

Memory and Identity

Several Jewish Experiences

MARIA GHITTA **from the End of the War (1944–1945)**

*“A man who walks, day
after day, hour after hour,
with the thought of death
by his side, in himself.”
(Mihail Sebastian)*

Maria Ghitta

Researcher at the Center for Transylvanian Studies, co-editor of the book **Dilemele conviețuirii: Evrei și neevrei în Europa Central-Răsăriteană** (The dilemmas of cohabitation: Jews and gentiles in Central and Eastern Europe) (2006).

IN A recently published volume of studies, ten Italian historians have individually attempted to show how various types of historical sources (epigraphic, iconographic, electronic, etc.) can be used in order to answer the questions: “How is history studied? How is history told?” The coordinator of the volume is the author of the chapter on “diaristic”¹ sources; in this case, the source is none other than Anne Frank’s *Diary*, which returned into the public attention at the middle of 2009. On 12 June that year, its author would have turned 80. Two days before that anniversary, the Holocaust Memorial in Washington received a rather unusual visit: an elderly gentleman (aged 89) entered the museum and started shooting. Subsequent research showed that Von Brunn, the author of the murder (he killed one of the guards) was a Holocaust denier and had a particular grudge against Anne Frank’s *Diary*, which he categorized as “fake,” as a fabrication. The document had been contested before, several philologists and historians having pointed out its various “layers,” but the episode from Washington exceeded the boundaries of any sort of debate. Could the mean-

ing of this serious and unfortunate happening have resided precisely in the importance of consecrating “diaristic” sources, memoirs,² in general, in the study and rendition of the history of the Holocaust or of any other important historical moment? Anne Frank’s journal has been described as the symbolic book of the Shoah, but also as the expression of a living, vivacious being, of a girl who was both normal and exceptional. This might be the second question that memoirs make us reflect upon: to what extent can personal life and experience communicate or convey a collective drama, a tragedy?

It is significant to note, in this context, the example of Mihail Sebastian’s *Journal*, published in Romania in the mid-1990s. Beyond the numerous discussions it generated, the document probably remains the most effective communicator of the Jews’ situation at and around the time of war, managing what history books and studies dedicated to the subject have accomplished to a lesser extent: entrance into the public consciousness.³

The questions “why” are such writings useful for studying the Holocaust and “what is their purpose” have been answered, among others, by A. Wieviorka, R. Hilberg and S. Friedländer.⁴ Memoirs or diaries cannot replace historical reconstruction proper and cannot supplant other types of sources, which are considered to be more objective; however, they manage, in many cases, to bring back a sense of humanity as it existed in the past. Most of the times, they arouse controversy and emotion, but this does not prevent researchers from consulting other sources or from sieving through the history, biography and autobiography contained therein. The transition from journals to memoirs requires additional precautions regarding “objectivity.”⁵

As far as we are concerned, we do not aim to retrieve “history” based on the accounts related in the memoirs selected here, but to see exactly how history intersects with biography and the important role it plays in autobiography. “It seems that I cannot remember my life outside history,”⁶ Ion Ianoși noted in his own memoir. It is very likely that all those who embark on similar undertakings may find their experience reflected in the statement above.

We shall therefore try to listen to and examine what the diary and memoirs of three Jewish men reveal about their own situation and that of their communities in the periods that preceded and followed the turning point of 23 August 1944, the date when Romania left Germany’s camp and joined the Allied Forces. How do these three characters perceive or remember the events from the summer–autumn of that year and what significance do they have in their own biography and in that of their community? They were all in Bucharest at that time, having different ages, different social positions, and different life experiences. What they had in common were the trials of the war years, of the anti-Semitic legislation and measures, as well as a reconsideration of their Jewish

identity under the harshest of constraints. A possible reversal of the situation could only be desired and expected. Once produced, however, the extent and the manner of this upheaval was bound to affect their prospects and their lives, and this is what we intend to find out.

In 1944, Arnold Schwefelberg was 48. He was a respected family head, a lawyer by training (a profession he could not practice, of course, at that time) and one of the important leaders of the Jewish community in Romania, being among the few members of the secret Jewish Council that operated “after the dissolution of the Federation of the Jewish Communities and the establishment of the Jewish Center in Romania as a governmental body, which instead of assisting the Jews went against them” (his words). This was a secret council of only five people, including the secular and the religious leaders of the Jews in Romania. Schwefelberg belonged thus to the innermost circle of the Community. He had also been appointed head of the Relief Commission established after the Iron Guard rebellion, a commission that extended and expanded its activity. Schwefelberg was among the approximately 100 wartime Jewish “hostages” and among the Jews who had become naturalized during military service on the battlefield of World War I.⁷ Leon Volovici, the editor of his memoirs, presents him as a “modern intellectual, with a solid education acquired in Romania and in the West, emancipated and largely detached from the Jewish tradition, which, however, he knew thoroughly . . . , with Zionist sympathies that were sentimental rather than programmatic and the adept of a moderate form of Jewish militantism”: “When he wrote his memoirs, in the 1960s, with an epilogue in 1973, Schwefelberg was a man overwhelmed by melancholy and the regret of not having had the courage of emigrating to Israel.”⁸ In his memoirs, he testified at one point that he had not taken such a step because he had thought especially of his children, for emigration “would have damaged” them; his children were actually well integrated into post-war Romanian society. One of Schwefelberg’s daughters, the poet Veronica Porumbacu, had been a young underground communist during the war.

Significantly, Schwefelberg calls his notations an “autobiography” and gives them a title (under which they were published: *The Life of a Jewish Intellectual in Romania*), even though he considers that “of course these pages are not to be made public.” Here he expresses his motivation and the envisaged purpose of his “memories”:

As I begin this autobiography, I cannot forebear wondering, above all, what is the purpose of what I start writing about. The question is entirely justified because, of course, these pages are not to be made public and I ask myself whether they will ever be read even by my children and by their children. And yet,

more than ever before, I feel the need to confess in this way, to unburden myself of the reflections that have accrued in me over the years as a result of experience, whose consequences are upon me, and I am afraid lest those who come after me should feel them even more. It is, for me, a kind of duty of conscience to set in writing the lessons that might be learned from my experience (which is not personal, in the sense of exceptional, but on the contrary, typical, with only a few details, in fact, that are personal). I thrive on the illusion—childish, of course—that these lessons could be of use to someone or, at least, that they might represent a document about the sad history of my generation. . . . I therefore intend to dwell in my autobiographical notes on those points in my life which—hypothetically speaking—might be of general interest because they carry the reflection, in an individual case, of several more or less general destinies . . . My notes have then a utilitarian purpose (at least I think that they might be useful); hence, I have no intention—let alone the pretention or ability—of creating a literary work.⁹

There could be no clearer expression of an author's intentions and preparation of the reader for a certain type of expectation. Schwefelberg's writing about the war years resembles an enhanced report on his activities during that period: a participant in the ever more desperate activities of the lay and religious leaders of the Jewish community to save whatever could be saved in the lives of the Jews in Romania or even of the Jews' life in Romania; memories, interventions, negotiations, transactions with the authorities or other characters. In all likelihood, the (former) lawyer kept some of the documents to which he had had access, and made notes on some of them or the events he had witnessed or participated in. There are situations in which he explicitly refers to the fact that he took things down in "his lawyer notebook" (professional habit), or others in which he mentions documents that can confirm or complete his statements ("it must be in the Community's archive now," and so on). Sometimes he admits, when talking about a detail or a name, that he simply cannot remember it, but that he remembers the "situation" only too well.

We learn from these memoirs about the changes that affected the composition of the Jewish Council "at the end of 1943": it became an "expanded" Jewish council by co-opting the representatives of the Zionists and the Social Democrats. Contacts began with the envoy of the Communist Party, the painter Maxy.

In this enlarged Jewish Council, various important decisions were made regarding the united resistance front. Dr. Filderman had (secret) audiences with Queen Helen and King Michael, in which they discussed what would be the right time for starting the open resistance of armed insurrection, as well as other exter-

*nal intercessions (with the Western Allies—in Romania's favor—these led to Dr. Filderman being arrested again in 1945); interventions with the government in order to cease collecting the exceptional tax for allowing the Jews to descend into the air-raid shelters; later, to take measures for the defense of the Jewish people against last-minute deportations, in case the Germans retreated, etc.*¹⁰

The community and the country were preparing for the changes that were to follow and for the dangers that might accompany them: “This is how we reached the historic day of 23 August,” the memoirist notes. The Jewish Council was no longer clandestine, the Federation of the Jewish Communities resumed its existence under the old law of the denominations, but, in keeping with the political model of the time (with representatives of the four parties—historical, Social Democratic, Communist—in government), a general Jewish Council was created, as was the Federation, which comprised now several secular political currents and religious organizations (“however bizarre it may have been for the representatives of two atheist political parties to acquire leadership positions in the religious community,” as Schwefelberg comments). At that time, the American and British military missions were still in the country, as was, of course, the Soviet mission (which stayed long after February 1948, when the others withdrew). “There was no knowing what the future political structure of the Romanian state would be. The communists, though, gradually acquired more and more influence. As for the Jewish community, which was deemed to be very useful in the beginning, when *other* antifascists or *non*-fascists were not, it appeared that it would be granted as much national autonomy as that imparted on the Germans and the Hungarians.”¹¹ Soon, however, “I had the opportunity to find out the truth about the relations between the new regime and the Jewish sector, given several actual clashes, in which I was involved on a personal level.” The headquarters of the Jewish aid commission were actually invaded by crowds of applicants sent and encouraged by the communists. Schwefelberg was however the victim of “something even worse”: he was attacked at home, while dining, by a commando of “young Jews in military uniform, with helmets, on motor-bikes, several with pistols and even machine guns in their hands.” He was demanded to hand over the funds of the Relief Commission and his wife’s jewels, while “my children and grandchildren were on duty with the armed youth groups from the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party and elsewhere.”¹²

Such occurrences and the general course of events made Schwefelberg more and more skeptical. He relinquished the presidency of the Commission, refused to enter the General Jewish Council, and then the newly created Federation: “I was not a member in any Jewish organization, nor did I want to get into

one . . . this was my first withdrawal from the general public activity that invaded the Jewish sector by the hour.” Thus he refused to participate, as vice-chairman, in the Interim Commission of the Bar, which was to be *appointed* by the Ministry of Justice. Arguing with those around him on such topics related to current events, Schwefelberg stuck to his opinion, maintaining an attitude of diffidence towards the new government. Educated and trained in another world, Schwefelberg could not overcome his “bourgeois condition” and its values. “Many a time I wondered who was right. I think events have proved I was right.”

When he evoked the great moment (23 August), Schwefelberg was far from enthusiastic about the “revolutionary” change, even though the “next generation” of his family was well integrated and represented in society. The new regime had an even more unpleasant experience in store for him. In 1952 he was arrested, interrogated and accused of Zionist activities.

M IHAIL SEBASTIAN was 37 years old in 1944 and already had a solid career as a writer (novelist, playwright and journalist). He was exactly what might be called a (former?) star of Bucharest’s cultural life. He began his *Journal*¹³ in 1937, shortly after his expulsion from the illusory paradise of the newspaper *Cuvântul* (The Word),¹⁴ following the hard blow represented by the preface that his mentor, Nae Ionescu, wrote to his novel *For Two Thousand Years*.¹⁵ Sebastian answered the numerous attacks he was then subjected to from all sides (ideological and cultural) in *How I Became a Hooligan* (1935). Given all these events, his journal turned into a sort of refuge for him and came to contain—as his later editor, Leon Volovici, noticed—several “journals”: an intimate journal and a Jewish one, a journal of Creation, a political and an intellectual one. These “faces” are shown one by one, overlapping sometimes, but almost always giving the impression of authenticity. Unlike memoirs, which are affected by the limits of memory, by emotions that change in time, by the tendency to present oneself and events in a certain way to posterity, to the future generations, journals, including this one, have the advantage of “direct engagement.” Sebastian’s writing also benefits from the writer’s talent and craft, which breathe life into the world he describes.¹⁶

The year 1944 began only on 8 April in Sebastian’s *Journal*. That was contrary to the custom of indicating the end and the beginning of a year. While the end of the year was recorded, the entry marking the beginning was made with some delay. The fatigue he had accumulated during the war, his deprivation and humiliation increasingly found their way into the pages of the journal. Only the fall of Paris (June 1941) caused a longer silence. After recording that event, Sebastian only resumed work on his journal more than six months

later. By early 1944, he had lost not only his friends, but also the right to practice as a lawyer, his job at the Royal Foundations, the right of signature as a writer, as well as his radio and bicycle, and the list is far from complete. He had been forced to “donate” linen and to shovel snow. In an entry from September 1941, he described himself as “a man who walks, day after day, hour after hour, with the thought of death by his side, in himself.”¹⁷ At the end of 1943, the major achievement worthy of being noted down was that “we’re still alive.” “Any personal list of accomplishments is lost in the shadow of the war. First, there’s its terrible presence. Only then, somewhere, far away, are we, forgotten by ourselves, with our lives diminished, deleted, lethargic, awaiting our awakening, our resurrection.”¹⁸

Passing over the possible interpretations that the last word in the quotation above may have stirred among his commentators, let us notice that Sebastian practically lived according to the rhythms of the war. Year after year, he recorded the developments on the Western and the Eastern Fronts, accompanying them with his own “strategic” comments. The radio, the press and the rumors fuelled his fears, anxieties and, sometimes, his hopes. In many of the decisions reached in the country (by the Antonescu Government), he sensed or acknowledged the consequences of the events triggered by the European war. He not only recorded them, but also predicted what might happen to “us.” The war, which exhausted and exasperated him, making him wonder whether he might still be a writer by its end,¹⁹ eventually made its way into his yard and his house. This is how he inaugurated the notebook covering 1944, which, in fact, was the last one he wrote. The event that brought Sebastian back to writing his *Journal*, making him snap out of his lethargy, was linked, of course, to the war. “Four days after the bombing, havoc still reigned in the city. The confusion of the first moments turned into panic. Everyone is fleeing or wants to flee . . . Half of the city has no light. There’s no water. The radiators are not working . . . In one hour (and I don’t think that the bombing itself lasted an hour), a city of one million inhabitants was paralyzed in the simplest functions of life. The death toll is unknown.”²⁰ Sebastian became now more and more of a chronicler of this new anguish that engulfed Bucharest: the bombings. He recorded their duration and effects, the schedule changes and the topography. He revealed his attachment to this ravaged, smashed, devastated city, which spent the spring amid “the smell of lilac and smoke,” which during the day displayed its devastated areas, filled by shards and debris, and looked derelict and grey at night. Anxiety loomed in the air, some of his acquaintances died in the bombings, others left town.

In an atmosphere in which “we are too tired to rejoice,” good news did begin to appear, albeit still wrapped in fear, in anxiety: Rome’s occupation by the Allies,

the Normandy landings, London in flames, Russia, Finland, Poland, Estonia, Moldova, Turkey, Bulgaria, France... Exclamation marks cropped up everywhere in his pages, which covered the front from west to east and vice versa. The tension became more acutely felt by the day, and the record of 21 August 1944 summarizes very well the mixture of fear and hope that had almost reached paroxysm.

*War is upon us. Not the war that has been hounding us for five years, like a moral drama, but physical war. Great upheavals may happen every hour, every minute. Again we put our lives, our skin, at stake. Everything is possible—and nothing is easy. Military resistance means (however fast the operations might run) destruction, forced evacuation, hunger perhaps. Surrender means (who knows!) a German retaliation, Northern Italy style. And in both cases, a pogrom becomes possible at any time. In any case, the relative silence so far is over. We're heading for the heart of the fire.*²¹

The outcome came only two days later, but the tornado of events engulfed the author, who resumed writing in his journal only on 29 August:

*How should I start? Where should I start?
The Russians are in Bucharest.
Paris is free.
The house in Antim, destroyed by bombs . . .
There are thousands of things to say. Maybe tomorrow, maybe the day after tomorrow. Now I do not feel up to it. I want to sleep. I didn't sleep a wink from Wednesday to Saturday evening.*²²

Still, from the almost telegraphic account of those moments, we learn that Sebastian spent that historic night “of delirium,” in which Antonescu was deposed “in five minutes,” in the company of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu and Belu Zilber, that he wrote for the *România liberă* (Free Romania) newspaper, which was to come out at dawn, and that the city quickly switched from screams of joy to screams of fear, on account of the German bombings of the following day. Sebastian was not only present in the midst of events (Pătrășcanu was the communists’ key man in overthrowing Antonescu), but conveyed, through his journal, the entire frenzy of those hours. One can almost sense the breath of the man living through the journal for a few days, to which he entrusts information and impressions so as not to lose them and, perhaps, to use them later in a book. The moments are memorable, overwhelming, worthy of being retained.

They represent (in a way) the end of the war and a regime change (and what a regime change that would prove to be!).

As is the case in such situations, there is much enthusiasm but also much confusion: both in those around him and in the author of the journal. Sebastian notes that “there is a terrible (moral) ruckus everywhere. Everyone is preparing to occupy positions, to capitalize on titles, to establish rights.” He believes, in this context, that for himself “the best thing that I must do” is “write a book someday.” As for the Soviet troops that had recently entered the capital, they caused him conflicting feelings and judgments. The tank parade on King Carol Boulevard seems “a grand spectacle”; the incidents with the Russian soldiers “who violate women” or “loot shops” and always look for watches seem him to be part of the “normal,” “even fair” rules of war. “It is not just for Romania to escape too easily. After all, this affluent, frivolous Bucharest is a provocation for an army coming from a devastated country.”²³ By contrast, the ordinances prohibiting any traffic after 9 P.M. and demanding that radio sets should be surrendered seem to make Sebastian more cautious, reminding him of times that appeared to have gone by: “This is not a very clear sign of freedom—and the people will have difficulties understanding this. But if that can be a lesson for the Romanians, who practiced plundering the Jews for four years, it won’t hurt.”²⁴

In the moral disarray surrounding him, with his own irritations, unhealed wounds and the practical problems he carried around (he did not have a home, after the bombing of the house in Antim), Sebastian tried, wherever possible, to put his life together. He quit working for *România liberă*, congratulating himself on that, only a few days later, immediately “after the onrush of Graur and his gang,” noting that “indoctrinated imbecility is harder to bear than imbecility pure and simple.” He found that the establishment of the “Jewish writers’ union” was a masquerade, which he refused to join, just as he refused to be readmitted to the Writers’ Society (from which the Jewish writers had been excluded). He also aimed to decline the invitation to return to the post of editor for the Royal Foundations Review (from where he had been fired for the same reason—he was a Jew): “I no longer feel capable of writing there.”

The conclusion of these few weeks, between the liberating outcry and the frustration with the lack of scruples manifest around him (as if nothing or nothing much had happened) was consigned to paper on 16 September. Then Sebastian seems to have finally had the respite to decant his emotions and clear his thoughts:

I am not willing to have disappointments. I do not recognize such a right for myself. The Germans and Nazism went down the drain. That’s enough. I

*have always known, deep down in my heart, I would have died happily, just to bring closer, with even a fraction of a millimeter, Germany's collapse. Germany has collapsed—and I am alive. What more can I ask? So many people have died, without seeing the beast fall with their own eyes! We, who are still alive, have had this immense stroke of luck. What's next? I do not know. Life begins next. Something resembling a life, which must be lived.*²⁵

Sebastian did not manage to live too much of that life. On 29 May 1945, he died in an accident. His “book,” however, his *Journal*, outlived him.

IN 1944, Serge (Ștrul Herș, in the school records of the time) Moscovici was a young man, barely 19. He was to become, in a few decades, one of the leading social psychologists in Europe, with an impressive academic career in France, but not only. Born in Brăila in 1914, Moscovici had a “rugged” early life, hard to describe and understand, as he says himself. During his childhood, he accompanied his family on journeys throughout the cities of Moldavia and Bessarabia (his father dealt in cereals). In his teenage years, he settled in Bucharest, where he went through the terrifying experience of wartime anti-Jewish measures. He even served in a forced labor brigade (on a building site), attending school, in parallel, either at the vocational school “The Hammer,” or at the Jewish High School.

His memoirs are called *The Chronicle of Wasted Years*²⁶—a suggestive title—and is primarily an attempt to “rescue,” to “resume possession” of an important part of his own life, the life before his current one and having so little in common with it. In a way, this is also an attempt to explain to the West what the East means, based on “an existence that unfolded in an unusual way,” even though the “Westerners” are, above all, “the ones I love,” friends and close acquaintances. The “wasted years” are the years he spent in Romania, before Paris, where after many “detours,” Moscovici “eventually found his place.” Those “wasted” years conceal the deep suffering of a child who grew up without a mother (his parents were separated and he was left in the care of his father), faced, more often than not, with the absence of his father, a child often left in the care of his relatives and subjected to the terrible experience of a stepmother. During the war years, “his only and true family” was “Aunt Ana,” who really took care of him. The experience of anti-Semitism was added, in time, to this problematic family environment, starting with the first years of high school in Galați and continuing throughout the period in which he lived in Bucharest.²⁷ Here are sufficient reasons to make the communication of one’s prior life difficult to others. The triggering of the anamnesis process led to a revelation. “Nothing I had experienced during the exile had been forgotten, as I initially thought.”²⁸

Autobiographical writing becomes, in this case, a psychological exercise for himself, for the others (those close to him) who are still alive. This is not an effort meant for posterity. “Do not expect to read some memoirs,” we are forewarned in the preamble, but a “protocol of the events from before my coming to Paris.” However, this “protocol” is a complex text which is simultaneously an autobiographical novel, a social and family chronicle, an informed meditation on events and historical processes experienced and re-explained more profoundly by the social psychologist.²⁹ Here is an example, speaking about what happened during the early years of high school: “The hitherto unified consciousness about me as a person, about us as a group, split. It underwent a split between two souls, two faiths, two forces, of the Jew and the Romanian I had to be at the same time. Feeling discriminated against does not mean feeling humiliated or excluded, but being cut in half. All evil must be sought here.”³⁰

The *Chronicle* was mostly written in the early 1990s, but it is based on “layers” of previous entries, some dating from the 1970s, after a longer stay in Jerusalem, and others (partly lost) going back to the “time of the inhuman war.” We ought to assume, therefore, that the memory that seems to have retained in considerable detail what happened in the summer 1944 was also supported by such written notes.

And for Moscovici, “that summer” seems to have been a very special one. The expression is repeated in the text, in several registers, to underline the situation. The summer was special for the world and the country, given that the course of the war changed decisively in favor of the Allies, making it all the more important for the group of friends, young men from Bucharest, who were waiting for a change of their fate:

That summer, reality took another bite of me. The Allies had landed on the coasts of Normandy and everyone hoisted a small three-colored flag in their hearts. Under the official calm, one could sense a certain restlessness. Everyone suspected that the military situation was hopeless and that resistance on the Focșani–Galați line, where we almost got sent, was impossible. In late June, something was hovering in the air of the political world. The four opposition parties, including the one I was a part of, had coalesced into a Democratic Bloc. Little by little, the hope buried throughout all those years of shame, began to rise again. . . . This was also the last summer, for a long time, in which I could give myself solely to the occupation of living.³¹

The latter reference was made to a group of friends, whom Moscovici fondly calls “I Vitelloni” (as in Fellini’s film), friends together with whom he engaged, at the time, in discovering life in the riskiest of ways; a group of friends who

had grown up too fast and entertained the “desire to be just like other young people,” who had not endured the trials they had gone through. They were now beginning to make plans for the future, imagining what they would do when they were free and finding that leaving the country was the most likely option: “How could you build your life in a country that has exposed us to so much ill-will and hatred?” one of them wondered. “I, for one, was thinking of staying . . . and I was almost happy, anticipating the big thrill of a revolution that I was going to take part in.”³²

During “that summer,” Moscovici was a young communist who looked forward to the revolutionary upheavals he had put his hopes in, cherishing “a great admiration for Stalin’s marshals and generals” who, after their early mistakes, were now properly running the war. He lived the months and weeks before August with the feeling that “it is only here that nothing is happening,” compared to what was going on in France, Serbia, Poland and Italy. The frenzy that was characteristic of his age made him live constantly under the impression that things were progressing too slowly. “So it was a total surprise when, on the eve of 23 August, the king proclaimed an armistice with the Russians and announced the arrest of the dictator.”³³

The psychologist’s memory retains the “general euphoria,” quickly followed by the fear caused by the German bombings and by their possible return, a few days (2–3) of suspended time spent in shelters with his sweetheart. And also from that time, the ecstatic experience at seeing the Soviet troops enter the city, with the mention: “I felt saved, but not free”: that moment provided closure to an entire chapter of both personal and community life, and was like a curtain dropping over an unrepeatable period. “I felt we were depositing the year 1944 in the archives of the past, so that we would never return to it. It is the only thing I remember from the day after the party, a day woven out of confidences, loneliness and the incurable sadness that grows on the ruins of wasted years.”³⁴

In the period that followed, the young Moscovici took his baccalaureate (in exceptional circumstances, after a short stage in a factory), enrolled in several faculties (sociology, law, engineering) but did not finish any. “In reality, I had other concerns.” At about the same time, he was intensely involved in the activity of the Zionist youth in Romania, travelling through cities and towns in support of this cause, and he also fulfilled party tasks. He infiltrated the Social Democratic Party, which the communists did not appear to trust. His desire to leave the country dated from the summer of 1945. While for one or another of his friends the destination was Palestine or Paris, Moscovici chose... Moscow: “That’s where I was to study, surrounded by the builders of the future, at the

epicenter of the revolution.” For that purpose “I went to the Soviet Embassy and filled out a detailed questionnaire for a visa.”³⁵

Still, something came up and, eventually, the plan had to be discarded. The enthusiasm triggered by the revolutionary changes soon became the certainty “that something was wrong.” Moscovici could see how the fight against fascism was turning into a struggle to “color the fascists in red and recuperate them.” He noticed that the country was in the hands of a Soviet general, the sinister prosecutor from the Moscow trials, Vyshinski, and that Stalin’s increasingly grotesque cult was all-encompassing. “Communism had become an army, a church almost.” “The Iron Guard wanted to eliminate the Jews, the communists wanted to eliminate their Jewishness” (an allusion to the name changes party activists resorted to at the time).³⁶ It was probably findings like this but also events of a more personal character that ultimately contributed to his change of destination.³⁷ In 1947, Serge Moscovici settled in Paris, where he pursued an academic career, turning from a man who had aimed to revolutionize society into one who observed and tried to explain it.

THE THREE types of confessional writing have provided us with accounts of three possible destinies marked by history and its spectacular upheavals. Expected and desired by all three men, the day of 23 August 1944 brought liberation to all of them (albeit for a short time). The days that followed also meant possible responses to the challenges of history and of life: regretful adaptation, but also a collision with the regime on the Zionist issue (in Schwefelberg’s case), death, for Sebastian, and a departure from the country for the young communist Moscovici. These situations, however, come nowhere near to exhausting the possible destinies of the Jews in Romania at those crucial moments.

□

(Translated by CARMEN-VERONICA BORBÉLY)

Notes

1. Sergio Luzzato, “*Cara Kitty: Una fonte diaristica,*” in *Prima lezione di metodo storico*, ed. Sergio Luzzato (Rome–Bari: Laterza, 2010), 143–161.
2. In Romanian literature, the term *memorialistică* (memoirs) is used both in the stricter sense of memoirs and in a broader sense, which includes, besides memoirs, correspondence and journals. See Silvian Iosifescu, *Literatura de frontieri*, 2nd edition, revised and expanded (Bucharest: Ed. Enciclopedică, 1971), 70–71.

3. Mihail Sebastian, *Jurnal 1935–1944*, preface and notes by Leon Volovici (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996). The wide reception of Sebastian's *Journal* is indicated by the existence of two volumes dedicated to him, edited by Iordan Chimet, *Dosar Mihail Sebastian* (Bucharest: Universal Dalsi, 2001) and by Geo Șerban, *Sebastian sub vremea* (Bucharest: Universal Dalsi, 1998).
4. An applied analysis on this topic can be found in Edward Kanterian, "Subiectivitate și obiectivitate în *Jurnalul* lui Mihail Sebastian," in *Mihail Sebastian: Dilemele identității*, ed. Leon Volovici (Cluj-Napoca: Biblioteca Apostrof, 2009), 255–276.
5. See the discussion of this problem in Iosifescu, 69–168.
6. Ion Ianoși, *Secolul nostru cel de toate zilele* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1980), 15.
7. Leon Volovici, Preface to Arnold Schwefelberg, *Amintirile unui intelectual evreu din România* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2000), 10.
8. *Ibid.*, 16.
9. Schwefelberg, 20–21.
10. *Ibid.*, 139–140.
11. *Ibid.*, 145–146.
12. *Ibid.*, 148–149.
13. In all likelihood, this was not Sebastian's first journal, chronologically speaking. See also, in this respect, Ion Vartic, "Singur, ca Iosif Hechter," *Apostrof* (Cluj-Napoca) 22, 2 (2011): 15. The existence of another journal of the same author, from the years 1930–1931, is confirmed by Leon Volovici, "Insula lui Sebastian," in *Mihail Sebastian: Dilemele identității*, 220.
14. For this problem, see Marta Petreu, *Diavolul și ucenicul său: Nae Ionescu–Mihail Sebastian* (Iași: Polirom, 2009).
15. The preface by Nae Ionescu was essentially anti-Semitic, rejecting the entire identitarian construction of the novel and, therefore, of its author, who aimed "to achieve in my individual life a harmonisation between the Jewish values and the Romanian values." See Mihail Sebastian, *De două mii de ani* (For Two Thousand Years) (Bucharest: Hasefer, 2000). On Sebastian's identity problem, see the more recent studies signed by Paul Cornea, Michael Finkenthal, Moshe Idel, Camelia Crăciun, Lya Benjamin, in *Mihail Sebastian: Dilemele identității*.
16. Sebastian's journal was also read as a literary work, not only as a document of the time. See, for example, Virgil Duda, "*Jurnalul* lui Mihail Sebastian, o capodoperă," in *Mihail Sebastian: Dilemele identității*, 235–246. It should be noted, in this context, that another journal belonging to the doctor and writer Emil Dorian, *Jurnal din vremuri de prigoană 1937–1944* (Bucharest: Hasefer, 1996), published in the same year as Sebastian's work and covering practically the same period of time, went, by comparison, almost unnoticed in the literary circles. This difference in reception cannot, however, be solely explained by the difference in the literary talent with which the two journals were written. The characters populating them also made a difference.
17. Sebastian, 391.

18. Ibid., 538.
19. In the entry of 17 July 1941, having found out, at about the same time, how Călinescu had “qualified” him in the *History of Literature* that was about to come out and having learned of the pogrom in Iași, Sebastian wondered: “Will I ever be a writer again after the war? Will I ever be able to write? Will I ever heal from so much disgust accumulated in these terrible, horrendous years?” Sebastian, 359.
20. Ibid., 539.
21. Ibid., 555.
22. Ibid., 556.
23. Ibid., 557–559.
24. Ibid., 560.
25. Ibid., 564.
26. Serge Moscovici, *Cronica anilor risipiți (Povestire autobiografică)*, trans. Magda Jeanrenaud (Iași: Polirom, 1999).
27. “And it was also in the streets of Galați that I encountered anti-Semitism for the first time. One could not live in Romania without knowing that it was there . . . In Bessarabia, we amounted to almost a quarter of the population and had not been the target of insults or attacks. Therefore, we only knew about persecutions from hearsay . . . What was most humiliating was not being assaulted or being forced to run away, but being insulted with slurs like ‘kikes,’ ‘Christ killers,’ and other injurious words learned in school or heard in the family.” Ibid., 86–87.
28. Ibid., 5.
29. Serge Moscovici also evokes his “Romanian” years in a book of dialogues with Adrian Neculau, *Urmele timpului: Iluzii românești, confirmări europene* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), 27–67.
30. Moscovici, 88.
31. Ibid., 237, 235.
32. Ibid., 227.
33. Ibid., 239.
34. Ibid., 253.
35. Ibid., 270.
36. Ibid., 263, 267.
37. When I refer to such events, I have in mind, for instance, the reaction to the project (probably) entitled *The '44 Generation*, a cultural magazine and a generation manifesto of the group of friends who had survived the war. The magazine, whose title was, apparently, the word DA (YES), enjoyed, as Moscovici recalls, an “unexpected success,” being well received in various literary and journalistic circles, with one exception: the press organ of the Communist Party found it totally unacceptable, decadent, etc.

Abstract

Memory and Identity: Several Jewish Experiences from the End of the War (1944–1945)

The study highlights the relevance of “diaristic” sources—memoirs, in general—for the study of important moments in history, also trying to determine to what extent one’s personal life and experiences can communicate or convey a collective drama, a tragedy. While memoirs or diaries cannot replace historical reconstruction proper and cannot supplant other types of sources, which are considered to be more objective, they do manage, in many cases, to bring back a sense of humanity as it existed in the past. Therefore, the present study looks at what the diaries and memoirs of three Jewish men reveal about their own situation and that of their communities in the periods that preceded and followed the turning point of 23 August 1944, the date when Romania left Germany’s camp and joined the Allied Forces. The three men in question are Arnold Schwefelberg, one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Romania, writer and publicist Mihail Sebastian, and Serge (Ștrul Herș, in the school records of the time) Moscovici, who later became one of the leading social psychologists in Europe.

Keywords

memoirs, personal diaries, Holocaust, World War II, Jewish minority