și educați. Aurul totdeauna a servit ca un indiciu de avuție. Dar pe mine aurul mă inducea în eroare și, totdeauna, încurcam avuția cu educația și inteligența. Acest metal nobil, care strălucește pe dintele unui individ, mă face să cred că omul e inteligent. Naivitatea vine din lipsa practicii de viață" (Marinat, 2017, p. 26).

aesthetic system of Mihail Bakhtin's dialogism, which perceives the narrative as a conversation. The implicit existence of this conversation is confirmed by the fact that the diarist Alexei Marinat begins his diary with a dialogue with his "green diary", using the second person singular to address the personified notebook: I share all my hardship with you (Marinat, 2017, p. 15), thus anthropomorphizing his intimate diary, within a dialogical structure. By doing so, the diarist starts with modeling his narrative in the form of a conversation with a hypothetical friend or perhaps with his own "self". While we can argue that such a narrative, with elements of intimate dialogue, should not be categorized as a monologue, we note that most critics consider writing a journal to be an expression of a desire to be discovered someday, a sharing of the "self" with the "other" (Mihail Bakhtin). At the same time, these pages register a high degree of literariness, an aesthetics of the prison experience. The author uses rhetorical devices to represent the dominant feeling of crisis and fragmentation in the modern oppressive world. His social, ethical, political and cultural concerns do not always cover the desired linguistic representations, as, originally from a Transnistrian village, Valea Hotului, he does not possess sufficient knowledge of the Romanian language: "I want to start all at once: both literature and history and language. I feel like working more on the language"¹⁰ (Marinat, 2017, p. 20).

The projective position of this autobiographical passage describes the trajectory of an artistic destiny, which is in a constant search for himself. Hence, for Alexei Marinat, the diary is not, in fact, just a way to share the common experience of an oppressed society. These confessions, full of candor and simplicity, offer public access to a private space, allowing the diarist to find a way to explore the boundaries of lived experience in writing. The literary valences of this diaristic text will always be open to an emotional reception and a ceaseless dialogue between the "authorial self" and the public. Even if it does not start from the premise to become literature, but rather to be a testimony of an oppressive reality, the diary *Me and the World* develops into an important literary work, mainly because of this confessional simplicity and the fever with which the confession is made. Like other confessional narratives in which personal trauma reverberates, Alexei Marinat's detention diary confirms its authority, especially through the authentic evocation of the detention experience and through the exorcism of memory, and the past.

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¹⁰Orig. " Vreau să mă apuc de toate odată: și de literatură, și de istorie, și de limbă. Îmi vine să lucrez mult asupra limbii" (Marinat, 2017, p. 20).

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