

ALEXEI MARINAT: NEVOIA CONSERVĂRII MEMORIEI GULAGULUI

ALEXEI MARINAT: THE NEED TO PRESERVE THE MEMORY OF THE GULAG

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Abstract: *The study reveals the increased interest in digitized memoirs and diaries, presenting the various forms in which the confessional literature of detention is circulated through new electronic and multimedia technologies. Special attention is paid to preserving traumatic memory in its original form, rehabilitating the collective memory of individuals under the oppressive Soviet regime, and reflecting the concepts of trans media storytelling and digital humanities. Essentially, nothing can more successfully combine the strengths of research practices in history, memorial studies, and computational linguistics than digital humanities, which make available to the general public a fundamental approach to the research and critical study of Gulag literature. From the point of view of the materialization of the narrative and the narrative flow, the perspective through which we examine the relationship between Alexei Marinat's memoirs and digital technology is that of digital humanities, which engages, in addition to the critical practice of contextualizing the text, the exercise of textualizing the context, reading the events of history and culture, as part of literary and artistic production. In this context, digital technologies, along with the increased availability of electronic storage media, have allowed the Bessarabian memorialist to digitize a consistent page from the vast history and literature of Gulag detention.*

Key words: *memoir, digital humanities, Alexei Marinat, memory, Gulag*

Currently, discussions of Gulag memorial literature seem to be proceeding in two representative directions. On the one hand, there is increased interest in digitized memoirs and diaries, in the various forms in which autobiographical confessional literature is shared through new electronic and multimedia technologies. On the other hand, there is a sustained concern regarding the *preservation* of traumatic memory in its original and indisputable form, in particular, the preservation of authentic historical documents in national archives and historical museums, such as the *Memorial* archive¹⁰³. Historian Patricia Kennedy Grimsted publishes a comprehensive study in this regard, highlighting the immensity of unstudied historical documents stored in the Russian trophy archives after the Second World War. In the corpus of valuable historical materials, there are also the records of the NKVD administration, regarding the opponents of the communist regime, the administration of labor re-education camps, the Gulag and deportations, the archive of sound recordings. The importance of these materials should not be underestimated in the rehabilitation of collective memory that would place the Gulag on the same level of record of genocide and oppressive social memory as the Nazi Holocaust. Regrettably, the Gulag remains little studied, even if new victims¹⁰⁴ and crimes of

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¹⁰³ GRIMSTED, Patricia Kennedy (1998). *Archives of Russia Seven Years After: “Purveyors of Sensation” or “Shadows cast to the Past”* [on-line]. Cold War International History Project, Washington [accesat 02.09.2019]. Disponibil: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/ACF518.pdf>

¹⁰⁴ *Victims of Communism* (2001). Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation (VOC) [cited 02.06.2020]. Available: <https://victimsofcommunism.org/>

this totalitarian system are discovered, illustrative being the digital platforms and archives dedicated to communist crimes.¹⁰⁵

Today, the media revolution has transformed all social fields, including the field of literary studies. The *discursive* environment of literature is considerably modified. Reading is given up in favor of blogging, twittering, etc. Thus, we find that there are two separate worlds, made up of the literary and media spheres that dispute their primacy, the Internet becoming more recently an analgesic for the traumas of exile, facilitating communication with the cultural space of origin and the preservation of national identity. At the same time, the Internet represents a much-needed virtual anchor, where the writer can expose his literary work in the form of an eBook, can communicate his ideas, provide reading keys for his own literary productions, establish relationships with peers, to initiate polemics etc. The Internet draws the user into a liminal, inconsistent dimension: from the real space of the home or office, the individual accesses an unreal, illusory space, to which media theories refer with the notion of *cyberspace*. Obviously, the two media for *storing* literary production can coexist constructively, turning into effective platforms for interacting with the public.

Memoir narratives about lived experiences in the Soviet past can be creatively represented through *digital technologies*, and concepts such as *trans media storytelling* have intensified the mode and style of sharing the memorial product. Media technologies do not simplify and, in any way, do not undermine the interiority of the subject, but, on the contrary, expand the area of representation of the authorial “self” outside of literary practices towards cultural and media ones. The new means of digitizing the *self* lead to the reconceptualization of notions of *identity*, *rhetoric*, and ways of presenting the individual self in relation to notions of authenticity, veracity, and factual material.

The digitization of Alexei Marinat’s memoirs and diaries offers a complex perspective of the digital representation of authorial subjectivity, generating various interpretations of this autobiographical narrative as readers navigate through different digital platforms to secure a more nuanced understanding of the memoirist’s life and his work. Through the narrative, the identity of the memorialist Alexei Marinat regains its meaning, obtaining an inner coherence. The writer’s inspiration to selectively and subjectively revise his own memories in the process of self-creation through writing enables him to construct his authorial identity. What acquires tangible meaning is the constitutive relationship, which ensures that the memoirist is not an abstract subject in himself, the pact with the reader becoming much more natural. The digital space, as an environment for writing and (re)creating the authorial self, constitutes that alternative environment that facilitates the maintenance and digital updating of Alexei Marinat’s memoirs, offering the opportunity to learn from history and analyze the forms exhibited by the dictatorship in the Romanian space, to make comparisons between similar prison experiences, impact on the alienation and suffering of the victims of the oppressive regime, to identify the double purpose of writing about oneself in communicating the authorial self to others, as well as, in communicating with oneself.

Reading memoirs in the digital space is an outcome not only of discursive practices shared online, but also of the underlying technologies that made textual transfer possible. Thus, the technological and electronic apparatus of archiving has experienced significant transformations in recent decades under the impact of the digitization of historical documents, which facilitates the preservation of collective memory, the reconstruction of the reality of the Gulag, the ordering of digitized material, etc. Well structured, in this sense, is the web page of

¹⁰⁵ *Communist Crimes* (2007). Estonian Institute of Historical Memory [cited 02.03.2018]. Available: <https://communistcrimes.org/en>

Eufrosinia Kersnovskaya's project entitled “What's a Human Being Worth?”, congruent with the title of the author's fundamental work.¹⁰⁶ The infusion of the lived biographical element is noticed in the samizdat version of the memoirs, constituting an eloquent example of the digitization of the history of the Soviet Gulag.

The digitization is motivated by the need to collect and preserve the Gulag memoirs, which often gather dust in the drawers or individual archives of the authors' heirs, which is not the case of Alexei Marinat's memoirs, which are carefully preserved and digitized by the author's son - Andrei Marinat, who claims that “regardless of whether we consider it necessary or not to digitize the memorial writings about the Soviet Gulag, it is our duty to revive the past and the historical truth!”, says the author's son ([marinat andrei \(bessmertnybarak.ru\)](http://marinat.andrei(bessmertnybarak.ru))). The digitization of the documentary material, recorded by Alexei Marinat, does not necessarily imply unlimited and unrestricted direct access to the databases, their duplication and copying by the public is often limited. In fact, the electronic format of any memorialistic material generates a series of challenges, such as the rapid change of information technologies, the fragility of data storage media, consequently, the fragility of the data itself, duplication of materials on servers or web pages. Under these conditions, the digitization of the fragments of the diary of the Bessarabian memorialist¹⁰⁷ implies that the data periodically migrate to updated digital media, corresponding to the new format or the requirements of new digital applications.

The culture of memoir writing has been reanimated with the emergence of new digital forms that are responsible for the visibility of content, the reconfiguration of the reader's relationship with the memoir text, and the appreciation of the paratextual contributions that any reader is willing to make. Using fiction as a form of multi-level projection, Alexei Marinat's autobiographical narrative reveals the drama and atmosphere of a non-fictional document, in which the testimonies of a survivor of the regime “where human rights are ignored at every street corner [...] where laws are violated at every step”.¹⁰⁸ Of particular relevance is the recording of the life histories of the memoir's characters, the creation of their narrative identities, as well as that of the narrator. The boundary between collective and individual memory is, in fact, mitigated when resorting to the chronicling of the history of the Gulag, to the description of historical figures, which have a significant influence on the documented material, such as, for example, the evocation of the famous singer Lidia Ruslanova¹⁰⁹, the information being digitized in the interview with Alexei Marinat.¹¹⁰ Therefore, the ample descriptive fragments in the memoir, supplemented with elements of self-reflection, are defining in the conception of an individual and relational self, such discourses being historically and politically grounded. The interview “Remembering Aleksei Marinat: The Solzhenitsyn of Bessarabia” makes possible, while respecting the value proportions, the likeness of Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's archipelago,

¹⁰⁶ Eufrosinia Kersnovskaya. *What's a Human Being Worth?* (2003) [cited 02.03.2018]. Available: <https://www.gulag.su/project/index.php?eng=1&page=0>

¹⁰⁷ ВОЛЧЕК, Дмитрий. Культурный дневник: судьба писателя Алексея Марината [on-line] [cited 11.08.2020]. Available: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/30375595.html?fbclid=IwAR3TK2xH15m5Ay6GPeUMzTt73oSl3KzmJIpEbZvop1RmHuW74nZ5rr0sb3c>

¹⁰⁸ MARINAT, Alexei (2004). *Călătorii în jurul omului*. Chișinău: Prut Internațional, 11. ISBN 9975-69-603-1.

¹⁰⁹ MARINAT, Alexei (2004), Op.cit., 101. ISBN 9975-69-603-1.

¹¹⁰ CREȚU, Eugenia (2019). *După cortină, în gulag. Interviu cu Andrei Marinat* [on-line]. *Radio Europa Liberă* [cited 10.05.2020]. Available: <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/dup%C4%83-cortin%C4%83-%C3%AE-n-gulag-pur-%C5%9Fi-simplu/30317332.html>.

which describes the slave caravans and the horror conditions in the Gulag¹¹¹ with the diary of Alexei Marinat, which reveals a series of individual memoirs, derived from hundreds of interviews in the Gulag camps: Jora Krasikov, Iakov Goldman, Alexandrina Kavalerova, etc. “Iakov Goldman reads me lessons from ancient literature in the evening. I continued to write the Nature’s Dairy, in which I wrote down the biographies of the most interesting people: there were some of them who made the revolution in Russia and were in the camps since 1937; others fought the revolution”¹¹², Alexei Marinat will later write in his memoirs. The digitization of this reclusion diary will later become the key to anti-Stalinist survival, a document of great social and cultural impact that provides the opportunity for overall re-evaluations of the realities of an oppressive era, *derailed* from a natural course of the autochthonous national historical development.

The digitization of the official documents of conviction and incarceration launches a call for the chronological marking of the life of the political prisoner Alexei Marinat, for the reconstruction of the history of communist *re-education*. *Photographing* the memorial literature from the concentration space reconfigured the interpretation of the Gulag from the Bessarabian space: on the one hand, it represents a plausible historical source, having a special moral particularity, on the other hand, subject to subjectivity, the photographic representation manages to capture the aspects of the indoctrinated communist inferno. The complete recovery of these pages written in consternation and maximum tension reflects the search for a new identity, an attempt to authentically record the history.

Intended for terror and human exploitation, the Gulag was clearly also designed to “reeducate” the prisoners, *enemies* of the communist Soviet regime, thus leading to the dehumanization of the hostages in the eyes of the guards and bureaucrats of the labor camps: “The biological destruction of the adversary does not longer satisfy, no longer suits or perhaps no longer pays. Breaking down the victim’s personality is more tempting and useful. The killing of human values, the reduction to a level of total animalization, a definitive «dehumanization». The transformation of man into a docile, malleable paste”¹¹³. In fact, this proved to be an ideological combination of maximum impact. Alexei Marinat’s diary describes this evolution of the communist concentration system, established to suppress the humanity and individuality of the prisoners and the overwhelming need to fulfill the infernal ideological project. “The shots were heard. I fell... [...] Are they going to shoot me a second time?... No, no order is given. They simply ran towards me and started beating me, all seven soldiers, with their boots on my head, under my ribs, jumping on my back... then I lost consciousness”¹¹⁴ [70, p. 81], the writer confesses.

Alexei Marinat projects his own interpretations of the coordinates of communist ideology and reevaluates the realities of power structures. His confessional prose revives the image of the Soviet Gulag, revealing the liberation of the captive thought of a subject who did not accept the regimentation: “I am called to the head of the camp, to his office in the area. The head of the camp is not an Interior professional - he is a naval officer... He showed me to take the sit... He

¹¹¹ POGOR, Eugenia, MASTRINI, John (2019). Remembering Aleksei Marinat: The Solzhenitsyn of Bessarabia [on-line]. In: *Radio Free Europe*, 21 July [cited 27.06.2020]. Available: <https://www.rferl.org/a/30065241.html>. 02:46.

¹¹² MARINAT, Alexei (2004), Op. cit., p. 78.

¹¹³ BACU, Dumitru. *Pitești. Centru de reeducare studențească*. București: Atlantida, 1991, p.30. ISBN 973-95429-0-5.

¹¹⁴ MARINAT, Alexei (2004). *Călătorii în jurul omului*. Chișinău: Prut Internațional, 2004, p.81. ISBN 9975-69-603-1.

has some information about me. They will put me in jail for writing something in some notebooks, which is strictly forbidden. They're going to send me to a disciplinary colony!”¹¹⁵ [70, p. 90]. Essential for the Gulag inmate is to have “to whom to say a word of pain, of encouragement”¹¹⁶, a fact also recorded in the digitized sequence of the diary.¹¹⁷ This documentary material also contains sequences from the documentary film “Political Detainee R-886”, screened by Moldova Film in 1989. In the interview with the writer’s son, we discover the great desire to fully digitize Alexei Marinat’s diary, relevant for individual and collective memory. In this sense, Andrei Marinat collaborates with the “Прожито”¹¹⁸ Society, which is not only a platform for publishing texts from the detention diaries of the victims of communism, but also constitutes a modern digital project that aims to transform personal memories into digital data, storing nearly half a million journal entries on this project’s website. Through that project, the writer’s son intends to decrypt and publish Alexei Marinat’s memoirs in full, including in Russian¹¹⁹. Entire pages of the diary and memorial are also published on the page of the Bessarabian Famine Virtual Museum.¹²⁰

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¹¹⁵ MARINAT, Alexei, Op.cit., p. 90.

¹¹⁶ MARINAT, Alexei, Op.cit., p. 77.

¹¹⁷ POGOR, Eugenia (2018). He was called „Solzhenitsyn of Bessarabia”. Interview with Andrei Marinat [on-line]. *Radio Free Europe*, 03 May [cited 28.08.2020]. Available: <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/i-s-a-spus-soljeni%C5%A3%C3%AEn-al-basarabiei-alexei-marinat-pur-si-simplu/29205733.html>.

¹¹⁸ Rus. *Lived out*

¹¹⁹ ВОЛЧЕК, Дмитрий (2020). *Культурный дневник: судьба писателя Алексея Марината* [on-line] [cited 11.08.2020]. Available: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/30375595.html?fbclid=IwAR3TK2xH15m5Ay6GPeUMzTt73oSl3KzmJIpEbZvop1RmHuW74nZ5rr0sb3c>.

¹²⁰ *Chișinău – Alexei Marinat. Muzeul virtual al foametei din Basarabia* (2020) [on-line] [cited 27.06.2020]. Available: <https://muzeulfoametei.ro/chisinau/chisinau-alexei-marinat/>

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