"JURNALUL FERICIRII" – THE PHENOMENON OF REFLEXIVITY

Lavinia-Ileana GEAMBEI
University of Piteşti

Abstract: *The present paper aims to describe the phenomenon of reflexivity related to declarative activity, in Nicolae Steinhardt's "Jurnalul fericirii" (Journal of happiness). Choosing a random distribution of the autobiographical material, for flashcard and fragment technique, to the detriment of the chronological arrangement, the Journal of happiness follows in the first place, the adventure of consciousness during political detention (1960-1964), although the narrative contains both earlier and subsequent imprisonment sequences. Thus, the author's main objective is to achieve his own portrait, the self is both object of description and describing subject. Being a specially featured literature, it is necessary to see how it acts on the author, how the declarative act turns its enunciator.*

Key words: *reflexivity, adventure, journal.*

After 1989, there is increasing interest shown by both writers and readers in the literature of memoirs in general, journals, collections of documents in particular, showing the great and excruciating thirst for truth in Romania. Further evidence in this respect is the frantic reading of newspapers in the early post-communist years, as stressed by Alex Ştefănescu in *Istoria literaturii române contemporane (The contemporary history of Romanian literature)*. This has also fostered the emergence of detention prose of memoirs, because after forty-five years of hiding the truth, the memoirs of former political prisoners, writers or non-writers, describe the hell created by the Communist authorities not only for extermination of political opponents, but also valuable people in all areas.

Therefore, in the landscape of Romanian literature only after 1990, along with the absence of censorship, they speak openly about the **literature of communist prisons**, the existence of this chapter representing one of the most significant aspects of our contemporary literature and a great experience throughout the history of Romanian literary creation. This literature includes poetry and detention prose of memoirs. The two branches, although from the same experience, differ not only in genus and species, but also pragmatically, as intentionality, time of enunciation and intensity of feelings. The detention prose of memoirs, which occupies an area larger than poetry, was written later, often with a fatal „detachment", by those who survived the ordeal of communist prison camps and had the power to write about cruel, horrifying experiences. Exception to this retrospective prose is Onisifor Ghibu's record drawn in the midst of persecution, at the place of atonement, when he experienced the Caracal camp in 1945, but when the Romanian gulag was not thought and organized thoroughly, being considered more of a Pre-Gulag.

Nicolae Steinhardt's *Jurnalul fericirii (Journal of Happiness)* is a book with a special destiny, first appeared at Dacia Publishing House, Cluj, 1991, and characterized by Dan Chelaru as " .. o capodoperă. O carte a cărților Estului. O carte contemporană cu

BDD-A5827 © 2010 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:55:15 UTC)

Dumnezeu "[1] (CHELARU, 2008: 28). It is part of a series of books banned during the communist regime, because it contained embarrassing revelations about a period of terror, that the power would have wanted erased from the collective memory. It is a work evoking the author's political detention, imprisoned between 1960 and 1964 for the mistake of joining a group of intellectuals made up of C. Noica, D. Pillat, Al. Paleologu, S. Mezincescu, M. Rădulescu, where they read their manuscripts and Eliade and Cioran's books published in the West which were considered propaganda hostile to communist regime, and also periods before and after imprisonment. Completed in early 1972, *Jurnalul fericirii* (*Journal of Happiness)*, of about 570 pages, was confiscated by Security. Under the circumstances, the author drafted a second version, of about 760 pages. There is a third shortened variant, which was illegally removed from the country and broadcast on radio *Europa Liberă* in 1988 and 1989 during the *Book on wave* transmission. Due to interventions of Writers Union management, Security released the first version of the writer in 1975, provided that it was no longer spread. After some time, in the '80s, following a denunciation indicating that Nicolae Steinhardt held ("oasis of peace" found with the help of Constantin Noica and Iordan Chimet) autographed books of his emigration friends, Eliade, Cioran, Ionesco at Rohia Monastery, the monk was summoned and threatened by Security. The author saw his manuscripts endangered and decided to hide them. His accomplice was Virgil Ciomoş at the University of Cluj, who would then be assigned the role of testamentary legatee. Ciomoş Virgil and Virgil Bulat chose the first version of the publication and confessed that, "se distingea printr-un plus de dinamism, concizie, fluență, expresivitate"[2] (BULAT, 2008: 11).

Although included in political detention prose of memoirs under communism, *Jurnalul fericirii (Journal of happiness)* differentiates from other works not only through its troubled biography (it has also been the case of *Monarhia de drept dialectic* - The *Monarchy of Dialectical Right* signed Andrei Şerbulescu in 1991, at first publication, which is actually the second version, the first being confiscated by Security, then drawn unevenly in a second variant; the first variant, recovered by Humanitas, was published under the title *Actor în procesul Pătrăşcanu - Actor in Patrascanu's trial*, in 1997, being signed this time under the real name of the author, Herbert (Belu) Zilber), but by the fact that it is more than that, it brings a new vision, as intentionality. First, it is among the very few political detention memoirs written during Communism. The others were developed only after the regime fall, in terms of freedom of expression, without the author's fear of being arrested on such grounds.

Most detention texts of memoirs confess their intentionality. Most authors address to posterity, to awaken their conscience, to make them know the truth, to draw a warning, and therefore out of moral, redeeming and depositional duty. However, this could be for many just an illusion or, anyway, be related to the second plan so that the text should claim its saving and remedial function and be a painful way to recover the lost years. The therapeutic function is inherent to these writings, because, writing and testifying help former political prisoners to heal themselves. Therefore, these authors admit that they wrote for others first, but actually they needed to remember, while N. Steinhardt confesses that he wrote the *Journal* for himself, but we always feel that he had us in his mind, the work thus gaining a strong teaching character.

---

[1] "…a masterpiece. A book of Eastern books. A God contemporary book".
[2] "it distinguishes by dynamism, conciseness, fluency, expressiveness".

BDD-A5827 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:55:15 UTC)

In this respect, we appeal to a statement made by N. Steinhardt to Security in December 14, 1972. This statement may fall into the category of texts related to the presentation of the work, along with prefaces, key words, preambles of various types, where that, "negotiation part of the text" appears as called in the literary text pragmatics. Here, N. Steinhardt states and confesses: "Ca referire la acest manuscris arăt că reprezintă un jurnal intim, redactat de mine la domiciliul meu în cursul anilor 1970-1971, în care am încercat să redau în mod detaliat conversiunea mea religioasă, adică trecerea mea de la iudaism la creştinism. Am simţit nevoia de a-mi lămuri mie însumi acest proces sufletesc deosebit de însemnat pentru mine. Manuscrisul cuprinde referiri la primele mele chemări înspre religia creştină, precum şi relatarea modului în care s-a produs în mod concret conversiunea. Deoarece aceasta a fost legată de anii pe care i-am petrecut în închisoare, *Jurnalul* cuprinde şi amintiri şi referiri la această perioadă de 5 ani.

Am urmărit prin acest jurnal să-mi clarific mie însumi un proces sufletesc complex. […] Motivul esenţial care m-a determinat a scrie şi sistematiza acest *Jurnal* a fost necesitatea de a-mi lămuri mie însumi un proces sufletesc destul de deosebit."[1] (*apud* ARDELEANU, 2008: 11).

Choosing a random distribution of the autobiographical material, for the flashcard and fragment technique, to the detriment of chronological arrangement, the *Journal of happiness* first follows **the adventure of consciousness**, it is a work of existential balance, as Virgil Bulat says (BULAT, *op. cit.*: 13), approaching to *Luntrea lui Caron (Caron's Boat)*, Lucian Blaga's autobiographical work, which outlines the becoming and crystallization of consciousness in all its components: theological, moral, civic, political, aesthetic, etc. The author aims to achieve his own portrait, the self is the object of description and describing subject and the declarative act turns its enunciator. Steinhardt stated, "De ce suferim şi de ce e nedreptate? Printre altele, şi pentru că viaţa e o aventură, este Aventura.

Chesterton: Aventură nu-i să te urci pe un yacht supra-elegant şi să faci înconjurul lumii; aventură (şi romantism) este să-şi rodeşti viaţa care *ţi-a picat* acolo unde te-ai născut din întâmplare şi-n condiţiile *date.* Asta e tot ce poate fi mai legat de primejdii, de neprevăzut şi de Mister"[2]. The author draws his own destiny while using this impersonal "you". Detention (especially for those against communism) as a whole and in its every moment is a test of both meaning of traps that „the quest" knights of medieval cycles are subject to, and in the religious sense of temptation. The test

---

[1] "In reference to this manuscript I show that it is a diary written by me at my home during the years 1970-1971, when I tried to thoroughly reproduce my religious conversion, my transition from Judaism to Christianity. I felt the need to explain this particularly important spiritual process for me. The manuscript contains references to my first calling to Christianity and how my conversion actually occurred. Since it was related to the years I spent in jail, the *Journal* also inlcudes memories and references to this period of five years.
I followed through this journal to clarify my soul complex process. [...] The main reason which made me write and organize this journal was the need to explain myself a very special spiritual process".

[2] "Why do we suffer and why is there injustice? Among other things, because life is an adventure, it is the Adventure.
Chesterton: Adventure is not to get on a super-stylish yacht and go around the world; adventure (and romance) is to make your life fruitful where you were born by chance and in the given circumstances. That is all that can be linked to dangers, unpredictability and Mystery".

BDD-A5827 © 2010 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:55:15 UTC)

involves risk, so its overcoming is an adventure and the *Journal of happiness* can be read without any restraint, as a spiritual adventure novel. The writing itself is a risk, especially if we go back to the genesis of this book and the tortuous route that it crossed afterwards. Risk overcoming has also meant an adventure, an adventure of writing that the author assumes with reconciliation. Unfortunately, a great suffering has caused Nicolae Steinhardt's death, before the Journal saw the printing light, but in the hope, even belief, that this would not happen too late. So it was, because two years after his death, the book was published for the first time, then reprinted and translated into several languages, which is appreciating.

As regards the teaching character, specific to all detention texts of memoirs, as shown by Mihai Rădulescu in the preface to *Istoria literaturii române de detenție (The History of Romanian detention literature)*, volume I, Steinhardt, we notice that it is stronger for Steinhardt, because the author is both scholar and teacher. The book reveals a double perspective of the narrative, one of the already narrated events, and one of the present narrative. Therefore, we speak about the training, self-taught "earlier self", and the "present self" which looks back, occurring mainly in the "debates" on religious and moral themes, a sort of preach made by the one who will become Nicolae Delarohia. We note in particular the use of modern teaching and learning "methods", as problematization, discovery, etc.

Although called a *Journal*, the book is not a journal, but a prose of memoirs. The author himself states at the forefront of the book, "Creion şi hârtie nici gând să fi avut la închisoare. Ar fi aşadar nesincer să încerc a susține că <<jurnalul>> acesta a fost ținut cronologic; e scris *après coup,* în temeiul unor amintiri proaspete şi vii"[1]. We understand that the author assumes the truth from the beginning. Dominique Maingueneau, in his *Pragmatică pentru discursul literar (Pragmatics of literary discourse),* approaches the issue of "being honest" in literature: "revendicarea sincerității poate părea surprinzătoare, pentru că a pretinde că eşti sincer este un principiu inerent oricărei enunțări"[2] (MAINGUENEAU, 2007: 167). But we must understand sincerity claim especially in such texts. The entire political detention prose of memoirs under communism brings together the false sincerity of history, security, repression apparatus, and political prisoners' true sincerity. The author is obliged to establish an individual contract with the reader: one should tell the truth and nothing but the truth.

Being inlcuded in the class of memoirs, the *Journal of happiness* is characterized by an inclusive vision, a remembrance focusing less on the pursuit of facts and more on the development and reconstruction of an inner track; the construction methods are specific to analytical psychological prose, designed to restore, through free association, the disorderly and spontaneous stream of consciousness. The journal elements present in the book are accurate dating of all these memories and stories about people especially in the hell of various prisons. The prevalent use of the present and not the past is also related to the journal convention.

Nicolae Steinhardt feels the need for justification specified in pragmatics. In this respect, Dominique Maingueneau in the above-mentioned work shows that

---

[1] "I had no pen and paper in jail. It is therefore disingenuous to try to argue that <<journal>> it was kept chronologically; it is written *après coup*, under fresh and vivid memories".

[2] "claiming sincerity may seem surprising, because claiming to be honest is a principle inherent to any statement".

BDD-A5827 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:55:15 UTC)

"Simplul fapt de a lua cuvântul (căci propunerea unei opere publicului nu înseamnă oare o luare de cuvânt la superlativ?) constituie o incursiune teritorială specifică ce impune acțiuni reparatorii. Toate formele de *captatio benevolentiae* îndrăgite de retorică nu sunt decât o ilustrare a acestei exigențe"[1] (MAINGUENEAU, *op. cit.*: 167). One of the strategies that authors of detention texts of memoirs often use is the formula of self-depreciation. In this sense, Steinhardt says: "…cred că îmi este permis a-l prezenta pe sărite, aşa cum, de data aceasta în mod real, mi s-au perindat imaginile, aducerile-aminte, cugetele în acel puhoi de impresii căruia ne place a-i da numele de conştiinţă. Efectul, desigur, bate înspre artificial; e un risc pe care trebuie să-l accept"[2]. And this way, the reader must accept it as well.

The artificial risk assumed by the author of memoirs, which is determined not only by construction but also by the use of the present, as already shown, receives the text as a novel in the first person. Instead of the fictional material, the author appeals to a strictly true one, provided by his memory.

The basic route of the already mentioned adventure lies between two essential moments: the interview confrontation with his girlfriend and the mistery of baptism in prison, both dated 1960.

The first is the one that opens, somehow abruptly, the *Journal of Happiness*, and though it contains the shortest length between the two responses of the interrogation, it takes place over six pages. It is a real radiography of the interviewee's feelings, his inner torment, and split personality, expressed by the impersonal „you". Recognizing the trivial detail of breaking a glass at a party, temptation occurs in successive waves, "Ai vrea tu să te refugiezi în frică, în brumă, în coşmar…ai vrea…Ar fi uşor"[3]. Recognition of the broken glass would have meant recognition of *blame* which did not exist in reality, but was caused by the entire repression apparatus, it would have probably meant accepting collaboration. This passage may be interpreted as the one explaining the birth of writing. This involves anxiety, tension, even drudgery, but also victory, the victory of spirit.

The interviewee triumphs in his attempt, and the solution also means a "miracle" on which Steihardt insists in the brief commentary concluding the key sequence of the *Journal of Happiness.* He who was put to a terrible test at these times (and not only) finds the solution in identifying with the Romanian, the Romanian peasant who was also subject to the history attempts. Solution means the courage to fight, to be united with the others, and to assume the risk of being imprisoned, because you are not accomplice, you do not denounce, you refuse to remember; it is the unexpected and strange solution as the author describes, "minciuna. Minciuna binecuvântată, şoptită de Hristos"[4]. Choosing Christ, "El e, nu m-a uitat […] voi fi al Lui"[5], N. Steihardt, "chose himself, was designed" in accordance with the country he was born in, the people for whom he felt a mysterious attraction since childhood: "Ce

---

[1] "the mere fact of speaking (a work proposal for public attention does not mean speaking at its best?) is a specific territorial incursion requiring remedial action. All forms of rhetoric *captatio benevolentiae* are an illustration of this requirement".

[2] "... I think I am allowed to describe how images, remembrances, flood of impressions called consiousness occurred to me. The effect, of course, is somehow artificial, it is a risk I must accept".

[3] "You wish you would flee in fear, in rime and nightmare ... you wish ... it would be easy" .

[4] "lying. Blessed lie, whispered by Christ".

[5] "It is Him and did not forget me [...] I will be His".

BDD-A5827 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:55:15 UTC)

curios lucru: văd că, dacă trebuie să apuc pe calea creştinismului, trebuie să mint. Cum a mințit poporul acesta (în mijlocul căruia m-am născut şi spre care mă simt mereu atras) – şi bine a făcut – când a fost nevoit să se plece fesului, neamțului, moscovitului"[1]. Throughout the book, memories of call signs, mysterious predictions, interact with hell calling. In such moments of miracle, as Steinhardt states, the indefinite calling spell of those distant years is illuminated. It is more illuminated at the moment of writing this "fire book".

We notice the paradox of the previous situation. Moreover, N. Steinhardt commonly uses the paradox, which gives a unique charm to the *Journal of Happiness*, because he considered it "sigurul tărâm unde poate miji adevărul: al contradicției şi paradoxului"[2]. Christianity itself is defined as a religion of paradox, therefore, he uses the motto including the greatest paradox which he then reveals in true teaching pages. The motto is from *Marcu 9, 24:* "Cred, Doamne! Ajută necredinței mele! (Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief)".

The title itself contains a paradox by its theme*, happiness*. The paradox of the title including memories from the prison hell is linked to the specific mystical experience intended for the more or less restricted text which sends to *Trei soluții (Three solutions)*, actually proved to be four.

Steinhardt's *political testament* is a sample of very well built argumentative text. In the beginning, Steinhardt clearly shows that, „faith is the mystical solution to escape from a prison world - [...] – then he develops three "worldly" solutions: Soljenițîn's voluntary, anticipated, caused death; Zinoviev's carelessness and daring, Churchill and Bukovsky's bravery accompanied by a wild joy, saying in *Conclusion*: "Liberi sunteți să alegeți. (You are free to choose)".

This is followed by the adversative conjunction, "but", with very important argumentative role. Following assumption, we know and admit the "recipient's" protests, "Veți protesta, poate, considerând că soluțiile subînțeleg o formă de viață echivalentă cu moartea, ori mai rea ca moartea, ori implicând riscul morții fizice în orice clipă. Asta aşa este"[3]. Then he explains that totalitarianism itself is the manifestation of attraction to death, and, "secretul celor ce nu se pot încadra în hăul totalitar e simplu: ei iubesc viața, nu moartea the secret of those who do not fall into the totalitarian abyss is simple: they love life, not death"[4]. And to show that, in fact, not the three solutions are to be followed, but the one mentioned first, Steinhardt concluded with a question to which he also answered: Who defeated death by himself? The one who stepped over death". Therefore, the path of faith was found by Steinhardt and, was equally given to him " there", in the cell of Security.

The *Journal of Happiness* obviously indicates the path of conversion. Therefore, another milestone mentioned earlier is that of baptism, which occurs after a while because of the circumstances, only after overcoming the interrogation stage. In

---

[1] "What a curious thing: I see that if I follow Christianity I should lie. The same way these people (among whom I was born and always feel attracted to) – and they did well – lied when they were forced to obey the Turkish, the German, the Muscovite".

[2] "the only realm where truth could be revealed: contradiction and paradox".

[3] "You will probably protest, considering that solutions imply a form of life equivalent to death, or worse than death, or involving physical death risk at any time. That is so".

[4] "the secret of those who do not fall into the totalitarian abyss is simple: they love life, not death".

BDD-A5827 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:55:15 UTC)

prison, N. Steinhardt found a monk priest, Father Mina and baptism was cautiously committed on March 15, 1960, ”under the seal of ecumenism”. The state of bliss felt by the newly baptized opposed not only to sordid surroundings, to the unbearable misery of the cell, but also to the ”greasy and repulsive red cup” that Father Mina made use of to commit the mystery of baptism while pouring the ”infested water carried by him and another prisoner”. However, the Holy Mistery immediately showed its effect, ",Asupra mea se zoresc clipă de clipă tot mai dese asalturi ale fericirii. […] Botezul e o descoperire. (More and more moments of happiness overwhelm me [...] Baptism is a revelation)”.

Prison is itself an expression of the paradox, a place of suffering and joy, ”a faded picture of hell”, and also a place of fulfillment as ”school of truth”. The self becoming after years of imprisonment is captured in the memoir dated 3 August 1964, Cluj, the liberation day, an observation made with modesty, but with evidence of deep self-knowledge, included in the writing act which involves remembrance and self-return. Here is the existential balance: “Asta-i tot ce am la îndemână, câteva citate (din oameni cumsecade) şi un sentiment – atât de firav, de nesistematic, de fragil. Şi totuşi acest vag, mărunt şi smerit capital – în urma anilor de închisoare e singura mea agoniseală, o bocceluță – îmi este de ajuns pentru a-mi da o temeinică siguranță şi a-mi transmite nedezmințita convingere că știu ce trebuie şi ce nu trebuie să fac”[1].

Nicolae Steinhardt’s *Journal of Happiness* is the book of a victory, the human being’s victory which requires sense in a demonized and absurd world. The book itself, with its destiny, is a victory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ardeleanu, George, „Un dosar al memoriei arestate – *Jurnalul fericirii* în arhivele Securității”, în volumul Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii,* Iaşi, Editura Polirom, 2008.
Bulat, Virgil, *Notă asupra ediției*, în volumul Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii*, ediția citată.
Chelaru, Dan, apud Virgil Bulat, *Lecția Jurnalului fericirii,* în volumul Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul fericirii*, ediția citată.
Maingueneau, Dominique, *Pragmatică pentru discursul literar.,* trad. Raluca-Nicoleta Balațchi, Iaşi, Institutul European, 2007.
Rădulescu, Mihai, *Istoria literaturii române de detenție,* I, Bucureşti, Editura Ramida, 1998.

[1] ”A few quotations (of decent people) and a frail, desultory feeling, that's all I have at hand. Yet this vague, small and humble capital - my bundle is my fortune after years of imprisonment - is enough to offer me complete safety and steadfat belief that I know what I should and should not do”.

BDD-A5827 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:55:15 UTC)