

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND LITERATURE OF CONFESSION

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Abstract: *Correspondence, alongside with autobiographies, memoirs and diaries, belongs to the literature of confession. Being a literary perception, it also maintains its quality as a source of information for historiographers. It is difficult to identify from confessional writing how much belongs to the actual history and how much is literature. The present study will offer some suggestions on this perspective and will provide a historical retrospective of the Epistle which reveals its contradictory way to great literature. We shall try to delineate between the actual and the literary correspondence, making some reference to the poetics of communication. In this respect, we shall address the following dichotomies: private/public correspondence, documentary/authentic/fictional correspondence etc.*

Keywords: *correlation, historiography, literature, confession, writing.*

Being referred to in several ways and without having a "canonized" name, the autobiographical literature still remains in search of its identity and its elements loom somewhere between the *literature of confession, paraliterature, non-fiction, biographical literature, literature of autobiographical narrative, subjective literature, confessional writing* etc. Thus, we have opted for the concept of literature of confession from this amalgam of "names", which are likely to further complete each other, since any diary, memoir, autobiography, correspondence; confessional interview becomes a "creative subject" in any obvious way (Jean Rousset).

Even in the absence of a "Christian name" unanimously approved of this type of literature spectacularly invades the bookstores, rivalling the canonized species. The literature of confession remains a segment which seduces unconditionally its readers; it is a wonderful rematch of "the author removed from the equation," as Eugen Simion puts into words. The authors, in their turn, are generous. Let us have a random look at some recent titles of confessional writing from a much larger list: *Memoirs of an Ideal Library* by Bogdan Suceava, *A Small Diary with Memories* by Nadia Anghelescu, *The Box of Monkeys. The Journal* by Răsvan Popescu etc. Diaries, confessions, memories relived in writing, interviews, uncensored autobiographies, correspondence, autobiographical essays and talks outshine casually fiction. Recently, the Polirom Publishing House initiated a new collection entitled *Memory (including diaries, autobiographies, memories)*, which comes to meet the readers' constant interest in memoirs.

The increased interest in the undisguised inner world, the tendency to reflect the unique experience, the search for one's own individuality and, thereby, the attempt to understand the human being determined the refuge of the literary sincerity in its familiar environment represented by

autobiographies, diaries, memoirs, private correspondence, dialogues, memories, biographical essays, together with a plethora of deviant formulas such as *interviews, conversations, outstanding personalities' memories, portraits* etc. The related species which might merge with or without the author's knowledge into a confession co-exist in a paradise of mutual tolerance, approaching or moving away from the biographical literature. However, the literature of confession is considered to be everybody's and nobody's territory at the same time, unable to determine precisely how much of the writing is history and how much is literature, where a confession text ceases to be literature and where its historiographical borders begin. According to Paul Cernat, being unable to confess something to the world and being susceptible to damaging the contemporaries' image beyond the admissible limits, confessional species remain to be an uncomfortable area that are accepted with reservations and regarded as something adjacent. Needless to say, not all the literature of confession has some aesthetic value, even if it might be considered literary. It is the author himself who takes the whole responsibility being a "naive and awkward" or a "dull and methodical" narrator. "Some memoirists have the gift of synthesis being closer to historiography, others are analysts par excellence, being closer to the letter. Whether there is a conscious or an involuntary literary treatment, it does not depend on the authenticity and authority of the writing or of the experience, but on the memoirist's aesthetic temperament" [3, p. 12-13].

Biographical literature, sufficiently heterogeneous, refuses the punctual classifications and claims a conglomerate of species where the primacy is held by the *autobiography, the diary, memoirs* and the *private correspondence*, whose advocate it appears to be. If the diary, memoirs and autobiographies succeeded in leaving the field of paraliterature, in the last decade, private correspondence, receiving increased attention from the literary critics, is still deprived of this privilege. Although we have a rich epistolary literature, the synthetic approaches focusing specifically on this species are very few in number: an old study devoted to Al. Săndulescu's epistolary literature, the volume entitled *Large Correspondence* (1981) by Livius Coicîrlie, several chapters from *the Biographical Genres* (2008) by Eugen Simion, some sporadic implications from *Literature and Communication. The Author-Reader Relationship in the Romanian Prose of the 1848 Period and Post 1848 Period* by Liviu Papadima, references to the medieval epistle in the Romanian literature (*And They Wrote the Book. An Essay about the Medieval Epistle in the Romanian Literature* (2003) written by Laura Badescu and we could identify just a few more sources.

If essential key species of the literature of confession have acquired a relatively autonomous status, leaving the paraliterature by passing the test of literalness, *correspondence* has to face many "canonized" prejudices. The

blame is partially on some correspondence that has compromised the species and, partially, on the reluctance which characterizes a "drawer" species, as well as on the theorists' ambiguities that slow down the definite boundaries between *correspondence/epistolary literature; private/public correspondence, documentary/authentic/fictional correspondence/epistolary convention*; letter writers and *epistolary* etc. Many problems remain still open, such as the morality of publishing and commenting private correspondence of some people who have never intended to exhibit publicly intimate details of their life; self-censorship assessment and, respectively, the degree of sincerity of the person who brings the epistle to public attention, the fluctuating boundary between the literary and the nonliterary; the type of communication matrix which it belongs to etc.

Even though the correspondence assessment is carried out from different (philosophical, rhetorical, aesthetic, historical and especially, from literary history and criticism) perspectives, it is clear that in the history of mentalities, the epistolary literature as a source of information and as a source of aesthetic value cannot be ignored. Epistles were very widespread and enjoyed great popularity in the Latin era, functioning as a literary species. Al. Săndulescu, making a brief foray into the European epistolary tradition, stated that it was the Romans who had endowed the universal culture with the first epistolary masterpieces: "The first letters belong either to a father or a mother: Cato the Elder to his son Marcus, Cornelia to her sons Gracii" [10, p. 21-22]. Cicero, Apostle Paul, Pliny the Younger, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, St. Augustine complete the gallery; due to them "the letter becomes more and more a philosophical and religious message, preserving a direct, oral, intimate form of address" [*ibidem*, p. 23].

Literary correspondence represents an epic species belonging to the epistolary genre which involves an exchange of letters among cultural figures implying consistent documentary, biographical, historical, cultural, psychological, ethical and aesthetic values. Of all the confessional writing species, correspondence "seems to be the least literary, because it excludes the poetic function. Basically, the letter exists as a go-between. It says somebody something from someone else" relating to a *poetics of communication*.

Correspondence is an intimate, private communication governed by numerous (informative, narrative, didactic, critical, emotional, controversial) intentions, hence the uniqueness of the relationship between the sender and the recipient. Considering communication matrices that deal with the majority of address strategies, Liviu Papadima includes correspondence in the intersubjective matrix, since it is dominated by the contact function and it touches upon the themes of "inner emotions" and individual experience:

"The epistolary begins where the pedagogical issue ends: the latter aims at balancing a consensus which needs to be created at the end of the text. The former tends, on the contrary, to create an experiential communion within the text itself with a suspended "conclusion"" [8, p. 89]. This presence ready to respond would precisely make the epistolary brand. If at the time of writing it is a solitary act imitating mutual communication, in reality, it is a monologue that the recipient will have access to in some time.

Radu Toma [11, p. 31] places the discussion of the epistolary genre in the immediate extension of the memorial speech, considering one to be the transformation of the other. The epistle, belonging more to the travel prose, makes ostentatiously its way into the bosom of literature, generating its own poetics. Spontaneity, artistic creativity, the biographical and confessional character and confessing the unmediated experience discourage its exclusive affiliation to the biographical document, the latter having the following formal elements: the sender, the place, the date, the recipient, the signature and the seal as essential markers.

Several distinctions are required from the outset in order to penetrate into the intimacy of this species: first, one should not confuse the *actual correspondence with the literary one*. Trying to capture the transgression mystery of an informational letter in a literary text, Livius Ciocîrlie begins with the communication epistolary instances highlighting the reader's crucial role: "if, by any chance, the letter is taken out from the information flow that it has initially been intended for, that is, if the reader is not the same as the original addressee and it ignores the sender's identity, then a remarkable phenomenon takes place: the letter turns from a simple message into a literary text". In other words, the letter, barely detached from its natural context, can become literature generating another context by its ability to project an imaginary universe. "A certain freedom, thus, is necessary for this transformation to happen; only freedom, which is a false paradox, allows the existing content of the letter to be aesthetically measured by the reader". Lack of informational intentionality ensures its accession to the status of a literary text, although it only remains an initial premise.

Numerous distinctions were made over time within the *correspondence itself* based on the individual's need "to communicate" in order to make an effective assessment, starting from simple issues. One such issue might focus on partners involved in an exchange of letters, while the other one might be based on a division into genres which run as follows: demonstrative, judicial and deliberative genres. Another epistolografic criterion refers to the *geographical and psychological distance*. In order to delineate the epistolary material of the 17th century, Rita Marquil has turned to the physical and geographical distance criterion: "to give a general characterization of the

subject matter of epistolography, we proceeded with a classification made on the basis of the physical distance that can motivate private correspondence: the distance caused by individuals' lack of mobility who were incarcerated for legal reasons or who belonged to that social community, or by the distance created by the geographical mobility" [apud 1, p. 39-40]. The evolution of correspondence was largely determined by the process of emigration and geographical discoveries. Operating with the criterion of 'theme' found in popular messages, Daniel Roche [9, p. 214] comes to distinguish between *love letters*, letters describing *family relations* and *letters* concerning *labor dynamics*. Horace and Cicero's letters are frequently cited for their diversity of topics. The latter will propose one of the first epistolary classifications: *genus familiare et icosumand genus severum et grave*. According to the salient characteristics of the letters, they can be lyrical, pathetic, elegiac, ironic, praise, polemical, satirical, allegorical etc. Given the commercial nature of popular messages, another researcher, Franzini, distinguishes the following letter types: *private greeting letter*, *letter of recommendation*, *letter of information*, *letter of request*, *letter of complaint and letter of denunciation* [apud 9, p. 47].

In addition, within the first category, we shall make a distinction between *private* correspondence without the intention of being published during the sender's lifetime, and, in Michel Tournier's terms, *public* correspondence. The latter would include that public "book of calculations and family events" [12, p. 7] which the French writer refers to and, namely, to the *royal correspondence* which had a crucial role in the public life; in brief, the correspondence with an editorial outcome. In Romania, Constantin Brâncoveanu seemed to have the most dynamic diplomatic activity reflected in 282 letters [6, p. 153], followed by Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave) with 240 letters [2, p. 130]. At the end of the 16th century, due to a need for "a communication code that often reflected a distinct social behavior" [1, p. 35] the so-called *epistolary manuals* appeared, a sort of rhetorical handbooks, functioning as "concise prescriptions for the sender, the receiver's status and the message" [*ibidem*, p. 35]. The oldest representative epistolary for our culture entitled *A Short Method on How to Compose a Letter* was used at the Royal Academy and is kept in a codex (1666) in Venice. Then comes the frequently mentioned breviary of the 18th century entitled *On Theophil Corydaleau's Epistolary Methods*. The appearance of these epistolary manuals will actually generate conventionalism and unauthenticity which are considered enemies of correspondence.

Requirements of objective nature determined the existence of the epistolary writing since ancient times. Once shaped, the history of correspondence evolved as a specific structural mode of written communication. Consequently, each historical epoch made use, to a greater or a lesser extent, of this dialogic genre which was accredited in time. Today,

in the e-mail, messenger and chat age, private correspondence recorded on paper has become obsolete.

We shall have to divide the private correspondence into letters with *documentary value* and letters with an *increased factor of literary expression* for a fair assessment of correspondence, because, beyond the failures inherent to any species which began without a literary claim, there are enough examples that prove the artistic value of correspondence. A literary epistle does not necessarily imply that the sender should be a writer. For example, the artistic value of some correspondence of the Roman Empire is considered nowadays incontestable (Cato the Elder's correspondence with his son Marcus, Brutus' letters, Marcus Aurelius' letters, Cassiodorus' letters or Saint Augustine's letters etc.)

If the actual epistolary genre has existed since antiquity, then correspondence with a high degree of literary expression appeared especially after 1900s and it was subsequently reinforced in the 18th and 19th centuries when the epistle moved from everyday usage into the field of literature.

The Middle Ages records a real epistolary trade which is used by the Church and Universities. The epistle obtains the status of art and becomes a discipline of study in Italy, thus establishing its constituent parts: *salutatio*, *benevolentiae*, *captatio*, *narratio*, *petition* and *conclusio*. In A. Rocha's perspective, a Portuguese researcher, the background of literature is completed through the emergence of a net division between *letter writers* and the *epistolary*, the latter indicating the acquisition of the status of *ars* by the letter.

The Renaissance encourages this species of vulnerable sincerity, of the unconfessed preserving some of the renowned kings' correspondence such as: Francis I, Maria Stuart, Henry IV or of the Baroque philosopher Montaigne and of some doctrinal theological figures (as François de Sales or Calvin). Correspondence represents a wonderful opportunity of search and reflection of the unique experience addressed to a real or formal recipient in an age when the concept of self has inevitably changed. The latter's role is to contribute to revealing the Other, the world of relativity. Much of the published correspondence is under the influence of the ancient authors that *the Renaissance period appealed to*. However, reading Cicero or Titus Livius will not generate a genuine correspondence trend; on the contrary, there is a rigid belief that "one's own portrait should correspond to an active public behavior, to an ideal of life" [13, p. 17]. More examination is required to identify how authentic the public figures' correspondences of the time is and, additionally, how much interest in the authenticity of the event is needed when we refer to a purely subjective literary genre.

Classicism will provide a favorable development of correspondence through its tendency to theorize the rational imitation of literature, by means

of cultivating the balanced, simple and elegant expression, which will get a distinct profile in France. The cycle of letters addressed to a provincial written during 1656-1657 and compiled under the title *The Provincials* by Pascal is regarded to be the French writer's fundamental work. This is a harsh indictment of the Jesuit moral which legitimizes the evolution of consciousness towards self-revelation. Madame de Sévigné, Madame de Simiane, and such personalities of the revolution as Mirabeau, Mrs. Rolland, Camille Desmoulins and others belong to the same gallery of classicist letter writers. These individuals' portraits and characters come to life inside their letters through a skillful *puzzle* game, even though their correspondence still shows what is visible and accessible to all, sacrificing the interior. Without having a unitary meaning, correspondence builds its essence from a multitude of separate meanings which, once put together, may reveal a destiny.

In the Enlightenment period, the self paradigm gets "a new dimension by promoting individual peculiarities in the community" [13, p. 22]. New sensitivity encourages all the forms of self-exploration, including correspondence. It reveals the unknown features of such personalities as J-J. Rousseau, Voltaire; the latter's correspondence consists of over 18,000 letters that outrun aesthetically the master's prose. Taking into account the alternation of anecdotal, historical and everyday life, correspondence frequently acquires a special unity and coherence as in the case of Diderot's letters addressed to Sophie Volland.

Even if modernists do not give up the privileges of correspondence, it is worthy to mention that at the literary level, it will stand out as a literary species in classicism and romanticism, evolving synchronically with the development of literature. Due to specific features pertaining to the nature of communication and certainly to the author's talent, it acquires diversity becoming sometimes an independent literary product.

The power of seduction of the epistolary style was felt by the Romanian writers. The first Romanian epistles, having a strict informational character, became available to readers through their publication in volumes of readers in literature [4, p. 29] or literary language [7, p. 43]. The volumes of correspondence denote the assertion of epistolary standardized formulae used both in the Romanian Country and in Moldova or Transylvania.

As privacy is revealed to us only in the 19th century, the first literary correspondences are documented relatively late compared to European impulses. It is to be noted, however, that our artistic prose in its first stage appears and develops in the form of epistolary and travel memoirs and belongs to the 1848 period. Almost all the literary genres and species except the theater were modeled according to the correspondence pattern. This layout is adopted, with some alterations from other species, by travel memoirs (*The Transylvanian Traveller* by Ion Codru Drăgușanu; *A Trip to*

Africa by Vasile Alecsandri), by short stories (Costache Negruzzi, Ion Ghica, Vasile Alecsandri and Vasile Porojan), by the sentimental novel (*Manoil* by D. Bolintineanu) and by poetry (*Epistles* by Gr. Alexandrescu) etc.

The correspondence with a documentary value will be highlighted by Titu Maiorescu, M. Eminescu, Duiliu Zamfirescu and later on by some interwar writers such as E. Lovinescu, Hortensia Papadat-Bengescu, N. Călinescu etc. The correspondence by Al. Odobescu, M. Kogalniceanu, V. Alecsandri, I. L. Caragiale C. Dobrogeanu Gherea displays a certain literary value, as well as E. Lovinescu's novel epistolary experience with Mihail Dragomirescu and Elena Farago, or G. Călinescu's correspondence with Al. Rosetti. Eminescu and Micle correspondence constitutes an invaluable material for the literary historians who could fill out many gaps in the poet's biography, where as the critics could establish some bridges with the literary creation. The interwar period preserves the famous epistolary dialogue between Mateiu Caragiale and his friend Bonicescu, as well as Liviu Rebreanu's, Pompiliu Constantinescu's, Emil Cioran's and I. D. Sârbu's correspondence. The original *Provincial Letters* by Stephen Bănulescu, Emil Brumaru's letters to Lucian Raicu or, more recently, *A Pheasant's Letters* by Alexander Musin come next, where one can denote a careful man's observations of the relief and pressure changes in literature, besides the description of the society. The correspondence discloses the sender's background, his/her mental state and mood, emphasizing his/her autobiographical elements which include a narcissistic view.

Correspondence itself may contain extremely precious value judgments that can be detected only after a thorough research work. A new, practically an unexplored paradigm in Romania would be the one related to the explanatory notes to Security.

When we approach things in terms of literalness, not all correspondence will obviously have some literary value, as well as not every epistolary dialogue will be considered a document revealing something important. When we speak of correspondence as a species of literature of confession only those authentic epistles, valuable as human documents and doubling the aesthetic value, will stir genuine interest and will also have an increased therapeutic touch. Moreover, we refer to literary correspondence when writing itself acquires a certain shape.

Literary Conversations Journal expresses its main point concerning the *personality* concept and the concept of *writing as an event* by publishing excerpts from Alecsandri's or Negruzzi's correspondence: not all the original documents are interesting, but only those that concern the great writers' life and focus on their personalities. The "publishers" show interest in what lies behind a writer's creation due to the positivist spirit of the age. Thus, given these documents, the writer's image becomes a new interface in literature. In case of a writer's correspondence, the document has a two-fold interest: first,

for the revealed reality and secondly, for the possibility to project that writer's image. Among the numerous literary correspondences, whose value cannot be contested, there are those written by Voltaire, Goethe, Schiller, Mérimée, Balzac, where the writer's image might be summed up from what the letters say. The exchange of letters between Gide, Francis Jammé and Paul Valéry, Jacques Rivière and Alain Fournier or that between Paul Claudel and Roger Martin du Gard, Marcel Proust and Emile Straus, as well as Flaubert's letters which outline his most significant inner portrait, or Dostoevsky's letters (over 1300) which are a beneficial overture to his artistic work, prove their aesthetic value. As far as famous writers are concerned, their correspondence may compete with their great novels. Voltaire's correspondence is more frequently read nowadays than his novels, in the same way as Flaubert's correspondence is more topical than some of his fictional writings considered a genuine aesthetic literary treaty. The publication of epistolary files and documents allow us to observe, as in the case of creative journals, the transformation process of some epistles into literary works.

Correspondence remains a species which follows its unimpeded "existential" path in the great challenge launched by literature, being a bearer of destiny and less of sense whose tutelary god is time.

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