# THE CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE OF THE MEMORIALISTIC OF THE ROMANIAN COMMUNIST CONCENTRATION SPACE

**Dumitru-Cătălin ROGOJANU**
**Ph.D. Researcher,**
**University „Constantin Brâncuşi" of Târgu-Jiu**
**Institute of Research on Development**

***Abstract***

*In this study we have desired to highlight the impact that memorialistic literature of the concentration space has had after 1989 in reconfiguring, analysing and interpreting the Romanian Gulag: on the one side as plausible historical source, but with a special moral tinge; on the other side as an epic genre, submitted to subjectivity. Trying to capture the reasons for the appearance and propagation of the memorialistic literature of detention, our investigation draws its attention on highlting the exemplary role of these „little life stories" in describing the communist inferno.*

*Ultimately, these pages written in grief, nostalgia, hate and contempt by the former detainees, reflect the search for a new identity and consciuosness, of a new „lighter" historical route, unaltered by the ancient „hard", indoctrinated history.*

***Keywords:*** *memorialistic literature of the concentration space, „subjective literature", individual and collective memory, „big history", „history of the little".*

Soon after 1989, the historiography of Romanian communist concentration camps met new challenges from the memory journals written by those who faced the repressive regime enforced by the communist regime in Romania. Once "infused" with this kind of "detention literature" under different forms: journals, memorials [1] or autobiographies [2], memories and confessions, the historian had to re-write consistently the history, both through the way he interpreted this kind of sources as well as through the clemency towards the former convicts for them to be able to tell their story, too often painful, about the communist detention system.

This "subjective literature [3]", "borderline literature", in Silvian Iosifescu's sense [4], "the genres of biography"(Eugen Simion) [5], or "literature of confessions", "self-referential writings", "documents of the real", "the original of human experience that was communicated" [6], "para-literature" in the etymological meaning of the word, that is beyond literary [7] is specific to the states in Eastern Europe that wanted to build "a history about to begin", in this sense eluding the "fragmented history" [8] and "conformist history" of communist regime, if not completely, at least partially. Whether the reader in the west of Europe was familiarized with such a literature, the reader in east and particularly the Romanians had to catch up with "an ethical moral delay which may be politically

explained; since 1990, he has passed abruptly from literature of hypocrisy to a literature of infernal truth, followed by the monotony of agony, from habitualness to Gulag's agony [9].

This dormancy of east is non-isochronous condition with the west, even if there is an isochronous in postmodernism, the west being in tiredness condition of its self image without being the owner of a living memory, but of a pluralism of data, fact and events; in comparison with the men in the eastern Europe, that is in a continuous search of its own identity, by a detached analysis of repulsions and traumas loaded in the individual and collective memory [10]. Recapturing its own identity has been transcribed through the agency of those memorial writings on detention acquiring the role of record-books [11] which "cries" out accusing a system which attempts at the people's lives and freedom and imprinted deep down their souls and memory profound pains and traumas. Another explanation for the memorial records to be delayed in their emergence in the Romanian space is of psychological nature, the former political prisoners representing somehow "the conscience of accepting the communist regime" who did not want to recall "the regime and moral wounds [12]" caused by the repressive system, preferring to break up with the past and peacefully go on with their lives.

The "literature of memory", "the literature of imprisonment", or "literature of substitution" as Dan C. Mihailescu calls it, on the one hand it projected a recapturing of the censured past and on the other, it emphasized our desire to apprise more or less exemplary destinies and "histories", which have been marginalized and placed at the outskirts of history [13]. To put it in another way, the literature of dungeon, even if it "enchanted our soul and mind", right this every moment it moves us towards an aporia [14] since with few exceptions it comes to control or it becomes an alternative to formal history which emanated from the official bodies of communist regime.

All the more, this "drawer literature" needs to satisfy the most different public interests: from research and documentation which may comprise, in our case, information on torturers and communist prisons, to literary ones (portrayals, descriptions, psychology) [15]. Another explanation of this "boom" of books, studies and memorial articles is a psychological one, because this phenomenon has to be thought through the changes of the expectations system [16]. Therefore the memories and journals edited after 1989, have a compensatory role due to the fact that they bring into the public's mind, historical disclosures [17], (Belu Zilber-Andrei Şerbulescu) [18], political discosures (Paul Goma[19], Adriana Georgescu [20], Lena Constante [21]) and even personal disclosures, by describing events in the life of some important persons as Nicolae Steinhardt[22] , Ion D. Sârbu [23]. Although they insist upon the biographical side, many of the memories and journals writers in speaking about themselves they write a self-portrait and they consider themselves diary writers[24] , many of their reports represent a rich documentary and even more these writings include, in a skilful way, "the history of small ones" into the "great history" of those who had led Romania for approximately 50 years (1945-1989).

Despite the fact that, a great deal of the memorial literature, which some considered "a necessary evil", has been and still is written from biased positions, the authors having debts to pay, some of the information being either inaccurate or false, the language, un-academic, whereas the style is rigid; nevertheless they are the outcome of a unique experience, which affected their authors profoundly [25]. Thought he suffering is told with the heart and soul, memory writers' effort and conscience to retell and to commit to paper as soon as possible their own thoughts and feelings for the future generations not to forget and not to repeat the tragic communist past[26]. It is only in time that the universal memory of communist dungeons with all its deficiencies and drawbacks, may disclose its real character, which is not of "fossil source", but that of "living document".

## References


[1]. Taking into account the researches of narrators, as it is the case of Philippe Lejeune or Jaap Lintvelt, the literary critic and historian, Eugen Simion, in his book, *Genres of Biography*, vol. I, s.l: Virtual, 2010, page 9, concludes that "memories are included into the narrative space in the first person singular and thus it determines the literary specific depending on the relationship *author-narator-charcter*. Like the personal journal, or autobiography, the three instances coincide: author is the same person with the one that narrates the story and at the same time he is identified with the character in the story". Eugen Simion goes on with his presentation saying that unlike *autobiography* and *personal journal* where "the object of the discourse is the individual himself (the narrator), in memorials, the narrator, telling about himself, tells about the world through which it passes…" The book *Genres of Biography*, vol. I and II is also partially available on http://books.corect.com/ro Accessed: 7 November 2011.

[2]. A thorough analysis of autobiographical genre, Philippe Lejeune, *Pactul autobiografic*, Bucureşti: Univers, 2000.

[3]. Ioan Holban, *Literatura subiectivă*, Bucureşti: Minerva, 1989.

[4]. Quoting Silvian Iosifescu with his study *Literatura de frontieră*, Bucureşti : Enciclopedică Română, 1971, Diana Vrabie in the study *Paradigmele discursului autobiograpic*, published in *Philologica Jassyensia*, An III, Nr. 2, 2007, p. 146, available at www.philologica-jassyensia.ro/upload/III_2_Vrabie.pdf Accessed: 10 November 2011, accomplishes a conceptual distinction of *border literature*, in two large categories: *literature of confessions*, to which memories, autobiographies, recallings confession, diaries belong to and *journey literature* (flight book and travel book). As Ion Manolescu notices in his book *Literatura Memorialistică*. *Radu Petrescu, Ion D. Sârbu, N. Steinhardt*, Bucureşti, Humanitas, 1996, p.5, these „rankings proves inoperative, when author themselves decide to broaden the frontiers of…border literature (…)".

[5]. Al. Săndulescu, *Memorialişti români*, Bucureşti: Universul Dalsi, 2003, p. 5.

[6]. See Mirabela Rely Odette Curelar, „Romanian reality in Peter Neagoe's novels" in *Annals of the „Constantin Brâncuşi" University of Târgu Jiu, Letters and Social Sciences Series*, Issue 1/2010, p. 69.

[7]. Iulia Pop, *Memorie şi suferinţă. Consideraţii asupra literaturii memorialistice a universului concentraţionar comunist*, Cluj-Napoca: Argonaut, 2011, p. 42.

[8]. *Ibid*., pp. 51-52.

[9]. Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Gulagul în conştiinţa românească. Memorialistica şi literatura închisorilor comuniste. Eseu de mentalitate*, Ediţia a II-a revăzută şi adăugită, Iaşi: Polirom, 2005, p.87.

[10]. Iulia Pop, *op. cit.*, p.52.

[11]. *Ibid.*

[12]. Claudia-Florentina Dobre, „Persecuţiile politice în România postcomunistă: victimizare, amnezie, nostalgie, ideologizare şi denunţare", in *Memoria*, nr. 74, 11/2011, p. 106.

[13]. See the chapter "Impasurile memoriei", pp.9-16 at Dan C. Mihăilescu, *Literatura română în postceauşism, I. Memorialistica sau trecutul ca re-umnizare*, Iaşi: Polirom, 2004.

[14]. *Ibid*, p. 13.

[15]. Ion Manolescu, *op.cit*, p. 8.

[16]. *Ibid.*

[17]. *Ibid.*

[18]. Andrei Şerbulescu, *Monarhia de drept dialectic. A doua versiune a memoriilor lui Belu Zilber, Humanitas*, Bucureşti, 1991.

[19]. Paul Goma, *Gherla*, Bucureşti: Humanitas, 1990, Idem, *Patimile după Piteşti,* s.l.: Ediţia a IV-a, 2004. These studies , as wel as others written Paul Goma are available also on the writer's personal site: www.paulgoma.com/, or *www.scribd.com/*

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[24]. Al. Săndulescu, *op.cit*, p. 5.
[25]. Ion Bălan, *Regimul concentraţionar din România 1945-1964*, Bucureşti: Humanitas şi Fundaţia Academia Civică, 1998, p. 12.
[26]. *Ibid*., pp. 12-13.