

***Poezia confesiunii la Sylvia Plath și la Mariana Marin –
Cristina Pipoș. 2014.***

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Cristina Pipoș's comparative study explores the work of two influential feminine poets, Sylvia Plath and Mariana Marin, seen as affinitive representative figures of the confessional poetry. The relevance of such a theme is undoubtedly obvious, firstly, because it consists in the innovative and challenging association between two poets, who come from different cultural, temporal backgrounds, and, secondly, because it acknowledges the value and draws attention to one of the most salient poets of the Romanian 80s Generation, Mariana Marin, whose poetry, unfortunately, is still waiting to be charted and (re)visited more often by the literary critics. Another pertinent aspect that supports its relevance would be that the study addresses the comparison of the two, firstly, as feminine voices, and, secondly, as poets attached to the confessional poetry.

The value of rendering such a theme becomes clear when the critical endeavour focuses on these poets' affiliation to the confessional poetry and displays a coherent view upon it, and when illustrating the valid claim that there would be a series of lyrical affinities between these poets. Despite the temporal, cultural and historical distance between the two implied by this comparison, the approach successfully engages in a bold effort to maximize the various similarities of style, poetic view and even to assess the similitude between women's social status as a writer within different societies and their continuous, distinctive, existential struggle with the social constraints. One of the strong points of this critical enterprise is that it never ceases to also emphasize each of the poets' specificity within this poetic formula of confession.

The starting point of this book consist of an articulate retrospective view of the cultural connotations of the term *confession*, targeting its transgression from the religious sphere into a rather secular area, from the private to the public space, and, later on, its occurrence in the literary discourse. This drift from the private to the

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public sphere would prepare the ground for a new type of poetic formula during the 19th and the 20th century, which celebrates the individuality of the poet and, implicitly, the poetic confession. A coherent and well-documented inquiry grounds the exploration of the concept of confessional poetry within the paradigm of modern poetry, as Pipoș takes into account and fuses ideas of both foreign and Romanian critics such as M. L. Rosenthal, Robert Phillips, Alexandru Mușina and Gheorghe Crăciun. By doing so, the critic revises the concept of confessional poetry by adding new features to it, such as poetry as a quest for explanations concerning the world's lost centre (Mușina 2004, 27-37) and the clarity and directness of language (Crăciun 2009, 262). This way, the approach indicates the permanent unfolding of this poetic mode (Gill 2006, 2), its flexibility in relation to other concepts.

A rather brief depiction of the forerunners of the confessional poets and of the school of confessional poetry exemplifies, summarizes and delineates the preeminent features of this lyric, following its embryonic state (with poets such as Appolinaire, Walt Whitman, Baudelaire, Yeats and feminine voices of Anna Ahmatova, Else Lasker-Schüler, Elisabeth Bishop, E. Dickinson) and its plenary manifestation with the *school* of confessional poetry (Theodore Roethke, Robert Lowell, W.D. Snodgrass, Anne Sexton, John Berryman). One of the main features of confessional poetry, which opposes Eliot's concept of *objective correlative*, represents the constant focus on the self and the individuality. Thus, a new form of poetic expression emerges: "Poeții confesiunii pun totul în prim plan, deschizând un nou drum în cultura umanității, «eu» devenind cuvântul cheie al creației." (Pipoș 2014, 61)² By enlisting the varied expressions displayed by this kind of poetic formula, Pipoș reinforces the idea that confessional poetry is rather a mobile and complex poetic expression and that it gains more significance with each of its variable manifestations.

The discussion, then, moves towards the different cultural, social environment in which the two poets evolved. Of great significance is the identification of the common elements which ground the social expectations that the two poets were forced to confront. Women's place in society was far from being associated with the idea of writer/ writing, as women were mainly perceived, above all, as mothers and wives. Both of the poets' confessions build up the image of the woman as a victim of the society that is trying to subordinate the woman's role to a rather patriarchal position. Pipoș states that the two poets fought each of the social limitations that imposed on them on the only terrain which they found free and, perhaps, liberating, poetry's battlefield: "Cele două poete trăiesc fiecare dintre ele în lumi în care clopotele de sticlă sunt imposibil de spart, imposibil de înlocuit, iar unica luptă

² The confessional poets bring everything into spotlight, setting a new path in the culture of the humanity, 'I' becoming the key word of creation.

adevărată se dă în poezie.”³ (Pipoș 2014, 148) This claim remains valid, but, in the case of Mariana Marin, it requires further clarification- which the author overlooks- as the idea of freedom of poetic expression also relates to the constantly enforced censorship of the communist regime, which, for instance, impeded the apparition of one of her most significant volumes, “Ateliere”, before 1989.

Another quality of this approach is that it never mistakes the biographical detail for the text itself. The analysis remains focused on the poetry. It never attempts to impose an interpretation of the text by referring to the poets’ lives. Even when Pipoș alludes to a series of biographical events, she maintains a precise distance between the two. For Pipoș it is always clear that poetry implies invention and construction: “Poezia confesiunii nu țintește către reprezentarea unui sine deja existent, ci dorește să creeze unul nou. Poezia confesiunii este mai mult o încercare de autoconstrucție decât de autoexpunere.”⁴ (Pipoș 2014, 266) In other words, there can be a series of elements which pass through the biographic filter into the poems, but poetry does not “«subsist on biography alone»”⁵ (Gill 2006, 12). Still, as Pipoș suggests, poems can also be regarded as testimonials/confessions concerning the woman’s place in a confining society, because, as Jo Gill remarks, “modern confessional writing is not hermetically sealed from its historical and cultural contexts.” (Gill 2006, 3) This separation with which Pipoș operates denotes a critical attitude guided by a vivid deontological conscience which prevents the approach from gliding into a biographical method of interpretation. More importantly, the author resorts to E. Pound’s conception of modern poetry, *Melopoeia*, *Phanopoeia* and *Logopoeia*, as a referential way of constructing the comparative analysis, which gives further confirmation of her balanced critical demeanour.

In a subchapter entitled *The Biography of Poem in the First Person*, Pipoș points out one of the main features of confessional poetry, the centrality of the *I*, of the poems written in the first person: “Așadar, poezii confesiunii se pun pe ei înșiși și viețile lor în centrul poetic. Pentru poezia confesiunii, «eu» este expresia centrală și cea mai clară a experienței personale.”⁶ (Pipoș 2014, 199) However, this basic area of the confessional poetry that celebrates the self is also under the influence of invention. It would seem that some of the confessional poets, like J. Berryman, would sometimes rather resort to another voice than using the first person. This trick

³ Each of the two poets lives in worlds in which the bell jars are impossible to break, impossible to replace, and the only authentic fight takes place in poetry.

⁴ The confessional poetry does not aim at representing a pre-existent self, but it wishes to create a new one. The confessional poetry is more an attempt to construct oneself than to expose oneself.

⁵ In an essay on Sylvia Plath called „Dangerous confessions. The problem of reading Sylvia Plath biographically” published in *Modern Confessional Writing. New Critical Essays*, edited by Jo Gill, 2006. London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, p 12, Tracy Brain, discussing Plath’s poetry, cites David Yezzi.

⁶ Thus, confessional poets place themselves and their lives in the poetic centre. For the confessional poetry, ‘I’ is the central expression, the most accurate expression of personal experience.

of making use of a projection of the self, even if the poem is written in the third or the second person, states Pipoș, would not impede any of the qualities of confessional poetry from manifesting themselves: “Ceea ce interesează este felul în care transpunerea poetică face ca poezia să capete aerul confesiunii. Chiar dacă(...)variațiile în utilizarea persoanei trec de la cea dintâi la a treia, prin cea de-a doua, în cele din urmă confesiunea există”.⁷ (Pipoș 2014, 120) Thus, the critic suggests that the confessional poetry cannot simply be reduced to the use of the first person, because the characteristics of this poetic mode, through its inherent intricacy, transcend any formal barrier. This way confessional poetry becomes a favourable ground for shaping a renewed *I*, because “the ‘I’ of modern confessional writing is more complex, mutable and fluid.”(Gill 2006, 7)

The inventive function of the confessional poetry also dynamically manifests in an area that, in the case of these poets, is intrinsically connected to the idea of femininity, that of imagination. This interest in the power of imagination, just like the emphasis on the self, is traced back to romanticism, but preserves its own particularities, managing to create its distinctive means of constructing an image. The use of imagination represents a valuable asset of the confessional poetry, because it pictures the elements of a feminine view and because it challenges the relation with the reader, positioning the latter closer to the text and completing the confessional process: “într-o lume în care important este rolul partidului(...)nu sentimentele personale, Mariana Marin reușește, cu ajutorul imaginației să creeze un nou tip de poezie care poate ajunge la cititor, îl poate sensibiliza și îl determină să empatizeze cu ea.”(Pipoș 2014, 232)⁸ Thus, in both Plath’s and Marin’s poetry, the symbols of femininity supported by images of acute hypersensitivity, anxiety, vulnerability constitute a means to intensify and complement the confessional poetry.

As the language of the confessional poetry aims at establishing an empathetic relation with the readers, it rests upon the rather colloquial and direct elements of speech: “Cu cât limbajul este mai prețios cu atât poezia este mai departe de trăirile imediate, sterilitatea limbajului afectează puternic calitatea confesiunii. Poezii confesiunii reușesc să empatizeze cu cititorul tocmai datorită calității limbajului utilizat.”(Pipoș 2014, 272-273)⁹ Plath and Marin are both committed to this type of expression. Moreover, Mariana Marin’s poetry is deeply engaged in a double process concerning this type of language, states Pipoș, because, on the one hand, she

⁷ What is important is the way in which the poetic rendering determines the poetry to gain the sense of confession. Even if (...) the variations in using a certain person move from the first, to the third, throughout the second, in the end the confession exists.

⁸ in a world in which the most important thing is the role of the party (...) not one’s personal feelings, Mariana Marin manages, with the help of her imagination, to create a new type of poetry that can reach the readers and can touch them and can determine them to empathise with it.

⁹ The more the language is bombastic, the farthest from the immediate experience the poetry becomes, the bareness of the language deeply affects the quality of confession. The confessional poets manage to empathise with the reader exactly because of the quality of the language they use.

is committed to bringing the authenticity of every day's life into the poetry, one of the 80s Generation's aims, and because she bravely inserts into this language the masked gestures of revolt against the regime: "aceasta utilizează limbajul confesiv, suprimă și resemantizează sensurile cuvintelor pentru a enunța, dincolo de cenzură, mesajul contestatar." (Pipoș 2014, 276)¹⁰ In other terms, Mariana Marin's poetry is animated by a double movement of disclosure (towards the readers) and concealment (against the regime).

Beyond this function of revealing and cloaking, the confessional language still owns another of its primary properties. A therapeutic pattern yet resides in it and this healing function is directly connected with the bluntness of expression: "Nu există nici măcar o simplă barieră între poet și cititor.(...) aceasta este pe scurt definiția confesiunii, a oferirii gândurilor și faptelor spre analiză, fără încercări de a îmbrăca fastuos păcatul. Oricât de dureroasă ar fi, mărturisirea este salvatoare." (Pipoș 2014, 266)¹¹ This way Pipoș embraces a rather common view, emphasizing the remedial role of confession, which Phillips also identified in his study about the confessional poets. (Gill 2006, 7)

One of the most valuable parts of the book is, beyond doubt, the final comparative analysis of a series of twenty poems of the two poets. This chapter is the most relevant in terms of portraying these two feminine voices as an expression of confessional poetry and of revealing both the unexpected similarities between texts and their distinctive features. Pipoș points out how these two intense feminine perspectives handle and recycle a series of mythologic elements, symbols such as the rose garden or the mannequins, Lorelei's myth, religious characters such as Ariel. Pipoș suggests that these feminine views totally infiltrate the subtlest poetic structures and she even applies this idea to the concept of confessional poetry: "Poezia confesiunii este o poezie puternic feminină" (Pipoș 2014, 319).¹² This final part of analysis also uses Pound's classification regarding the modern poetry and it illustrates the occurrence of all three types of poetry in the chosen texts and the prevalence of *Logopoeia* that is intensely connected with the idea of confession, which adds another feature to the concept of confessional poetry.

This study represents a significant critical contribution, because it proves its relevance on a national and international level. As the interest in confessional poetry still represents a matter of debate and such type of poetry is still being written worldwide nowadays, the present study represents an up-to-date undertaking. Moreover, the book is built on a bold double effort. On the one hand, it explores and

¹⁰ She uses the confessional language; she deletes and restores the words' meanings in order to state, beyond censorship, the message of revolt.

¹¹ There is not even one single barrier between the poet and the reader. (...) this is in short the definition of confession, of availing one's thoughts and deed to analysis, without attempting to bombastically cover the sin. No matter how painful the confession is, it remains redemptive.

¹² The confessional poetry is intensely feminine.

revises the concept of confessional poetry and, on the other, it compares the works of two poets who are affiliated to this poetic mode.

Pipoș displays an accurate and coherent view both of the concept of confessional poetry and the works of the two poets. A strong point in her argumentation is the fact that it simultaneously deals with the poems of Plath and Marin. Of great importance is the fact that all of these inquiries are correlated with the idea of femininity. Pipoș asserts its centrality within the concept of confessional poetry. Not only does the critic manage to bring femininity of this type of poetry into the spotlight, but she also reconsiders the concept of confessional poetry. Another merit of the book is that it brings forward the work of Mariana Marin, one of the most remarkable poets of the 80s Generation.

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